

Environmental Issues Across Africa



SS7G2 The student will discuss environmental issues across the continent of Africa.

- Explain how water pollution and the unequal distribution of water impacts irrigation, trade, industry and drinking water.



Africans face many types of environmental issues. Some problems are lack of water, poor soil quality, and expanding deserts.



Much of Africa has trouble having enough water for people to live.



At least 1.5 million people are suffering from acute **malnutrition**. Malnutrition is poor health caused by a lack of good food.

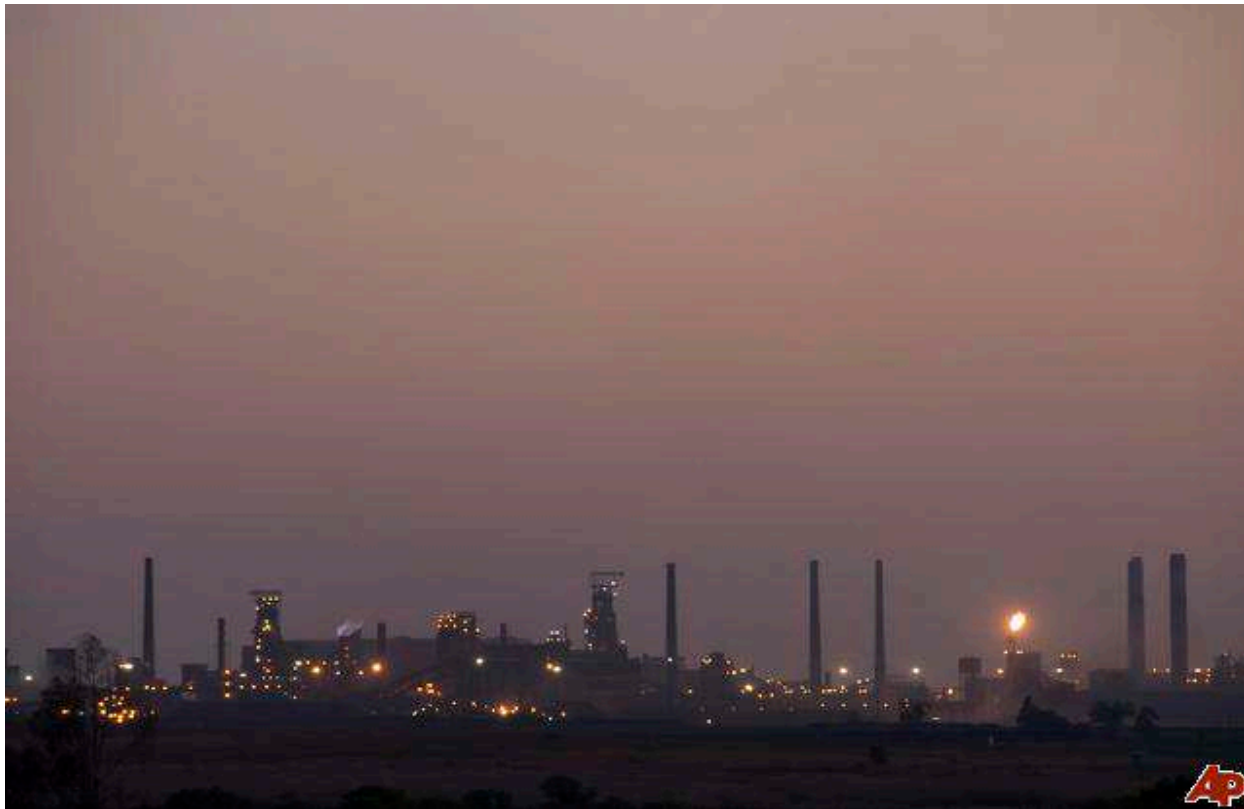
Those countries with large river systems have enough water for farming and for people in villages, towns, and cities.



Above: Zambezi River

All countries, however have the problem of increasing pollution from factories, and animal and human waste.

Below: A steel mill in Vanderbijlpark , South Africa. Journalists and environmental activists visited the mill as part of a fact-finding mission to investigate the physical and social impact of the steel mill.



Some countries have poor harvests, little grazing land for farm animals, and little clean water for drinking and washing.

The tension between the needs of a growing population and the limited supply of water is a serious issue for most of Africa.



