

Water Shortages Around the World: The Water Project (thewaterproject.org)

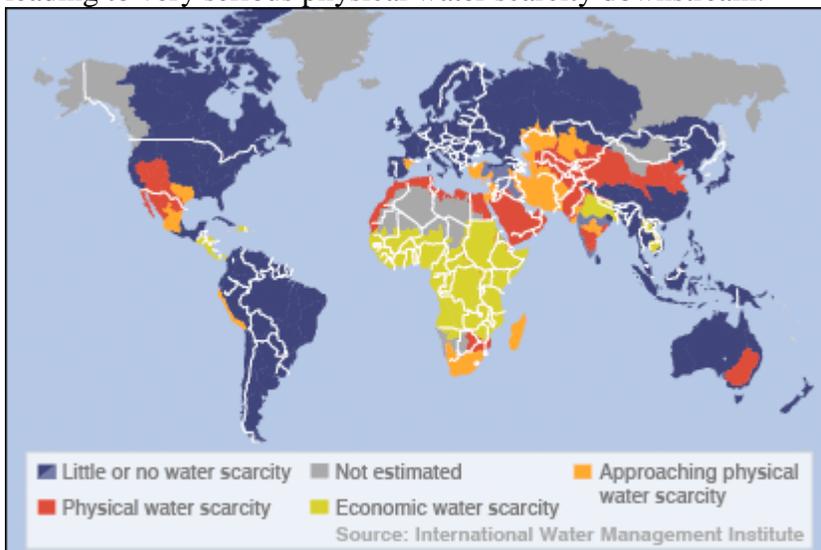
Section 1: Facts about clean, safe water:

- Nearly 1 billion people don't have safe water to drink.
- A child dies every 15 seconds from a lack of clean water.
- 115 people die every hour from diseases linked to poor sanitation, poor hygiene and contaminated water.
- 1 in 5 children who die before age 5 worldwide, die of a water related disease.
- Children often walk miles every day to collect dirty water to drink.
- Water related illness kills more people each year than wars and conflict.
- At any one time, half of the world's hospital beds are occupied by patients suffering from water-borne diseases.
- Over one-third of the world's population has no access to sanitation facilities.
- In developing countries, about 80% of illnesses are linked to poor water and sanitation conditions.
- 1 out of every 4 deaths under the age of 5 worldwide is due to a water-related disease.
- In developing countries, it is common for water collectors, usually women and girls, to have to walk several kilometers every day to fetch water. Once filled, pots and jerry cans weigh as much as 20kg (44lbs).

Section 2: Two Types of Water Scarcity

1. Physical Scarcity

- Physical water scarcity is what it sounds like. Physical access to water is limited. When the demand outstrips the lands ability to provide the needed water you have physical scarcity. For the most part, dry parts of the world or arid regions, like in Africa, are most often associated with physical scarcity. However, there are an increasing number of regions in the world where physical scarcity is a man-made condition. The Colorado River basin in the United States is an excellent example of a seemingly abundant source of water being overused and over managed, leading to very serious physical water scarcity downstream.



2. Economic Scarcity

- Economic water scarcity is by far the most disturbing form of water scarcity because it is almost entirely a lack of compassion and good governance that allows the condition to persist. Economic water scarcity exists when a population does not have the necessary monetary means to utilize an adequate source of water. Economic water scarcity is about a unequal distribution of resources for many reasons, including political and ethnic conflict. Much of sub-Saharan (below the Sahara Desert) Africa suffers under the effects of this type of water scarcity.
- Without question, economic water scarcity in an issue that can be addressed quickly and effectively. The Water Project's key goal is to provide the means necessary for communities suffering from it to find relief. Access to clean water can be as simple as building small dams to catch rain water, or rain collection systems to collect rain from rooftops. It simply takes some money, a bit of engineering and some local construction efforts.

Section 3: Water Scarcity in the US

Water scarcity is a global concern, and that means there's even a problem in our own backyard. While it may be difficult to put yourself in the shoes of an African child struggling to find fresh water, it's important to understand that water scarcity affects everyone, even here in the United States.

It seems impossible that a powerful river, like the Colorado River, is beginning to run dry in places. It seems farfetched that a huge body of water like Lake Mead in Arizona might become obsolete, but these and other dramatic changes are facing the United States. Some of our local neighbors are quickly finding it easier to understand the problems facing the driest and poorest geographic areas of the third world. Some researchers claim that Lake Mead, which currently supplies water to 22 million people, may be dry by 2012. Water scarcity is not just an issue for those who "never had." It is a problem that faces people where water seemed abundant. Pollution, demand and other factors are ushering in these new problems. Because of current water scarcity concerns, hundreds of homeowners who are today illegally drawing water from the Colorado River may soon be forced to cease pumping. As the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation works to preserve local waters, meet demand and prevent future shortages, these people will face the enforcement of fines.

Climate warming is thought to be decreasing water containment in the Colorado basins such as Lake Powell. Some of the Colorado River's lower course near Baja, California, is now actually running dry. Populations, especially along the arid Southwest bends of the river face a realistic threat to their drinking and irrigation water supply.

Environmentalists suggest low-cost but immediate solutions for managing drying waters, such as digging ponds or underwater receptacles. These low-tech fixes already help farmers in China. Still, water conservation and volume promotion needs to be a joint partnership effort and governmental agencies, land-owners, environmentalists and conversationalists. Outdated damming and gauges result in billions of gallons of lost water, but a quick fix for one local population might harm another downstream. One agency's priorities could harm another's. These facts highlight the need for shared information and cooperative effort.

Water scarcity within the U.S. is not just an environmental problem. Our current daily demand for water also affects its future availability. Wasteful flush toilets, non-insulated pipes and generous showerheads are all culprits to the water crisis. The Southwestern United States is already this emerging reality. A crisis may soon spread into other areas of the U.S. when local waterways can no longer replenish their resources to meet our growing demand. Many may "thirst" for more.

Section 4: Water and Education

Education is critical for breaking the cycle of poverty and yet over half of the world's schools lack access to safe water and sanitation facilities.

Lack of clean water has serious effects on student's academic performance and attendance rates. The lack of safe water can cause even the best students to lose momentum as they deal with stomach pains and diarrhea from disease and hunger.

Students miss class to go fetch water, or to care for sick parents or siblings. In many places HIV/AIDS has already caused a large percentage of children to become orphans, requiring students to drop out and find work to provide food and care for younger siblings. If teachers are sick, classes get cancelled for all students.

Schools cannot run programs if they cannot provide water to students, faculty and their families.

Section 5: Lack of Water = Lack of Equality

For girls, the situation is especially troublesome. If schools do not have proper toilets, girls drop out once they reach puberty. Further, it is typically the responsibility of the women to fetch water thus limiting their access to both education and business opportunities. Think about it: everyday, women and young girls carry more than 40 pounds of dirty water from sources over 4 miles away from their homes. This leaves little time for education which is critical to changing the long term prospects of developing nations. With the many additional burdens that a lack of clean water brings, education simply becomes less of a priority. This sets up an unfortunate cycle of poverty and inequality as without a proper education, there is little chance of improving one's situation later in life. The Water Project is working to break this cycle. Sometimes the first public voice the women of a community ever have comes from an individual woman who is part of a water committee.