



Environment Digest

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From droughts to floods: Is there a going back to normal?

South Africa is a country that is naturally prone to recurring drought conditions, and it has recently been grappling with the effects of a prolonged deficiency in rainfall, which led to water shortages in most parts of the country since 2015. Furthermore, rainfall patterns seem to have shifted considerably, resulting in great environmental and socio-economic challenges. Low and delayed rainfall has over the past four years contributed greatly to a decrease in crop yields, livestock loss, job losses, and hikes in fuel and food prices. Concurrently with the drought conditions, the country has experienced isolated heavy rainfall, causing flash floods in some parts. Between 2016 and 2018, as parts of the Eastern Cape, the Western Cape and the Northern Cape provinces were struggling with extreme drought, parts of Gauteng and KwaZulu-Natal were experiencing periodic heavy rainfall and severe hail storms.

Most recently the country was faced with a great national disaster when parts of KwaZulu-Natal, the Free State and the Eastern Cape became flooded in April this year. There was considerable damage to property and, unfortunately, a number of lives were lost. Latest projections by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) suggest that, due to an increase in atmospheric greenhouse gas emissions, the frequency of occurrences of extreme weather events such as droughts, floods and heatwaves, is going to intensify globally.¹

The following links provide more details on the most recent drought and flood extremes in South Africa:

<https://www.iol.co.za/mercury/news/drought-is-hitting-kzn-farmers-hard-20025930>

<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2018/01/extreme-drought-grips-parts-south-africa-180118092847342.html>

<https://www.fin24.com/Economy/drought-hurts-sa-maize-soy-plantings-grain-sa-says-20181229>

<https://ewn.co.za/2019/01/18/drought-animal-disease-threatens-south-african-farmers>

<https://ewn.co.za/2019/04/23/joburg-ems-on-high-alert-amid-floods>

<https://www.timeslive.co.za/news/south-africa/2019-04-24-kzn-death-toll-after-and-flash-floods-rises-to-51/>

<https://www.iol.co.za/news/south-africa/gauteng/6-killed-in-gauteng-flood-horror-2088649>

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¹ https://report.ipcc.ch/sr15/pdf/sr15_spm_final.pdf