

NATURE ENVIRONMENT

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Thirsty Planet

Over 1.2 billion of the world's population have no access to clean drinking water. Thousands of people, most of them children, die every day after being exposed in one way or another to polluted water. The United Nations has said it wants to reduce that number by at least half by the year 2015. A noble goal – but most experts doubt it can be achieved. The water crisis is real. But how to solve the problems of water shortages and water pollution?

Water for the Fields 00 2662

World-wide, the one human activity that consumes the greatest volume of water is also the one that wastes the most: agriculture. So, the greatest potential for saving water lies in the use of more efficient irrigation techniques and long-term planning. The motto has to be “more crop per drop”.

Water for the Cities 00 2663

The urban water crisis is not an imminent threat – it has long been a present reality in the world's burgeoning metropolises. The challenges involved in supplying millions of people in urban spaces with potable water and disposing of their waste water must be acknowledged and faced up to.

Testing the Limits of Possibility 00 2664

Many politicians and technocrats seem convinced that colossal problems can only be solved through colossal projects. However, blind faith in concrete as a means of water management can often have devastating effects on natural landscapes and ecological systems. The search is on for new economically, socially and environmentally viable alternatives.

Water for Profit 00 2665

As the world population grows and pollution spreads, fresh water becomes increasingly rare. The moment demand outpaces supply, water becomes a trade good to be bought and sold on the market – a commodity in the global economy. But privatization remains bitterly controversial. Who owns the rights to water? And how can a price be set on water?

Waters of Discord 00 2666

About 40 percent of the world's population gets its drinking water from rivers that cross national boundaries. Some nations depend entirely on river water that flows in from other countries. So the control of water supplies has the potential to be used as an effective political weapon. Some analysts go so far as to predict that wars will be fought over water rights.

Watery Visions 00 2667

The problem of water shortages cannot be solved by technology alone. The best prospects for a long-term solution lie in a comprehensive program of water management. In the not-too-distant future, a number of major policy decisions will have to be made on how water supplies can be used more efficiently. We can start taking action now.