



## Background Information

Sri Lanka is an island located in the middle of the Indian Ocean, 50 km away from the southern most part of India, in Asia. Whereas in Canada about 80% of the population lives in cities, in Sri Lanka, slightly more than 80% of the people live in rural areas, far from big urban centers and public services.



## Instructions

Read the following text and answer the questions in order to evaluate your understanding.



### Sri Lanka's Solar Ovens...

Sri Lanka is an island located in the middle of the Indian Ocean, 50 km away from the southern most part of India, in Asia. Whereas in Canada about 80% of the population lives in cities, in Sri Lanka, slightly more than 80% of the people live in rural areas, far from big urban centers and public services. Agriculture therefore plays a very important subsistence role, despite the fact that it is practiced in an traditional way, with very few resources. The families use it to fulfil their basic needs and in order to maintain a viable level of self-sufficiency. Chandrawathi and her family belong to this majority of Sri Lanka's inhabitants who, each day, cultivate a small and often dry piece of land, without any access to running water or electricity.



In Chandrawathi's village, a few solar oven manufacturers are beginning to appear. Supported by the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), the local foundation EMACE popularized the solar oven concept and began overseeing the production and distribution of the product. Recently, a few small entrepreneurs also began producing the ovens. The small manufacturers sell approximately 10 ovens each month for a price of 800 roupies each (about \$25). In this way, they are able to generate additional revenues allowing them to face the constant increase of the cost of living.

The recent purchase of one of these ovens completely changed Chandrawathi's daily routine. Previously, every day after the children's departure for school, she left the house in search of firewood in order to satisfy her family's daily essential needs. Without access to electricity, the fallen branches she gathered served as her family's unique source of energy and were used in several different ways, a few of which were cooking and lighting. Over the course of the past few years, tree cutting has greatly intensified in Sri Lanka, while the number of families depending on wood for energy remains very large. In order to produce increased amounts of food through the cultivation of rice and the raising of cattle, large forested areas are being eliminated.



As a result, firewood has become harder to find and Chandrawathi often had to walk several kilometers before gathering a big enough bundle. The load quickly became very heavy and the routine task jeopardized several hours of her day. For many other women in rural areas who do not have access to solar ovens, the labour of gathering wood is still passed from mothers to daughters.

Ever since the installation of the solar oven in their house, Chandrawathi has a lot more time available. She is easily able to take care of the house while efficiently dedicating enough time to both the family business of producing sour milk and the vegetable garden. In contrast to the old wood oven, the solar oven is powered by a renewable energy source, does not produce smoke, and is entirely safe to operate. The dependence on fire wood contributes to deforestation, hence increasing Sri Lanka's ecological footprint<sup>1</sup>. The oven's clean operation therefore contributes both to avoiding health problems induced by smoke and to preserving Sri Lanka's vegetation, air quality, and environmental integrity.

We can perhaps imagine with difficulty what life is like without electricity. Almost all of our daily activities, as insignificant as they might be, depend on this energy which arrives directly to our homes, offices, schools, and even to our streets. In our part of the world, the list of uses of electricity never ceases to grow. However, a large proportion of our planet's inhabitants are faced with an entirely different reality.

Indicator	Sri Lanka	Canada
Area (in thousands of km <sup>2</sup> ):	66	9 985
Population (in millions of people):	19.2 (2004)	32.0 (2004)
Population Density (per km <sup>2</sup> ):	291 (2004)	3 (2004)
Urban population (%-2003):	21	80
Ecological Footprint (hectares per person-2001):	1.1	6.4
Life expectancy at birth:	61(1960), 73 (2003)	71 years (1960), 79 years (2003)
Mortality rate among children less than 5 years of age (per 1000):	133 (1960), 15 (2003)	33 (1960), 6 (2003)



<sup>1</sup> A country's ecological footprint represents the degree to which its population consumes natural resources and modifies environmental equilibriums. A larger footprint means that the state of the fauna, forests, lakes, rivers, grounds, air, etc. has shifted further away from their initial states, and that the changes are more irreversible.

Student's name: \_\_\_\_\_ Class: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**Reading Comprehension Evaluation : Sri Lanka's Solar Ovens**

1. Before the purchase of the solar oven, how was Chandrawathi required to manage her fire wood reserves in order be able to properly administrate the family business and maintain the garden? Explain your answer.

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2. Based on the text, Chandrawathi is able to dedicate more time to which activities since the acquisition of the solar oven?

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3. According to you, is the solar oven a necessity or a luxury item to Chandrawathi and her family?

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4. Review the definition of an ecological footprint. What are two elements mentioned in the text contributing to the increase of Sri Lanka's ecological footprint? \_\_\_\_\_

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5. What is the meaning of the expression "self-sufficiency" used by the author at the end of the first paragraph? How does one become self-sufficient?

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6. Give two examples of products or services that we have access to, but which, according to the text, are not available to the people of Sri Lanka. \_\_\_\_\_

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7. Who, apart from Chandrawathi and her family, benefits from the newly introduced solar oven industry in the village?

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8. What does "increase in the cost of living" mean?

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9. Do you believe our daily living habits are a wasteful use of our natural resources ? Explain your answer.

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**AN INITIATIVE OF THE**  
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