

In South Africa, volunteers deliver water to ease drought emergency

SENEKAL, South Africa — The shabby, faded umbrellas bob above a long queue of people, protection not against rain, but the parching sun. Some farmers are calling this the worst drought they've seen. Residents in many rural towns saw the water in their taps dribble and die months ago.

Without enough water to live on, this drought has been especially hard those living in rural areas of South Africa. Crops didn't get planted. Wildlife disappeared. Cattle were sent away to early slaughter when farmers couldn't bear to watch their slow, dry deaths.

The drought has been caused by El Niño's punishing path across Africa. Pockets of flooding occur in countries such as Somalia and Kenya in the eastern part of the continent. In South Africa, the southernmost country on the continent, the situation has been quite different. An endless succession of dry days has made even simple drinking water a precious resource for many of the country's 54 million people.

Government Sends Truckloads Of Water

Government officials are now sending water by truck to thirsty communities in massive drives across the country.

Salman Seeday is a volunteer truck driver who recently delivered water to the remote town of Senekal in South Africa. He described how people ran toward the arriving trucks, grabbed the bottles that were offered and guzzled down the contents.

"Within two or three minutes we had a queue of 2,000 or 3,000 people," he said. "It's heartbreaking. What you see there will bring tears to your eyes."

El Niño is a cyclical weather condition that occurs when the water in the equatorial Pacific Ocean becomes very warm. This rise in temperature can affect weather all over the planet in many different ways. For example, the current El Niño has started to relieve a drought in the western United States even as, on the other side of the world, it has created a new one in Africa.

Disaster Declared In 5 Of 9 Provinces

Here in one of the continent's most advanced nations, the lack of available drinking water has become an emergency. Five of South Africa's nine provinces have been declared disaster zones, as well as areas of two other provinces. The country, which normally exports corn to much of southern Africa, will have to import up to 6 million tons of grain, according to Agriculture Minister Senzeni Zokwana.

There have been violent fights over water in some towns, according to Yaseen Theba, who set up Operation Hydrate, one of several voluntary water delivery efforts. People spend all day waiting in line for water to arrive, and they do not always get all the water they need. "We have to wake up at 12 o'clock at night for the queue. Sometimes we sleep here," said Vinus Nkala, 36, who lives with her three children just outside of Senekal.

Water delivered by the local municipality was "muddy" and had given some children diarrhea. This made some people afraid to use it for drinking, said Nkala. After the first rain in months fell on a recent Monday, people rushed with buckets to collect the dirty water for washing clothes.

Long Lines Await Water Deliveries

The voluntary water trucking efforts began late last month.

A South African security company manager, who goes only by the name of Theba, has been trucking water donated by South African companies. His operation delivered more than 26,000 gallons of water to Senekal on Thursday. A long line formed instantaneously under the blazing sun as the trucks pulled up.

"We couldn't not do it. We could not sit back and watch people die and kill people out of thirst," he said.

"We needed to get water to people as quickly as possible. We are totally aware of the fact that this is not the most practical solution. But the people need water now. You can see the queues. And while we're getting a project together to put tanks into these areas, at least we can get water to the people."

Municipal Tanks May Cause Illness

"I never seen anything like this in my life. We never felt we could experience this thing," said Maduna Nkosama, 27, of Senekal. His family of nine was too poor to buy water and instead has been relying on municipal tankers — with their questionable water supplies.

“We don’t know where the municipality got that water. That water is not good enough, especially for the kids. Some kids have been getting sick,” Nkosama said. Some townsfolk are angry that farmers bringing water tanks there were charging 60 cents for 5 gallons of water.

“It’s not fair. If you have something, why don’t you contribute to other people, to show mercy?” Nkosama said. “Some people take advantage of us because of our suffering.”

Critics say the water crisis points up the national government’s failure to spend more money on water infrastructure. They think the government should have built more water storage tanks and pipe systems. Others complain that municipal governments have not responded effectively to the crisis.

Quiz

1 Read this selection from the article.

Without enough water to live on, this drought has been especially hard those living in rural areas of South Africa. Crops didn’t get planted. Wildlife disappeared. Cattle were sent away to early slaughter when farmers couldn’t bear to watch their slow, dry deaths.

Which of the following can be inferred from the selection above?

- (A) Urban areas of South Africa are not experiencing the effects of the drought.
- (B) Farmers will need to reduce the amount of water they use in the future.
- (C) The lack of rain has mostly been a problem for farmers who plant crops.
- (D) The drought has harmed agricultural production in South Africa in many ways.

2 Which paragraph from the section "Government Sends Truckloads Of Water" BEST supports the claim that the drought in South Africa is a natural disaster?

3 Which TWO statements describe central ideas in the article?

- 1. South Africa is experiencing a drought that has caused a shortage in drinking water.
- 2. Some children were sickened by drinking water that the government provided.
- 3. Five of South Africa's provinces are considered disaster zones because of the drought.
- 4. People are dissatisfied with the government's response to the water shortage.

- (A) 1 and 2 (B) 2 and 4 (C) 1 and 4 (D) 2 and 3

4 How does the following paragraph reflect a CENTRAL idea of the article?

There have been violent fights over water in some towns, according to Yaseen Theba, who set up Operation Hydrate, one of several voluntary water delivery efforts. People spend all day waiting in line for water to arrive, and they do not always get all the water they need. "We have to wake up at 12 o'clock at night for the queue. Sometimes we sleep here," said Vinus Nkala, 36, who lives with her three children just outside of Senekal.

- (A) It shows South Africans' frustration with the government.
- (B) It shows the growing desperation of some South Africans.
- (C) It shows how private groups are trying to respond to the drought.
- (D) It shows the variety of problems produced by drought conditions.