

What is

Desertification?

The United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) defines desertification as land degradation in arid, semi-arid and dry sub-humid areas resulting from various factors, including climatic variations and human activities.

Dryland which are vulnerable to desertification occupy 41% of Earth's land area and are home to more than 2 billion people, at least 90% of whom lives in developing countries. Desertification often causes poverty, food insecurity and water scarcity.



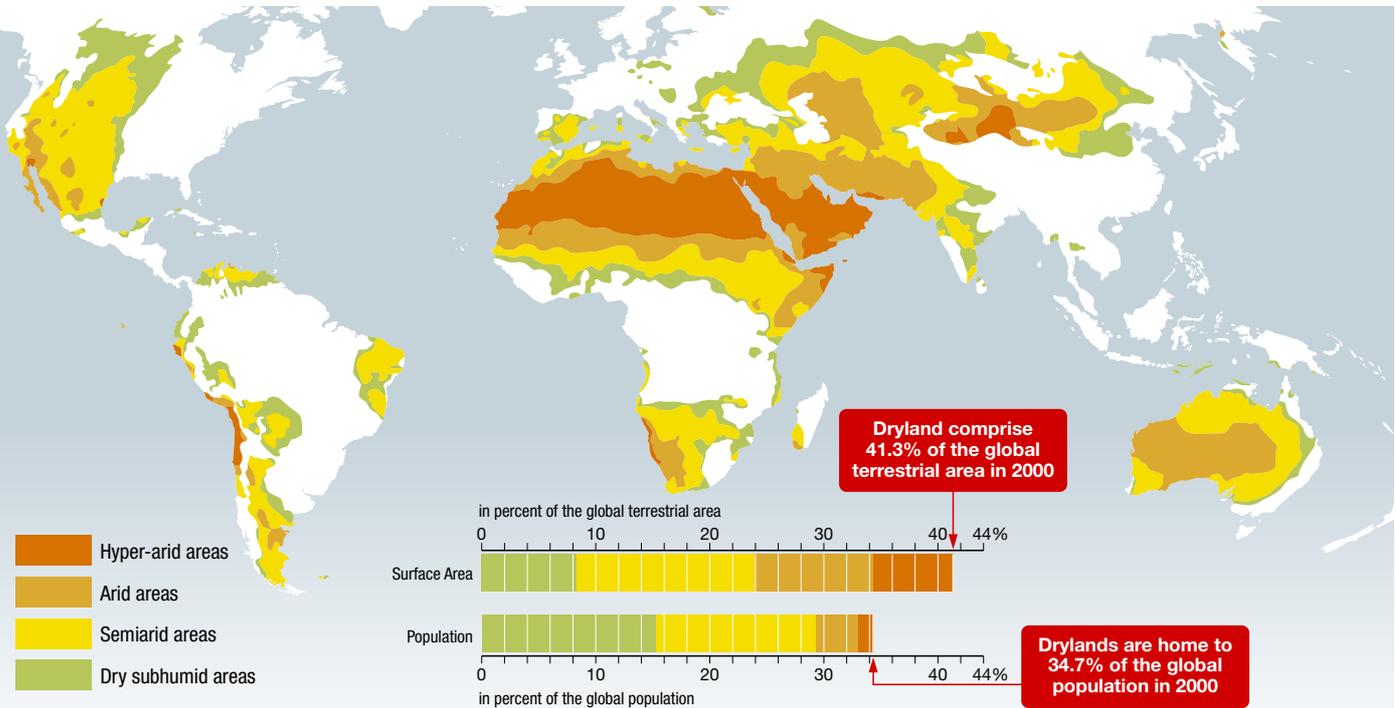
Burkina Faso, Africa
Photo : Global Environmental Forum

▼ Classification of Dryland

Dryland Subtype	Aridity Index	Characteristics
Hyper-arid environments	$AI < 0.05$	There is no seasonal rainfall regime, and these areas offer very limited opportunities for human activity (Desert area).
Arid areas	$0.05 \leq AI < 0.20$	Annual precipitation values up to about 200 mm in winter rainfall areas and 300 mm in summer rainfall areas. Interannual variability is in the 50-100% range.
Semi-arid areas	$0.20 \leq AI < 0.50$	There are highly seasonal rainfall regimes and annual precipitation values up to 500 mm in winter rainfall areas and 800 mm in summer rainfall areas. Interannual variability is nonetheless high in the 25-50% range.
Dry subhumid areas	$0.50 \leq AI < 0.65$	Less than 25% interannual rainfall variability and rain-fed agriculture is widely practiced.

Dryland subtypes are determined by the aridity index (AI=P (annual precipitation)/PET (potential evapotranspiration)). In Drylands, water deficit constrains the production of crops, forage and other plants.

▼ Drylands Vulnerable to Desertification and Their Categories



Some 10-20% of drylands are already degraded. Based on rough estimates, about 1-6% of the dryland people (approx. 20 million-120 million people) live in desertified areas.

Source: Millennium Ecosystem Assessment (2005)

● COLUMN Millennium Ecosystem Assessment

The Millennium Ecosystem Assessment (MA) was called for in 2000 by UN Secretary-General, Kofi Annan, and since, has been implemented and compiled. Through four UN Convention Secretariats—the Convention on Biological Diversity, the Convention to Combat

Desertification, the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands and the Convention on Migratory Species, a number of institutions provided the MA with information. A 'Desertification Synthesis' was prepared from 2003 to 2005.