

Poverty in Africa has a significant impact on the environment. Many countries in Africa are very rich with natural resources from oil to minerals. Africa has some of the best farmlands in the world, with the exception of the Sahara desert region, most other parts of Africa could be converted into great farmlands but most Africans have no access to fertile land and are unable to plant crops. It is not the lack of education that keeps Africans from planting crops but the treatment of them by the landowners. Most African farmworkers are severely underpaid and the revenues accrued by the landowners are never shared with the workers. For example, in Zimbabwe only twenty percent of all fertile land is available to ninety percent of the population, while there are millions of people at risk of dying from malnutrition. Nearly all of Africa's environmental problems are caused by humans, though not necessarily Africans. Parts of the continent south of the Sahara are experiencing serious desertification problems as a result of mismanagement of natural resources. Two thirds of the continent is desert or drylands and experiences frequent and severe droughts. Environmental degradation occurs in most of Africa because people that are on the verge of starvation are unlikely to care about the fate of their environment. When people live in poverty they have little choice but to over-exploit the land. As they try to farm they end up using the soil's contents, leading to desertification. When the land eventually becomes uneconomic to farm, these people are often forced into internal and cross border migrations. Poverty negatively effects the environment because it causes soil erosion. Agricultural practices that tax the soil lead to soil erosion, which lowers crop yields and pollutes rivers and streams with silt. The accumulation of the silt from the loose eroded soil kills the fish in rivers and

streams. Another cause of soil erosion is the cutting down of trees, in massive numbers, either for use as firewood or to sell for much needed cash. Eventually not only will the soil erode to a point where it can no longer sustain agriculture, but the trees will be gone too. One other way poverty effects the environment is it creates a lack of safe drinking water and supplies. Of the estimated eight hundred million who live on the continent, more than three hundred million live in a water scarce environment. Clean potable water is rare in most of Africa despite the fact that the continent is crossed by several major rivers and contains some of the largest freshwater lakes in the world. Although boiling water is a possibility, supplies for boiling are scarce as well. Also many of the major population centres are coastal, and few major cities have adequate sewage systems. Despite Africa's wealth of natural resources the continent still remains in poverty.