

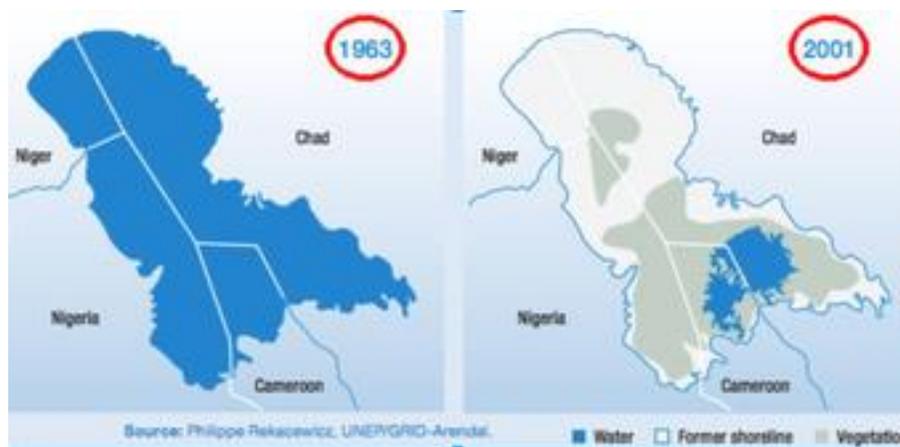
18.6 Lake Chad's Rapid Retreat

Source: <https://www.nytimes.com/2001/03/27/science/lake-s-rapid-retreat-heightens-troubles-in-north-africa.html>;
<https://www.nationalgeographic.com/magazine/2018/03/drying-lakes-climate-change-global-warming-drought/>

“Lake’s Rapid Retreat Heightens Troubles in North Africa” by Andrew Revkin appeared in the New York Times on March 27, 2001. Revkin believed that drawing water off from the lake for irrigation was the primary culprit. Since 2001 it has been clearer that climate change has also played a dramatic role in the shrinkage or environmental decay of Lake Chad, as well as other lakes around the world. Lake Poopó in the Andean highlands, once Bolivia’s second largest lake, has now virtually disappeared. So has the Aral Sea in Central Asia. In East Africa, Lake Tanganyika is warming and threatening fish populations that feed millions of people in four countries. The decade of war in Sudan’s Darfur region and the civil war that plagued Syria from 2011-2019 were both partly the result of competition for depleted fresh water supplies.

Questions

1. How are climate change and human activity affecting the environment in North Africa?
2. In your opinion, what are the social and political consequences of catastrophic environmental changes?



A. “Near the dead center of North Africa, where water has long been scarce and long-term drought is making it scarcer yet, one of the last large water bodies, Lake Chad, has shrunk by 95 percent since the 1960’s, and new research points to irrigation as a major cause. The rapid retreat of the shallow lake threatens fish stocks and crops and could raise political tensions because the lake and the rivers that nourish it are shared by four countries.”

B. “The problem is feeding on itself, as a three-decades-and-counting dearth of monsoon rains that normally swell the region’s rivers has prompted the construction of irrigation projects that divert ever more water from the same rivers . . . The drop in precipitation and the rise in irrigation appear responsible for equal parts of the extraordinary shrinkage of the marsh-fringed lake, which has shriveled from an area of 9,700 square miles in 1963 to less than 580 square miles now.”

C. “The early 1980’s also saw the start of a burst of construction of internationally financed irrigation systems diverting water from the Chari and Logone rivers, which carry 90 percent of the runoff that enters the lake. Together, the change in weather patterns and a fourfold rise in irrigation have since reduced the flow in the two rivers by 75 percent.”