Drought and Famine

Drought

A **drought** is an extended period of months or years when a region notes a deficiency in its water supply. Generally, this occurs when a region receives consistently below average rainfall. It can have a substantial impact on the environment and agriculture of the effected region. Although droughts can persist for several years, even a short, intense drought can cause significant damage and harm the local economies.

Consequences of drought

Periods of drought can have significant environmental, agricultural, health, economic and social consequences. The effect varies according to vulnerability. For example, subsistence farmers are more likely to migrate during drought because they do not have alternative food sources. Areas with populations that depend on a major food source are more vulnerable to drought-triggered famine.

Drought can also reduce water quality, because lower water flows reduce dilution of pollutants and increase contamination of remaining water sources.

Common consequences of drought include:

- Diminished crop growth or yield productions and carrying capacity for livestock
- Dust bowls, themselves a sign of erosion, which further erode the landscape
- Dust storms, when drought hits an area suffering from desertification and erosion
- Habitat damage
- Malnutrition, dehydration and related diseases
- Mass migration, resulting in internal displacement and international refugees
- Social unrest
- War over natural resources, including water and food
- Wildfires are more common during times of drought
- Famine due to lack of water for irrigation

Famine

A **famine** is an extreme, widespread scarcity of food, caused by several factors including crop failure, overpopulation, or government policies. This phenomenon is usually accompanied or followed by regional malnutrition, starvation, epidemics and increased mortality.

Every continent in the world has experienced a period of famine throughout history. Many countries continue to have extreme cases of famine, including in Africa today.

A famine is declared when the death rate is greater than two people per 10, 000 per day. Those most at risk are children under 5 years old, the elderly, anyone who is sick, and pregnant and lactating mothers.

When famine strikes, many people flee as refugees into neighbouring countries. Even when the rains eventually come, people cannot return home until crops are established.