

50% to its lowest level in 25 years, alarming government officials who have suggested that models predict that the falls could one day run dry.

"The pictures of the Victoria Falls are a stark reminder of what climate change is doing to our environment and our livelihood," ~~Zambian President Edgar Lungu said this~~ month. "No doubt that developing countries like Zambia are the most impacted by climate change and the least able to afford its consequences."

He has outlined steps his government is taking in an effort to head off the crisis. Zambia, he said, is promoting agricultural practices including the pursuit of drought-resistant food crops, construction of more-resilient roads and water-harvesting facilities, and strengthening the regulation of groundwater resources.

#### Victoria Falls, Zimbabwe after prolonged drought

One of the key drivers changing southern Africa's climate is accelerating deforestation, as growing populations are cutting into forests to sell timber to Asian and Western markets. The forests act like giant sponges that absorb carbon dioxide, the heat-trapping gas that contributes to global warming.

Hotter and drier summers have accompanied the loss of forest cover, with temperatures expected to rise at twice the global average in the region across Zimbabwe, Zambia, Malawi, Namibia and Mozambique. This year, southern Africa has seen its lowest rainfall since it was first recorded in 1981, according to the Botswana-based intergovernmental organization Southern African Development Community.

This week, South Africa's Weather Service issued a flood warning for multiple provinces following unusually heavy rains, although abnormally hot weather continues in some parts of the country.

Victoria Falls

"Southern Africa is one of the hot spots world-wide that is already experiencing extreme weather events. It may be the new normal," said Felix Horne, an environmental researcher with Human Rights Watch. "What determines how much these events will impact communities is not only the event itself, drought in this case, but also the ability of marginalized communities to adapt."

The Democratic Republic of Congo, which hosts the world's second-largest rainforest,