

CRED CRUNCH

“Disaster Data: A Balanced Perspective”

December 2006

First of all welcome to 2007. All of us at CRED wish you a peaceful and active year.

This issue is devoted to droughts and famines, which have devastated communities for centuries and continue to do so today. While droughts are relatively frequent phenomena, famines occur rarely. But when they do, the ferocity with which they affect populations does not compare with most other disasters.

Some of the worst in the last century have been the Great Bengal Famine, the 1974 famine in Bangladesh and the two recurring regional famines of Sahel Africa in the mid 1970's and mid 1980's. In all of these famines, drought is now recognised to have played a partial and aggravating role rather than a causal one¹. The main generator of famine is a complex mix of economic inequality, market imperfections and in recent years, civil war.

Drought, on the other hand, is a common phenomenon, frequently affecting developed countries such as Spain, Belgium or the US. Even when it occurs in poor countries, droughts do not typically develop into famines.

In this context, the EM-DAT team has been faced with a multifaceted problem of having to unravel the various threads and develop a transparent method to classify droughts and famines. Working closely with the International Research Institute for Climate and Society (IRI) of Columbia University, CRED has established a standardized methodology for characterizing drought disaster events and reclassifying famine events contained in EM-DAT. Famines that had drought as a causal factor were re-classified as such. Thorny issues were plentiful for these disasters and it took over two years of work to come to a workable conclusion. For example, the start date for drought disasters now represent the year and month in which the drought-related losses began, rather than when the hazard event itself was first detected. Details on the methodology are available on the website².

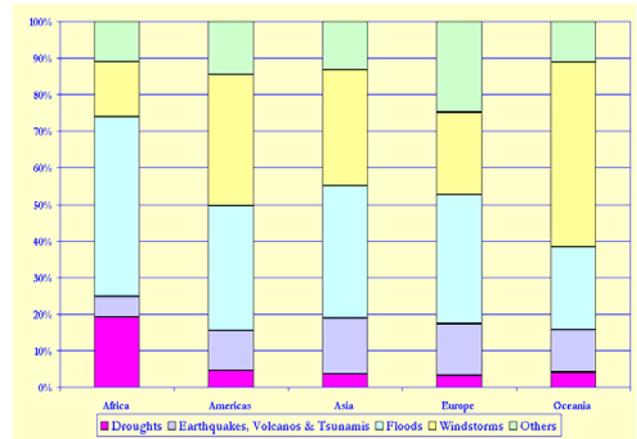
The method is not perfect by any means but we now offer users clear criteria by which we classify these events in EM-DAT. We will continue to work on improving the classification system to make it as transparent and rational as possible for the users. Meanwhile if you have any suggestions, we will be delighted to receive them.

Dr. Debarati Guha-Sapir
Director

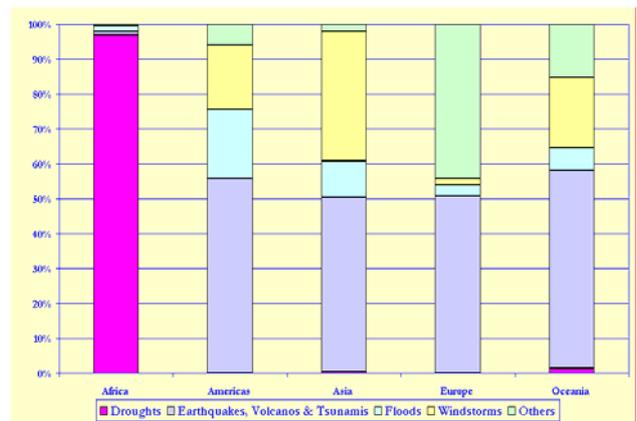
1. Sen, Amartya, *Poverty and Famines: An Essay on Entitlement and Deprivation*, Oxford University Press, 1982

2. <http://www.em-dat.net/documents/MethodologyWebPage.pdf>

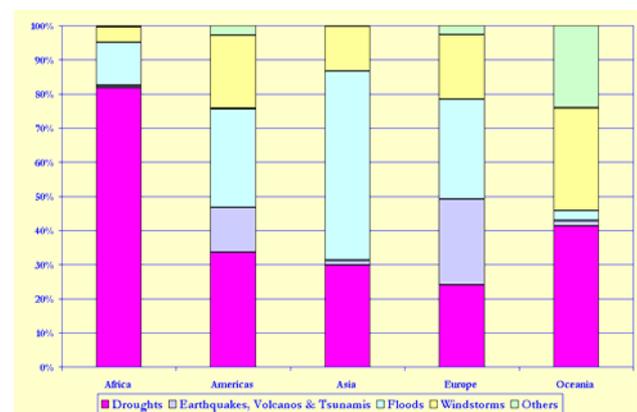
Proportion of occurrence by disaster type and by continent

