



SIYABHABHA TRUST- CARITAS SOUTH AFRICA NEWS:

The poor and rural communities suffer the effects of water scarcity and drought in South Africa

Water scarcity are becoming emergency issues and are going to play a key role in the near future for the definition of both environmental and development policies at a global scale. Drought and water scarcity differs from other natural disasters in its slowness of onset and its commonly lengthy duration. In most cases, drought is caused by either a deficiency of precipitation or an inadequacy of inland water resources supplies for a prolonged period.

History is showing that even if this is one of the worst, the crisis emerged in the past 4years with 2015/16 being the worst. South African Weather Service indicated that the country is in the grips of the worst drought in 23years. 5 Provinces declared drought disaster areas and 10 Dioceses supported by the Church are within the worst affected provinces (Ingwavuma, Umzimkulu, Kokstad, Dundee, Rustenburg, Klerksdorp, Bloemfontein, Bethlehem, Polokwane and Witbank). These dioceses are dominated by rural communities and resources are still very scarce. It is very difficult to look at the entire summer rainfall and deduce that drought affected all of the areas equally. On the contrary, it is clear that some of the provinces suffer harshly than others in times of rainfall deficit.

Government reports stated that more than 4million people and 2.7million households have been affected countrywide. The excessive heatwave which result in El Nino, has grossly exacerbated the dry conditions that the country is already experiencing, thus putting a strain on the already stretched resources. *According to the eNCA weather team, El Niño occurs when ocean surface temperatures in the Eastern Pacific are warmer than normal. This causes warmer and drier conditions in areas like South Africa, which largely relies on summer rainfall for its water supply.*

Reports also say that, the El Niño-induced drought is not just a South African problem but also a regional one that stretches through to Ethiopia, where 10% of the population is facing famine. A drought crisis, particularly in neighbouring countries, is bound to affect South Africa negatively, with problems that include overloading at ports and even mass migration.

It is also added by Bart Stemmet, a senior economist at NKC African Economics, hardship in neighbouring countries could lead to an influx of migrant workers seeking greener pastures.

Drought and shortage of water threatens food security, health, economy and environment. Grain SA economist Wandile Sihlobo said that, of the maize consumed in the Southern African Development Community, 40% is produced in South Africa and so lower local production will have a significant impact on the region. The country may be forced to start importing maize, food prices are bound to go up and the poor and vulnerable are and will be the most affected.

The church's plan is to work with Dioceses and other stakeholders in mitigating the situation's impact towards rural and poor communities. Drought mitigation measures are necessary in

order to minimise the impact of drought on production systems and livelihoods. It is critical for the church to explore relief and future preparedness within communities for this type of disasters. The main aim of disaster management programmes is to reduce human suffering and improve human welfare.

As per management measures Caritas SA need to learn from others but also start putting in place options for mitigation and future preparedness and therefore the following were looked at as possible policy options for National office to capacitate itself and then transfer the knowledge to all 26 Dioceses:-

1. Crisis response/contingency plan, relief and rehabilitation measures
 2. Evaluation of drought consequences
 3. Awareness programmes on water preservations
 4. Land use plans, especially in "drought-sensitive" areas
 5. Drought mitigation measures such as building of reservoirs
 6. Drought resilience
 7. Irrigation as the most effective application of drought damage reduction
 8. Early warning systems
 9. Strengthening Local Resource Management
 10. Monitoring and Evaluation of processes
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