

# What Are the Major Causes of Desertification?

'Climatic variations' and 'Human activities' can be regarded as the two main causes of desertification.

**Climatic variations:** Climate change, drought, moisture loss on a global level

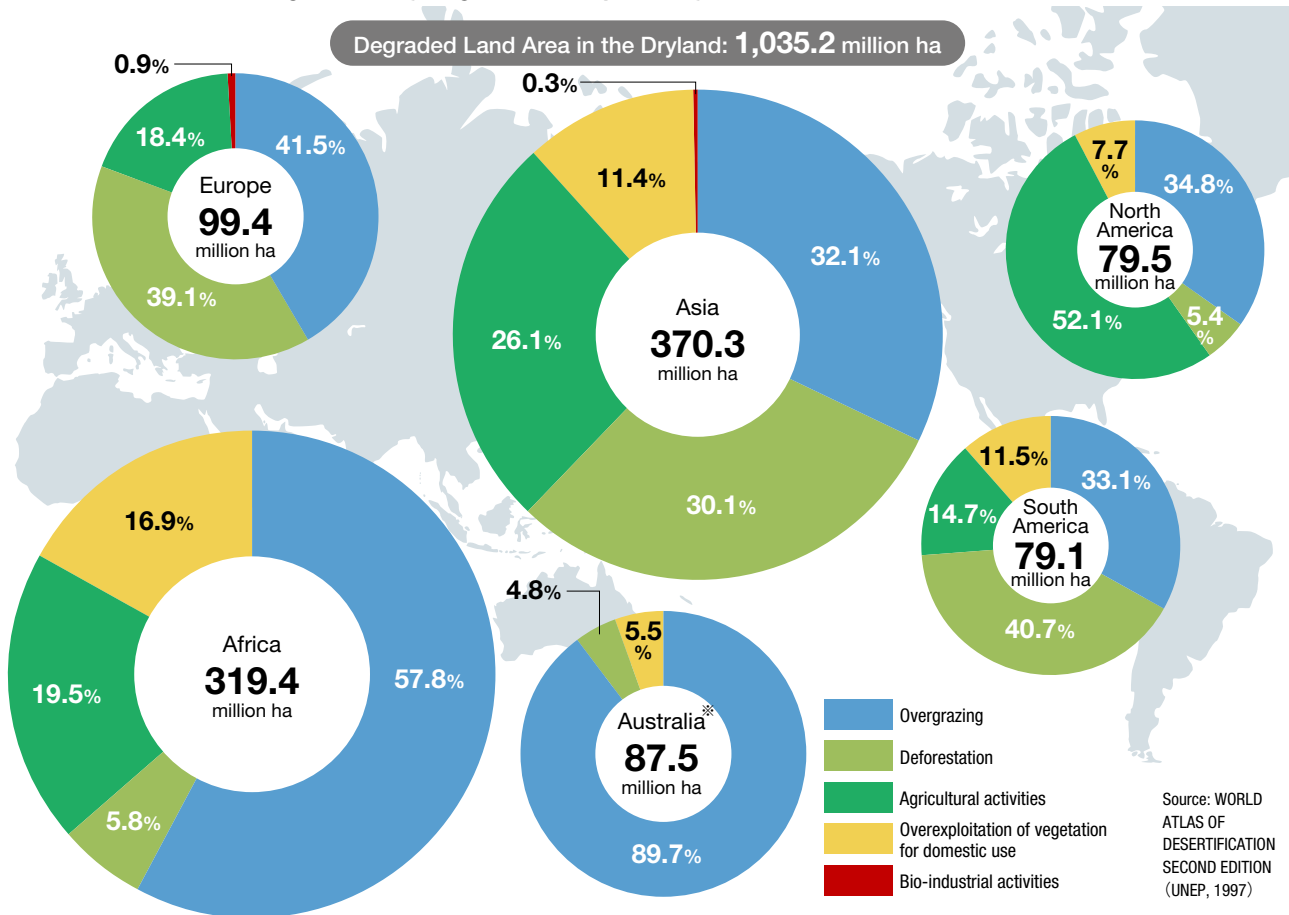
**Human activities:** These include overgrazing, deforestation and removal of the natural vegetation cover (by taking too much fuel wood), agricultural activities in the vulnerable ecosystems of arid and semi-arid areas, which are thus strained beyond their capacity. These activities are triggered by population growth, the impact of the market economy, and poverty.

Population levels of the vulnerable drylands have a close

relationship with development pressure on land by human activities which are one of the principal causes of desertification. The table below shows the population in drylands by each continent and as a percentage of the global population of the continent. It reveals a high ratio especially in Africa and Asia.

There is a vicious circle by which when many people live in the dryland areas, they put pressure on vulnerable land by their agricultural practices and through their daily activities, and as a result, they cause further land degradation.

## ▼ Main Causes of Soil Degradation by Region in Susceptible Drylands and Other Areas



## ▼ Population of the World's Susceptible Drylands (1,000 people)

	Hyper-arid areas		3 Dryland subtypes						
		% of total population of the respective continent	Arid areas	% of total population of the respective continent	Semi-arid areas	% of total population of the respective continent	Dry subhumid areas	% of total population of the respective continent	Total
Africa	58,175	9%	41,366	6%	117,573	18%	109,038	16%	40%
Asia	29,506	1%	161,556	5%	500,695	15%	657,899	19%	39%
Australia*	0	0%	275	1%	1,352	5%	5,318	19%	25%
Europe	0	0%	628	<1%	28,811	5%	115,146	21%	26%
South America	3,877	1%	6,330	2%	46,851	16%	33,777	12%	30%
North America	508	<1%	12,750	3%	53,900	13%	24,342	6%	22%

\* Includes New Zealand and neighboring islands  
 Source: Aridity zones and dryland populations: an assessment of population levels in the world's drylands with particular reference to Africa (UNDP/UNSO, 1997)