

Accessing the necessities of life—fresh water

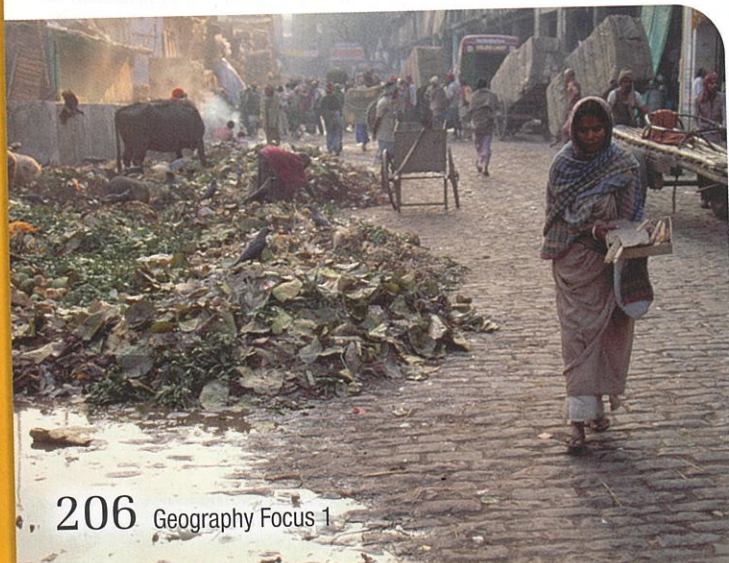
In order to survive, human beings have three basic needs of water, food and shelter. However, the world today is an unequal place where people's quality of life varies greatly. Some have full access to the basic necessities while others struggle just to stay alive. As you read this unit and the next, consider the access to food, water and shelter that you enjoy.

WHAT IS THE WORLD LIKE TODAY?

The quality of life refers to all aspects of a person's life. At one level it includes the basic human needs such as the amount of food available, access to a reliable water supply and the type of housing a person has. Other things—related to the standard of living—add to the quality of life. For example, the availability of medical care, the ability to vote, the value of women's roles and the amount of schooling available are all important in creating better living conditions for people and improving their standard of living.

People around the world do not enjoy the same levels of all of these things. Some people have better access to them than others.

9.2 Poor drainage and sanitation affect people's access to clean water.



9.1 Collecting water from wells and bores is hard work.

ACCESS TO FRESH, SAFE WATER

Fresh water is one of the most important requirements for life on Earth. People use water to drink, cook, wash and water crops. It is important for people's health that they have access to a sufficient quantity and quality of water.

In some parts of the world—much of Africa, for example—accessing water means walking long distances to collect it in containers every day. This job is typically done by women and girls who spend many hours collecting water from rivers, wells and bores (see 9.1). These water sources are sometimes polluted, leading to disease and even death. Where mosquitoes breed in stagnant, polluted water they spread waterborne diseases, which further add to deaths from lack of safe, clean drinking water.

In areas that lack a fresh water supply there is frequently a lack of drainage and sewage system. When it rains and the water runs over the surface of the street it collects other waste as well, such as rubbish and animal waste. This water runs into rivers that become contaminated. In poor countries many people take water directly from rivers, unlike richer countries where water is stored in reservoirs and treated before it is pumped through supply taps to people's homes and other buildings.