Many countries in Africa don't have enough clean water even though they have large rivers. In Egypt, the Nile River is used for water and transportation. **Overpopulation** and **poor sanitation** have contributed to the Nile's contamination with human and industrial wastes.



The **Aswan High Dam** has allowed Egypt to have year-round irrigation instead of relying on the flooding of the Nile during the rainy season, so now farmers can grow three crops a year instead of one. The dam is also used to generate electricity.



However, because the Nile no longer floods, the silt, which is the rich topsoil carried by the floodwaters, is no longer deposited in Egyptian fields.



Irrigation requires farmers to use chemical fertilizers instead which are expensive and contribute to the Nile's pollution.

Fertilizers have caused the build up of salt in fields which is not suitable for growing crops.

Below: date palm grove (left) and an irrigated field (right)



The **Niger River** provides some relief to people living in the Sahel. It's also a vital transportation route. When the Niger reaches the sea in Nigeria, it broadens into what is known as the "**Oil Delta.**" This area is rich in petroleum. The silt from the river makes good soil for planting crops.



The **Congo River**, the most powerful river in Africa, provides water to villages and towns. It provides water for irrigation and a fishing industry. It also serves as a major transportation route for those who need to go from the interior of Africa to the Atlantic Ocean.



Much of the timber cut from the rainforests is transported down the Congo River. People also travel the river in search of work.



Many who study this region believe that Africa could find itself in the midst of "water wars" in the coming years. The Nile River runs through Ethiopia, Sudan and Egypt. All of these countries have growing populations and growing water needs.



The Niger River supplies the dry Sahel area before flowing into the country of Nigeria. As more water is drawn off upstream, less is available to the countries farther down river. Increases in agriculture also mean greater water needs as well.

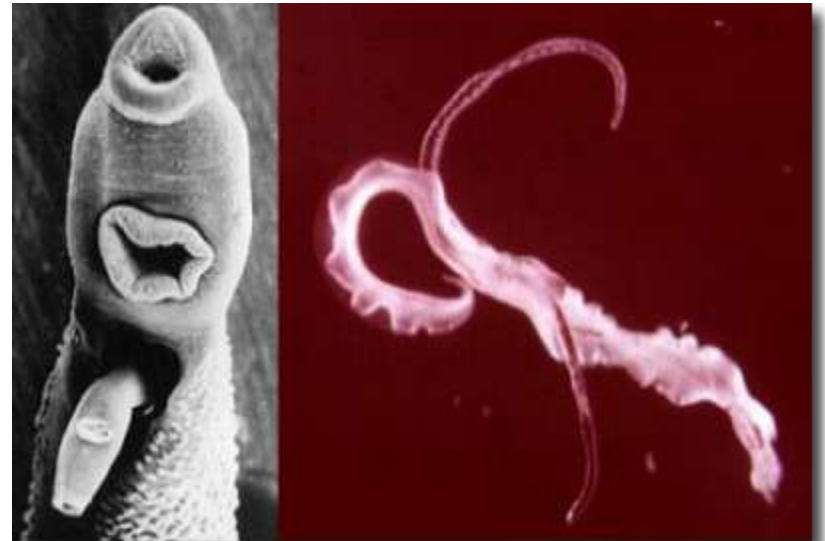


Clean water is needed for basic health and **sanitation**. That means that water should be free of filth, infection, or dangers to people's health. People who are not able to have access to clean water are at risk for many diseases.



Above: Around Lake Victoria, residents wash cars in the same lake water that sewage water is regularly released in and that they also end up bathing in. People who come in contact with the water are susceptible to coming away with several diseases including cholera, pneumonia, diarrhea, and several skin diseases.

Lack of clean water to wash with also increases the frequency of skin and eye infections. Some people in Africa also face the problem of water-borne diseases spread by parasites living in standing water.



Some countries in Africa have tried to improve their economies by starting factories. Some have paid little attention to the factory wastes that are flushed into rivers and streams.



Government officials ignored environmental problems as long as factories made profits. Sometimes the factory workers are harmed by the industrial waste that pollutes local water supplies.



The United Nations, the World Bank, and the United Children's Fund are clean water programs at work in Africa. The African Union had a special meeting on African water issues during the summer of 2008.



Africa's environmental problems are large, but African countries are working hard with world organizations to try to find solutions.

