



# World Water Day 2007 - Questions and Answers

## What is the difference between water scarcity and drought?

While arid and drought-stricken areas suffer the most, people everywhere can be affected by water scarcity, even those who live in areas with plenty of rainfall or freshwater. Water scarcity occurs whenever the ways in which we use and distribute water cannot fully meet the demand from households, farms, industry and the environment.

## What causes water scarcity?

Anything that causes water shortages, contaminates freshwater supplies, damages the facilities that carry water to people, or keeps significant numbers of people from receiving clean water can lead to water scarcity. Major factors include drought, the heavy use of water for agriculture, a lack of water near people's homes, high water tariffs, and the overuse of lakes, waterways and aquifers. Other causes range from flooding to poorly-placed dams.

## How serious is the problem?



By 2025, more than 2.8 billion people worldwide will be living in water-stressed countries or regions, defined as when available water resources per inhabitant fall below the level of 1 700 cubic metres per year, which is considered to be the national threshold for meeting water requirements for agriculture, industry, domestic purposes, energy and the environment. However, in much of the world, the issue is not so much a lack of water, as gaining access to that water. In many cases, it is a question of funding shortages, poor management and governance, unfair distribution and pricing of water, and the lack of political will to change the way in which we use and share water.

## Can we cut back on the water used for agriculture?

People need food to thrive and improve their lives, so agricultural production must increase if we are to reduce hunger and meet the needs of the growing world population. At the same time, irrigation for agriculture accounts for 70 percent of the freshwater withdrawn. This means that we should focus on finding ways to produce food for more people while using proportionally less water.

## What does global warming have to do with water scarcity?

Experts are divided on the extent to which human activity, deforestation and pollution affect the climate, but many point to the rising level of the earth's seas, the rapid melting of glaciers, the frequency and ferocity of recent hurricanes, floods and drought as consequences of climate change or global warming. All of these can threaten the amount or safety of a community's water supply.

## How can a shortage of water lead to or worsen poverty?

Without enough water to produce food and without access to sufficient water for drinking and proper sanitation, people are unable to eat, earn sufficient income or resist disease. Entire generations of children, especially girls, skip classroom education to spend time walking long distances to retrieve freshwater.

## Should more people move to urban areas to get better access to water?

As the 2nd UN World Water Development Report published in 2006 recounts, living in urban areas is no guarantee of access to water. The urban poor typically live near water facilities but have no direct supplies or cannot afford to pay high water tariffs. Also, the rapid growth of urban areas around the world has threatened water supplies with sewage runoff and industrial pollution.

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