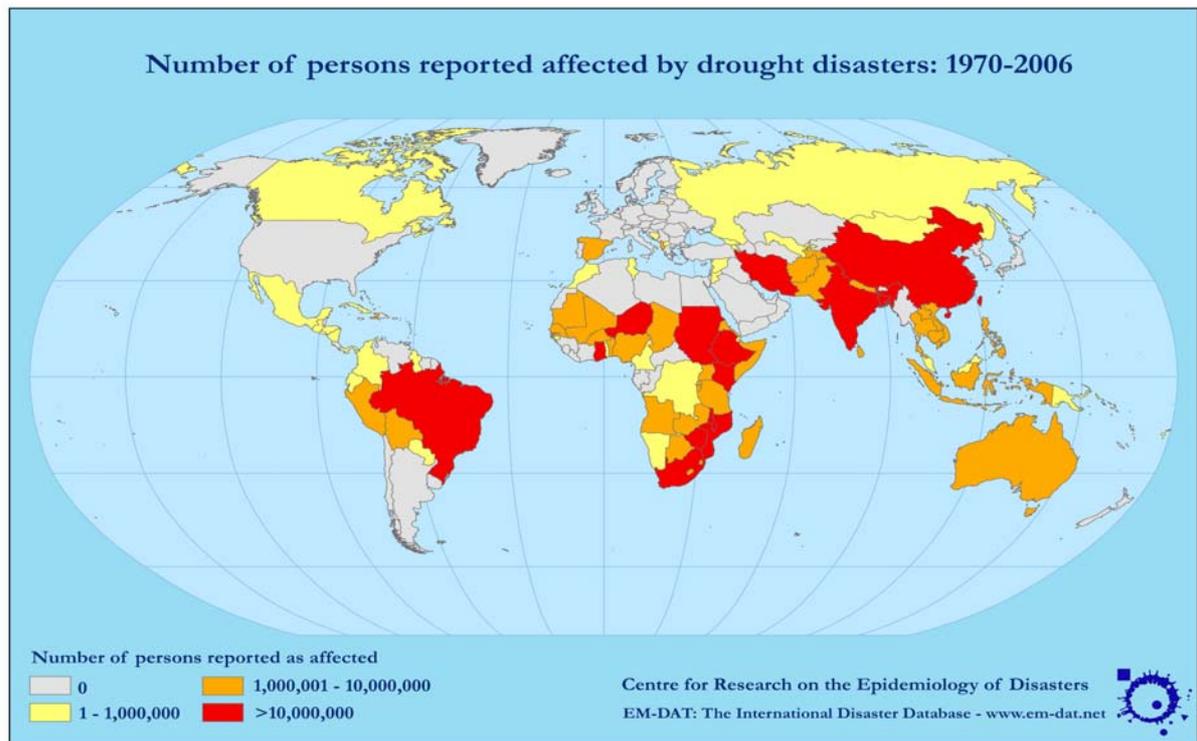
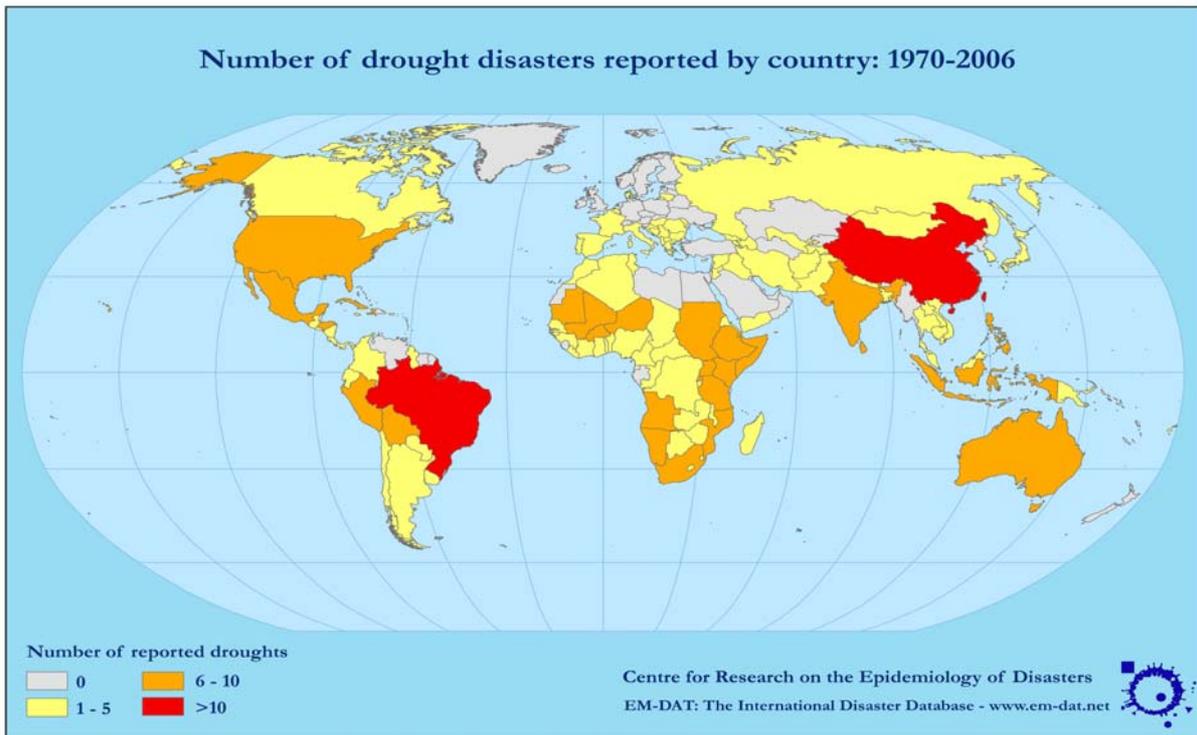


Proportion of persons killed by disaster type and by continent



Proportion of persons affected by disaster type and by continent





CRED News

- January 2007 – Geneva, Switzerland: Joint press conference with the International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (ISDR) to release the 2006 annual disaster data.
- CRED will be participating in the 5-year research project "MICROCON – A Micro-Level Analysis of Violent Conflict". This project is funded by the European Commission's Research Directorate General under the 6th Framework Programme.
- March 2007 – Brussels, Belgium: Workshop on Profiling of Internally Displaced Persons, organized in collaboration with UNHCR.

Please note that disaster data are subject to change as validation and cross-referencing of the sources is undertaken and as new information becomes available. For any enquiries, please contact cred-crunch@em-dat.net