

# Introduction

Population and environmental issues are, in and of themselves, extremely complex; linked, they create a whole new set of dynamics which add to that complexity. In conceiving this *AAAS Atlas of Population and Environment*, the AAAS International Programs Directorate wanted to bring together population-environment linkages in ways that make them easily accessible to policy and decision makers, students and the general public. Our hope is that in presenting the issues clearly, the debate surrounding population-environment dynamics and our understanding of the issues will broaden in the coming years.

In origin, atlases contained both maps and expository text. It is on this tradition that we have tried to build, providing maps and graphics that quantify and illustrate many of the issues, and text that lays out the broader links between population dynamics and the environment and places them within their historical perspective. This is followed by a series of analyses of individual topics – both ecosystems and human activities such as migration or trade – that bring together what is known about the ways in which people impact the Earth’s environment. Lastly the atlas contains six case studies that look at population-environment relationships in selected areas.

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Covering all aspects of the population/environment relationship is nearly impossible in any circumstances, let alone in a single introductory volume. However, by drawing on very current research and data as well as the most up-to-date mapping techniques, we have attempted to provide a cogent entry-way to some of the most important concepts and questions facing us at the beginning of the 21st century. In producing the *AAAS Atlas of Population and Environment* we have tried to make that critical link between the scientific data, research and analysis of issues to policies and public understanding. We hope you will find it useful.

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