

World Water Day, 22 March, draws attention to the essential role of water in our lives, the difficulties people face in getting it and solutions to these problems.

Before reading

Do the preparation task first. Then read the article and do the exercises.

Preparation task

Match the definitions (a–h) with the vocabulary (1–8).

Vocabulary

1. underprivileged
2. sanitation
3. hygiene
4. to displace
5. scarce
6. vulnerable
7. grass roots
8. domestic duties

Definition

- a. keeping clean to prevent illness
- b. tasks relating to home, house and family
- c. to force someone to leave their home, often because of war or natural disaster
- d. difficult to find or get
- e. the system that moves dirty water and waste away from where people live
- f. involving the ordinary people in an organisation or a society
- g. able to be easily hurt or attacked and in need of special care
- h. without the education, possessions, money or social advantages that the average person has

World Water Day

Water is vital. Between 55 and 60 per cent of the adult body is made of it and every living cell needs it to keep functioning. In normal conditions, the human body can only survive three or four days without water. We need water to stay alive, yet there are billions of people all over the world who do not have access to safe drinking water.

World Water Day

The first World Water Day was celebrated in 1993. It was first proposed at the United Nations (UN) conference on environment and development in Rio de Janeiro in 1992 and has been celebrated annually on 22 March since then. Every year the UN releases its World Water Development Report on or around this date. Each year has a different theme, looking at things like the role of clean water in the world of work, ways to stop wasting water, finding ways to supply water to underprivileged groups and so on.

Safe water is a human right

Clean drinking water is fundamental. But it is also vital for sanitation and hygiene. It is estimated that more than 700 children under the age of seven die every day from illnesses linked to unsafe water and poor sanitation. The right to water and sanitation was recognised as a human right by the UN General Assembly in 2010. However, there are still at least 2.1 billion people around the world who live without safe water in their homes. These include rural communities, people who have been displaced due to war and local conflicts and areas where climate change is making water more and more scarce.

The problems facing communities without water

Apart from the obvious health issues, a lack of accessible clean water means that people – often women and children – spend hours every day walking to and from distant water supplies. This means they don't have time to dedicate to work, studies and other domestic duties. The search for water becomes their main occupation. And people who are not able to walk to get their own water are particularly vulnerable.

For many people, access to water has become increasingly difficult due to increased demand for a finite resource. According to figures released by the UN, around 4 billion people – nearly two-thirds of the world's population – experience severe water scarcity during at least one month of the year. It is believed that by 2030 as many as 700 million people worldwide could be displaced by intense water scarcity.

What are the solutions?

There are many charities working on creating sustainable supplies of clean water at a grass-roots level for different communities around the world, and this important work needs to continue and to expand. But the fundamental problem of increasing demand for a limited resource can only be addressed by more efficient use of water, especially in industry and agriculture. Waste-water recycling, capturing rainwater, more efficient irrigation techniques and reforestation are all examples of how water can be used more efficiently.

What we can do to help

As individuals, what we can do to help is support charities, raise awareness, take part in the World Water Day events that are happening all around the world and, of course, be careful with how we use water in our own lives. Visit the UN World Water Day website to find out about an event near you. Follow #worldwaterday on social media and help spread the word about this incredibly important issue.

Sources

- <http://www.worldwaterday.org/theme>
- <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/water-and-sanitation>
- https://www.who.int/water_sanitation_health/takingcharge.html
- <http://www.bbc.com/future/story/20170412-is-the-world-running-out-of-fresh-water>

Tasks

Task 1

Are the sentences true or false?

	Answer	
1. Three-quarters of the human body is made up of water.	True	False
2. The human body cannot normally survive for five days without water.	True	False
3. World Water Day was first celebrated in Rio de Janeiro.	True	False
4. Access to clean drinking water and sanitation is recognised as a human right.	True	False
5. Women and children are particularly affected by lack of clean water.	True	False
6. The problem of water scarcity has always been the same.	True	False

Task 2

Put the correct numbers in the gaps.

one	22	55–60	700
2010	2030	700 million	4 billion

- The adult body is made up of per cent water.
- World Water Day takes place on March.
- It is estimated that over young children die each day due to illnesses connected to unsafe water.
- Around people suffer water shortages for at least month of the year.
- By, about people may be displaced due to water scarcity.
- The right to water and sanitation became recognised by the UN as a human right in