GEOGRAPHY FOCUS

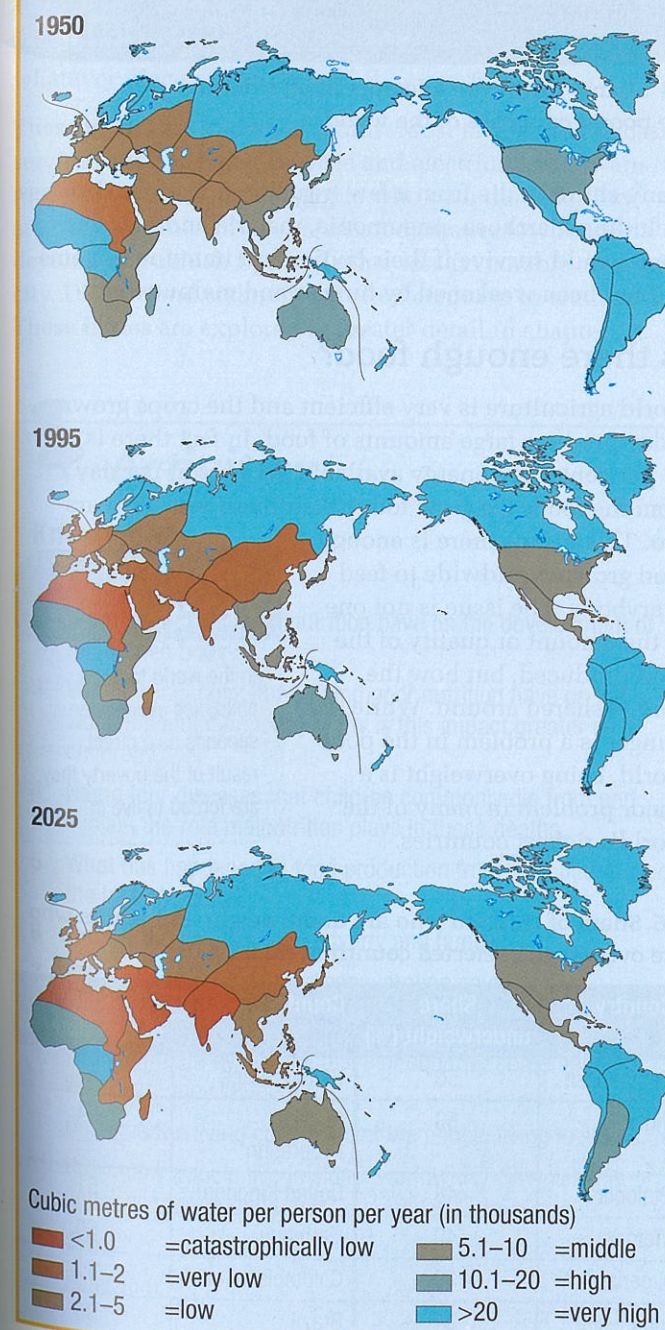
Diarrhoea caused by contaminated water has killed more children in the past 10 years than all the people lost to armed conflict since the Second World War.

Global inequalities in water availability

The maps in 9.3 show how access to fresh water for domestic (household) use has changed since 1950 and predicts what it will be like in 2025. In rich countries like Australia a person typically uses 300–400 litres per day. In poorer countries a person is considered to have access to fresh water if they are able to obtain just 20 litres per day within one-kilometre walking distance of their household.

Access to fresh water as an issue is explored in greater detail in chapter 11.

9.3 The changing access to fresh water for the countries of the world shows that regions of Africa and Asia face critical water shortages into the future.



Activities

Knowledge

- 1 State the three basic human needs.
- 2 In what way can a person's quality of life be viewed on two levels? How do these two levels differ from each other?
- 3 List some of the factors that can be used to determine a person's standard of living.
- 4 Why is access to fresh, safe water such an important issue for people?
- 5 What two aspects of water supply are most important in maintaining a person's health? Why are both of these aspects important?
- 6 Explain the role women play collecting water in many parts of the world.
- 7 How does the water supply in rich countries differ to poor countries?
- 8 Under what circumstances can using a river as a source of water lead to the spread of disease?
- 9 Under what conditions are people in poorer countries of the world considered to have access to a water supply? How does this compare to people in rich countries like Australia?
- 10 How would a sewage system stop disease spreading?

Skills

11 Refer to 9.3:

- a In 2025 how many cubic metres of water will there be per person in Australia?
- b Copy and complete the table below. You may need to refer to an atlas to assist you as you complete this activity.

Country	Global water availability (thousand cubic metres per person per year)		
	1950	1995	2025
India			
Egypt			
USA			

- c Which country listed in the table above experiences the greatest change in water availability between 1950 and 2025?
- d List five countries where the water availability will be catastrophically low by 2025.

Application

- 12 Draw a diagram that explains how drinking water in rivers can become polluted and unsuitable for drinking.
- 13 Australia is a rich nation of the world. As a class discuss the access to the necessities of life that you have as an Australian citizen.

Surf

