

1 The world's most valuable stuff

2 *original at*

3 http://www.economist.com/opinion/displaystory.cfm?story_id=16163366

4 People kill each other over diamonds; countries go to war over oil. But the
5 world's most expensive commodities are worth nothing in the absence of
6 water. Although mostly unpriced, it is the most valuable stuff in the world.

7 The supply of water is fixed. Meanwhile demand rises sharply as the
8 world's population increases and enriches itself. It is the planet's growing
9 need for food that matters most. Farming accounts for 70% of
10 withdrawals.

11 The consequences of the rising demand for water are increasingly visible.
12 Few of the world's great rivers that run through grain-growing areas now
13 reach the sea all the year round or, if they do, they do so as a trickle. Less
14 obvious, though even more serious, are the withdrawals from
15 underground aquifers.

16 So far the world has been spared a true water war, but since over 60% of
17 the world's population lives in a river basin shared by two or more
18 countries, the scope for squabbles is plain.

19 Although the supply of water cannot be increased, mankind can use what
20 there is better—in four ways. One is through the improvement of storage
21 and delivery. A second route focuses on making farming less thirsty—for
22 instance by growing newly bred, perhaps genetically modified, crops that
23 are drought-resistant or higher-yielding. A third way is to invest in
24 technologies to take the salt out of sea water and thus increase supply of
25 the fresh stuff. The fourth is of a different kind: unleash the market on
26 water-users. Once water is properly priced, trade will encourage well-
27 watered countries to make water-intensive goods, and arid ones to make
28 those that are water-light.

Questions

- 1) 'Although mostly unpriced, it is the most valuable stuff in the world.' (line 6) – paraphrase this sentence with your own words!
- 2) According to the article, is there a way of increasing the amount of water on Earth?
- 3) Has water consumption by humankind increased or decreased? And what are the reasons behind this development?
- 4) What are the visible and invisible consequences of excess water consumption?
- 5) What are the possible effects of lack of water on human societies?
- 6) What can humanity do to prevent water shortages?
- 7) What is the difference between the first three ways of tackling the issue of water consumption and the fourth one? Explain with your own words what the fourth solution to the problem consists of.
- 8) Are you concerned about the increasing water consumption at all? Do you think that water is priced correctly in the Czech Republic? Do you think that humans should somehow make their lives more 'sustainable' or are we doing just fine?

Vocabulary

stuff (lines 1, 6 and 25) – unspecified material or substance; matter, thing; a general word for about anything

go to war over (line 4)/ argue over – Note that we use the preposition 'over' to indicate the motive or cause of quarrels and conflicts

withdrawal (lines 10 and 14)– removal from a place or position of something that has been deposited (note – you also 'withdraw' money from an automatic teller machine or ATM)

focus (line 21)– to concentrate attention or energy

You can find additional explanation and more examples to help you understand and use English words and phrases at <http://dictionary.reference.com>, <http://dictionary.cambridge.org/>, or <http://www.merriam-webster.com/>

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