

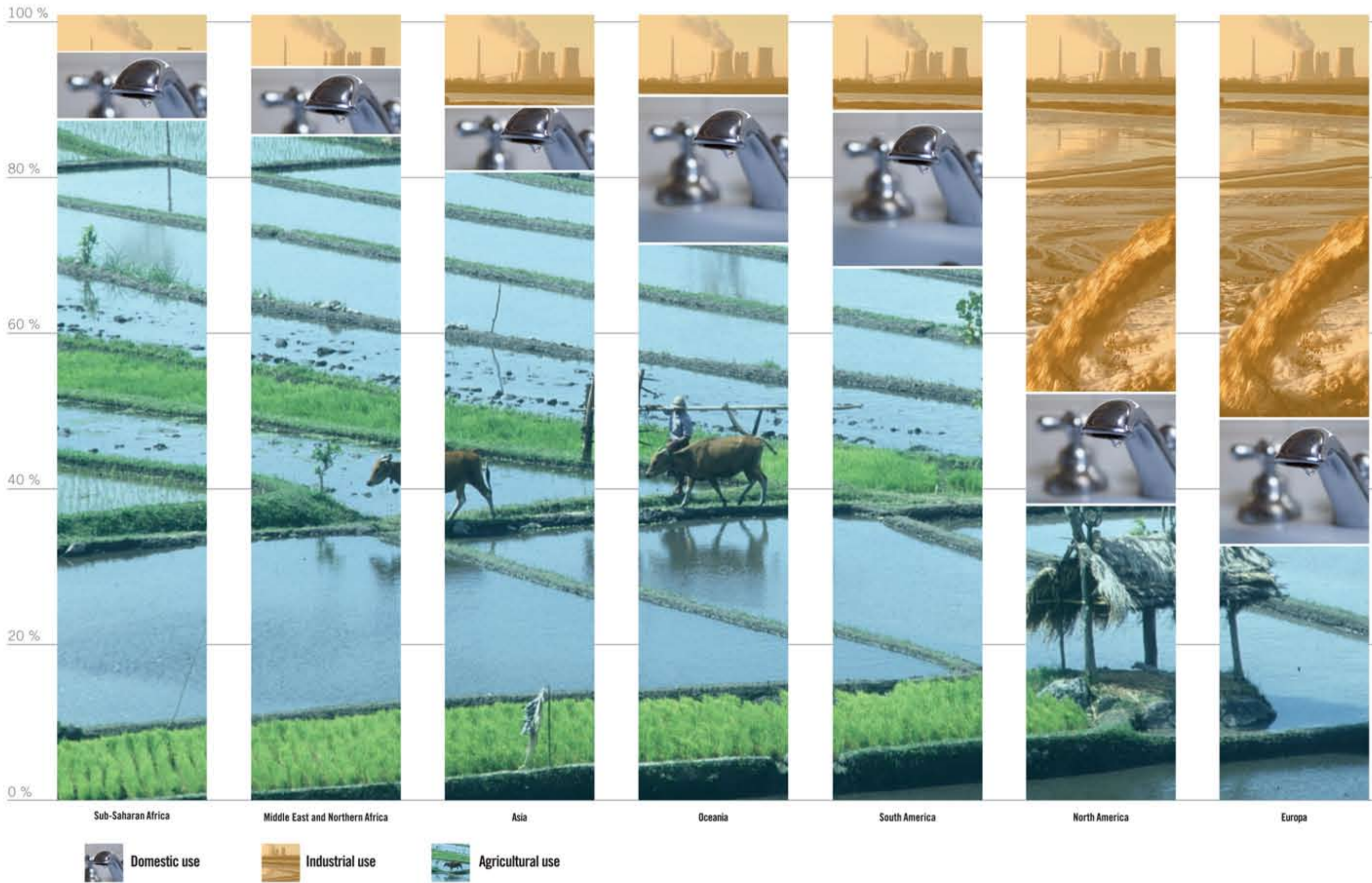
The uses of water

Fresh water is a crucial, limited and scarce natural resource. It is used for agriculture and industry, as well as for urban and domestic consumption. This massive consumption of water makes it essential to regulate water use through proper planning.



How water is used (2004)

Source: World Resources Institute (2005).



Agriculture is the sector with the highest water demand (70-80% worldwide) and is a determining factor in water shortage problems. It is possible, and highly necessary, to produce food using less water per unit of production.



Water for urban and domestic use is the water supplied to homes, businesses and service providers. It usually undergoes costly treatments in order to guarantee public health. Up to 60% of the water in urban supply systems can be lost due to unrepaired leaks.

Nearly all industrial manufacturing processes require water to some degree (for synthesising chemical products, cooling or cleaning, among other applications). The reuse of water in industrial systems must be fostered and the discharge of pollutants into water prevented.



The minimum amount of water necessary for survival is 20 litres per person per day. One hundred litres per person and day is more than enough for a decent life. In developed countries, however, this figure often ranges from 200 to 500 litres per person per day. In any case, water for human consumption must be kept free of industrial, agricultural and urban pollutants.

- Some of the challenges that urgently need to be met include:
- Universal access to potable water and sanitation;
 - Increased efficiency in agricultural, industrial and domestic use;
 - Reuse of water; and
 - The struggle against water pollution.

