

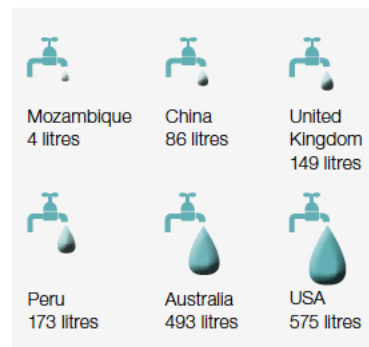
## 2.6 The world's drinking water

Drinking water, sometimes called potable water, is water that is safe to drink and use for cooking and washing. In Australia, most water undergoes some form of treatment to make it safe to drink. Water treatment removes sediments, pollutants and microorganisms that can make us sick. Australians are among the world's biggest water users, using almost 500 litres of water per person per day. This figure is for all water use, including water used in agriculture and industry. While this amount has declined in recent years, it still ranks among the highest in the world. Experts estimate that each Australian will need to use 12 per cent less water by 2030 in order to stay within the limits imposed by our rainfall. Some households have started to use a number of strategies to save water, while many others continue to waste large amounts.

### Access to safe drinking water

In Australia, we take for granted that we have flush toilets, running water from taps and clean, safe drinking water. However, millions of people around the world get sick or die each year from drinking contaminated water. The United Nations estimates that half the world's population has problems caused by lack of access to clean water. More than 1 billion people do not have access to a reliable freshwater supply, and 2.6 billion do not have basic sanitation, such as running water to clean their hands or flush their toilets.

It is estimated that, at any one time, almost half the people in poorer countries are suffering from health problems due to a lack of safe water. Each year, millions of people die from diseases carried in their water. Millions of women and children around the world, particularly in Africa, spend several hours a day collecting and carrying enough water to keep their families alive for another day.



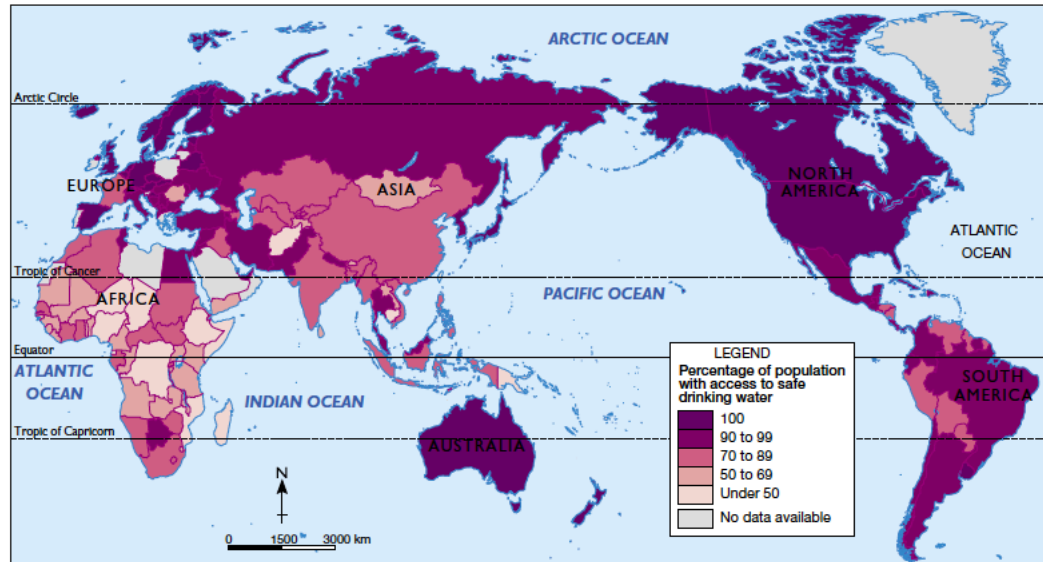
**Source 1** Water use per person per day. Mozambique has the lowest daily water use per capita while the United States has the highest. Source: United Nations 2006

**Source 2** In Chad, as in many African countries, each day begins with a walk to the village well.



## 2A How is water an environmental resource?

WORLD: ACCESS TO SAFE DRINKING WATER



Source 3

Source: Oxford University Press

### keyconcept: Environment

#### Serah's story

Serah and her six children live in Ethiopia in Africa. The scarcest resource in her region is water. Before dawn, she makes her first journey to the village pump. Once there were three wells, but the 8-metre well has dried up. The 9-metre well has a little salty water at the bottom. The flow from the pump of the 25-metre well has slowed to a painful trickle. There is just barely enough for everyone to drink.

While it takes her 25 minutes to walk down the hill to the pump, it will take her 40 minutes to make the return journey with the 10-litre jar balanced on her head. She makes this trip at least twice a day. She tends not to drink as much as the others as she believes she should look after her children before herself. This means that she cannot produce enough milk for her baby, so he is often ill. The water contains parasites that make her other children sick, but Serah has little choice.

For more information on the key concept of environment, refer to page 8 of 'The geography toolkit'.

### Check your learning 2.6

#### Remember and understand

- 1 What is potable water?
- 2 How many people in the world do not have access to a reliable supply of fresh water?
- 3 Describe the differences in the drinking water available in most Australian homes and in Serah's village.

#### Apply and analyse

- 4 Using Source 3 and a world map, identify two countries with excellent access to safe water and two countries with poor access to safe water. Which continent has the worst access to safe water?
- 5 Read Serah's story.
  - a How much water will Serah collect in two trips to the pump?
  - b How many people depend on her trips to the pump?
  - c How much will each person receive?
  - d The average toilet in Australia uses 8 litres per flush. Write a statement about the way water is used in Australia compared to Ethiopia.