

UN WATER COMMITTEE

Improving water management to solve the World-Wide drought crisis.

Topic Background

Our world is quickly running out of one of its most precious resources, to the point that every single country, from Northern Europe to South Africa, has been greatly affected by this water shortage. Since the 1970's, droughts - periods of time when a region experiences water shortage due to minimal precipitations, caused by human induced climate change¹ - have claimed the lives of more than 650,000 people around the globe, from which around 90 percent occurred in developing countries² and a great percentage of victims being women and children. Not only that, in just about the last decade the amount and duration of droughts have increased by almost a third than how they were before, as reported by the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD).

At this moment in time, we're facing a globally unprecedented level of droughts with 2.3 billion people are facing this water crisis first hand, causing huge economic losses for both first-world and third-world countries: Registering an overall world economy loss of at least 124 billion dollars, an all time low for the coffee industry in Brazil and other South American countries, massive cases of severe hunger in Africa and record breaking amounts of crop failings in the United Nations and European countries. Worst of all, scientists predict that shifting precipitation patterns as well as increasing global temperatures will only make the crisis worse,

¹ Brown, T. (Director). (2022, July 15th). Drought. National Geographic Society.

² COP-15 Côte d'Ivoire. (2022, May 11th). DROUGHT IN NUMBERS 2022: Restoration for readiness and resilience. United Nations | Convention to Combat Desertification.

and if it continues at this rate for the next few decades, by 2050 more than 75% of the world's population could face drought directly.³

According to a 2019 WHO (World Health Organization) report on water inequality 1 in 3 people globally don't have access to clean water, and the most affected nations are the least developed countries,⁴ as the report highlighted new data showing 3 billion people lacked any kind of basic hand washing facilities in 2017, from which nearly three quarters correspond to developing countries; this itself causes a shocking mortality rate, with over 6% of deaths in low-income nations being a result of unsafe water sources, most of them being children, as over the course of just one year around 297,000 children under the age of five die due to diarrhea directly linked to inadequate washing.⁵ And this is only the beginning, as by 2025, 1.8 billion people will be living in countries or regions with absolute water scarcity.⁶

When comparing the death rates caused by unsafe water sources from all around the world, the most affected countries and the most fatalities are between Sub-Saharan Africa and Asia, with Chad as the most affected nation of them all, as 10% of the total deaths in a year are in some way or another attributed to the lack of sanitized water. Compare this to death rates across high-income countries: in most European countries the death rates are below the 0.1 deaths per 100,000. A greater than 100-fold difference.⁷

In most countries around North America and Northern Europe an estimate of 96% of the population have access to drinking water facilities, United States having

³ United Nations Environment Programme. (s. f.). Around the globe, as the climate crisis worsens, droughts set in. UNEP.

⁴ 1 in 3 people globally do not have access to safe drinking water – UNICEF, WHO. (2019, June 18th).

⁵ *ibid*

⁶ Water in developing countries. (s. f.). GAC.

⁷ Ritchie, H. (2021, July 1st). Clean Water. Our World in Data.

an overall percentage of 97.33% of their citizens with clean water usage, this is more than 90% of the population of the Sudan, where only 5.59% of their population has the “privilege” of being able to consume sanitized water.⁸

Going back to the United States as a primary example, even though 96% of their population have access to clean water, there’s still approximately 2.2 million other citizens that are living without running water and basic indoor plumbing, most of this due to the large amounts of resources that are wasted or used inefficiently.⁹

General History

Droughts and water shortage are not something new for humanity, the earliest case of drought reported and observed in the United States going back as far as 1621.¹⁰ The deadliest drought crisis ever reported occurred in northern China during 1876 - 1879, when between 9 and 13 million people passed away due to the lack of rain for more than three consecutive years.¹¹ Nonetheless, the longest drought in recorded history happened in the Atacama Desert in Chile, where not a single drop of rain touched the ground for four hundred years. More recently, during the 1930’s, the Dust Bowl, the most devastating ecological disaster in the history of the United States, took the lives of around 7,000 people and left around two million more homeless.¹²

In 1994 the UNCCD was adopted to help during the process of linking environment and development to sustainable land management.¹³ One of their

⁸ Ritchie, H. (2021, July 1st). Clean Water. Our World in Data.

⁹ Work together to improve access to clean water worldwide. (2022, August 3rd). World Economic Forum.

¹⁰ Drought - History. (s. f.). Droughts, People, Million, and Korea - JRank Articles.

¹¹ Worst drought famine. (s. f.). Guinness World Records.

¹² Berardelli, J. (2020, August 18th). A devastating Dust Bowl heat wave is now more than twice as likely, study says. CBS News.

¹³ United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification. (s. f.). UN Women Headquarters.

multiple initiatives is the Drought Initiative, which “promotes a shift to proactive drought management, working with countries to develop national drought plans and developing an interactive Drought Toolbox that enables users to design custom drought solutions.”¹⁴

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¹⁴ United Nations. (s. f.). Our work & impact. UNCCD.

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