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Asia's water worries

By [Graham Land](#) Oct 06, 2012 8:00AM UTC

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The current global market system means that rich nations are literally sucking the developing world dry.

This is done via wealthy, mostly Western, nations manufacturing water-intensive products in poor countries. For example, it takes 30 liters of water to make a cup of tea in the UK. Of course, no one drinks a 30 liter cup of tea, not literally anyway. But the growing, shipping, packaging, selling and finally brewing of a cup of tea in England uses 30 liters – most of them in India, China, Sri Lanka, etc. That means the consumers of products made in the developing world are draining it of water – an increasingly scarce and valuable resource.

From [BBC News](#):

Ten times as much is embedded in the British-made goods bought by the average UK consumer; but that represents only about one-third of the total water embedded in all the average consumer's food and goods, with the remainder coming from imports. The UK is not unique in this – the same pattern is seen in most developed countries.

The same is happening within developing countries as they adopt more Western lifestyles.

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In 2006 the [International Water Management Institute](#) estimated that one in three people were “enduring one form or another of water scarcity”. The numbers are expected to increase as the Earth’s population grows and more people adopt water-intensive lifestyles, including diets with more meat. As you can imagine, things have only gotten worse during the past 6 years.

So it’s not just consumers in the US and Europe, for example, buying agricultural products like coffee and fruit from US and European companies growing it in developing nations, it’s also the rapid development in countries like China that is putting huge stresses on their own water resources.

From [China Dialogue](#):

China builds an average of three new power stations a week; by 2030 it plans to add more power capacity than exists in the US, the UK and Australia today. This will require huge amounts of water for cooling and driving steam turbine generators. The country’s water resources are already stretched and climate change is making conditions even tougher.



Tea harvesting in India Pic: Arul Prasad (Flickr CC)

India, the largest consumer and second largest producer of sugar, is set to become a net importer of the product within 1-2 years, according to market analysts. Sugar cane is a particularly water-intensive crop and the water necessary to grow it is simply not available

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in much of India.

From the [Daily Times](#) (Pakistan):

India has been blighted by its first drought in three years, with monsoon rains likely to be less than 90 percent of the long-term average and with the rainfall deficit in some cane-growing areas as high as 30 percent. That has dealt a blow to Asia's third-largest economy, where more than half the farmland lacks irrigation.

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