



DROUGHT



What is a drought?

Droughts are not very easy to define. A drought is not just a lack of water for a period of time. In fact there are a whole range of types of drought including; agricultural (farming), meteorological (weather), hydrological (surface water) and socio-economic (ones which affect humans).

Agricultural drought

This is a drought which affects how farmers can use their land. An agricultural drought usually means there is not enough water for the crops to grow as there is a lack of soil moisture. It can also affect livestock such as cows and sheep.



Hydrological drought

Hydrological droughts are ones which there is a lack of water at the surface of the earth, resulting in less water in streams, lakes and reservoirs and can impact on the use of water for houses and industry.

Meteorological drought

This is usually simply defined as a period of time where there has been less rain recorded. Rainfall amounts can vary by duration (i.e. time the rain fell for) and the intensity of rainfall (how hard it was raining). Meteorological drought is usually recorded in the time there has been little or no rain for e.g. months or years.



Socio-economic drought



A Socioeconomic drought is when physical water shortages affects the lives of people; such as their health and quality of life. It can also affect the supply of food and materials and so affect the economy.

What is a desert?

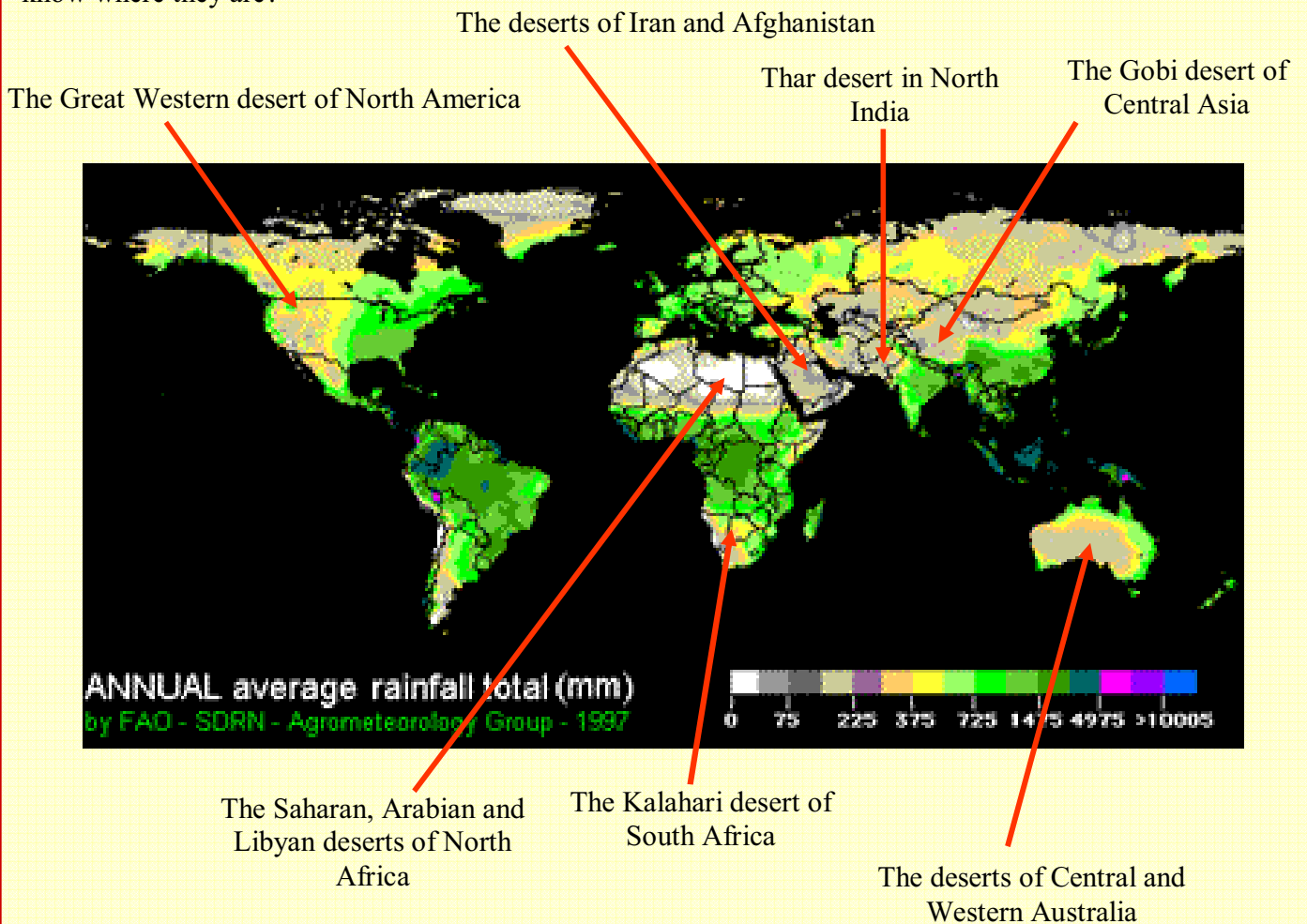
A desert is an area of land where rainfall is not sufficient to support vegetation. There are usually large temperature difference between day and night, known as the diurnal temperature range. Deserts can be hot or cold!

What is desertification?

This is the area on the boundary of a desert which loses its vegetation and the land becomes filled with sand dunes. Possible causes include climate change and variability, human pressure on the land and overgrazing by livestock (animals).

Where are the main deserts in the world?

Deserts are areas of very low rainfall and are often described as drought regions of the globe. But do you know where they are?



DROUGHT FACTFILE

Large areas of 'blocking' high pressure over the UK can lead to long dry spells and can lead to a drought period as in 1976.

Defra (Department for Environment Food and Rural Affairs) manage droughts in England.

In 1976 rain was less than 60% of normal across the whole of the UK and the countryside turned brown! In South Wales some homes had their water turned off for over 17 hours a day!



Droughts can ever happen at the poles where much of the precipitation falls as snow not rain!

Even when we have normal amounts of rain, the high population density in England and Wales means there is less water available per person than in some Mediterranean countries who receive much less rain (Environment Agency 2009)



A heatwave lasted from June 22nd to July 16th in 1976 with temperatures reaching over 27C in many places in the UK.

If climate change continues the UK will experience more droughts especially in the south-east of the country