

SAFARI'S ENCOUNTER WITH DROUGHT



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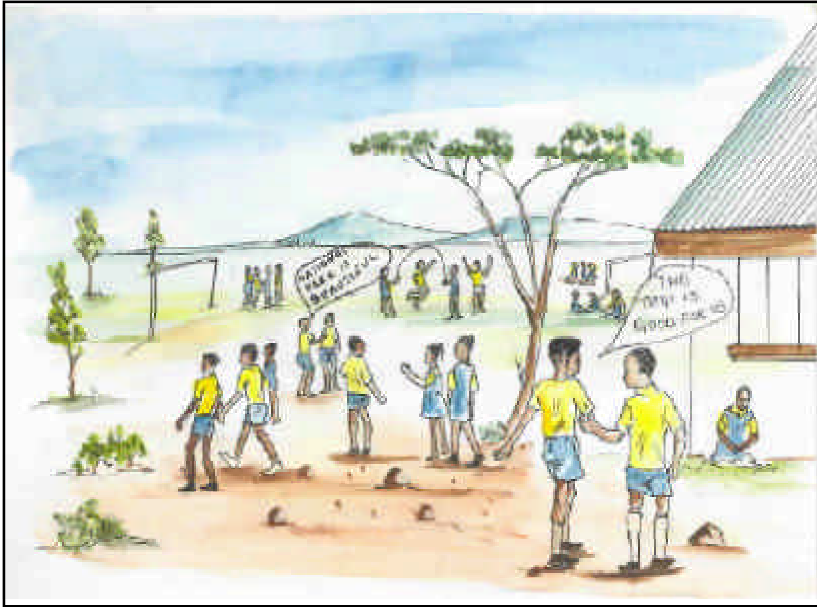
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One morning Safari's school teacher Mr. Kombo announced that the class was to go on a field trip to a national park at the end of the school term.

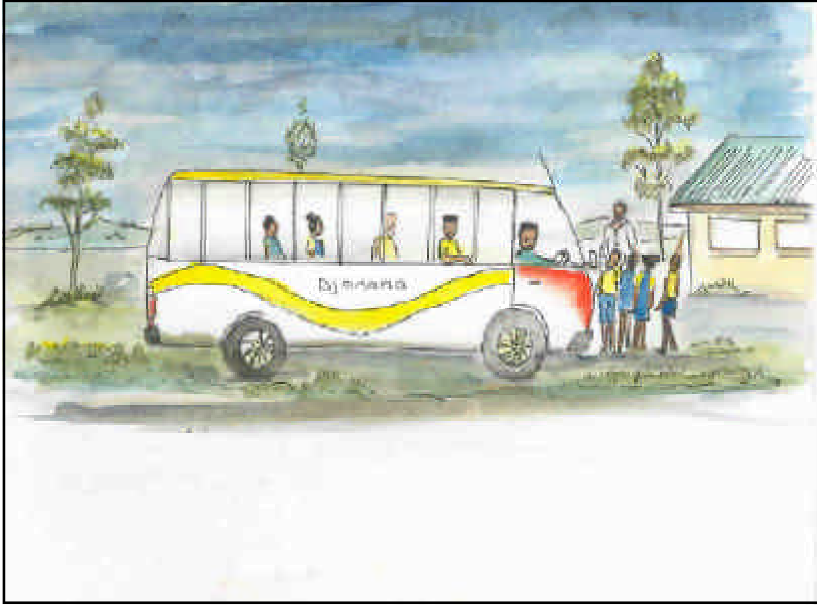
Mr. Kombo told them many stories about the animals and the different kinds of plants like desert roses and acacia trees that they would see in the park, located 170 kilometres from Safari's village of Kilima.



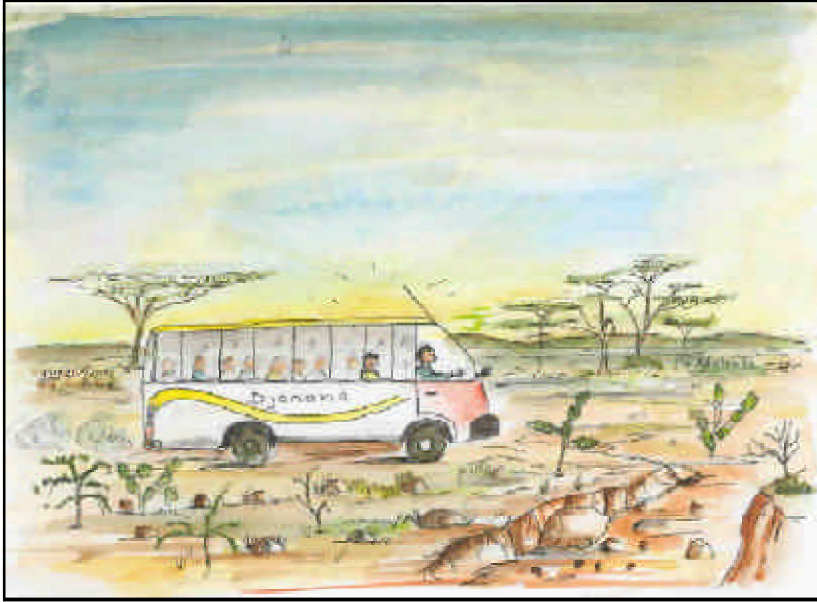
Time seemed to move as slow as a snail while Safari and his classmates counted down the days until the end of the term. All they could think and talk about was the trip to the national park.



The night before the trip, Safari kept tossing and turning in his bed, impatient for what awaited him and his classmates the following day. He was far too excited to sleep. By the time his mother came to wake him, Safari jumped out of bed. It was very early in the morning, so it was still dark outside.



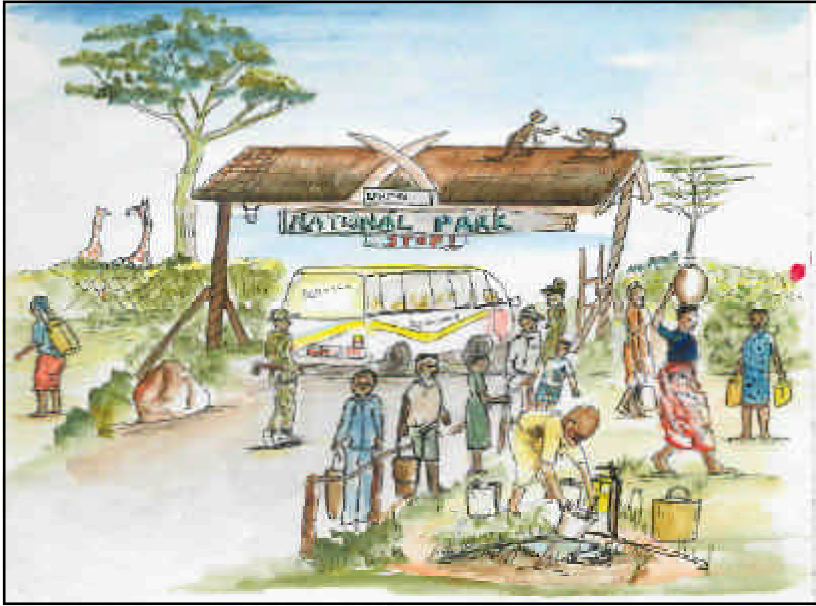
Safari dressed quickly and ran to meet his teacher and classmates at school. A bus was waiting for the children, who were full of joy and excitement as they boarded. Safari sat next to the window so that he could watch everything outside as they drove. Mr. Kombo told them the trip to the national park would take four hours.



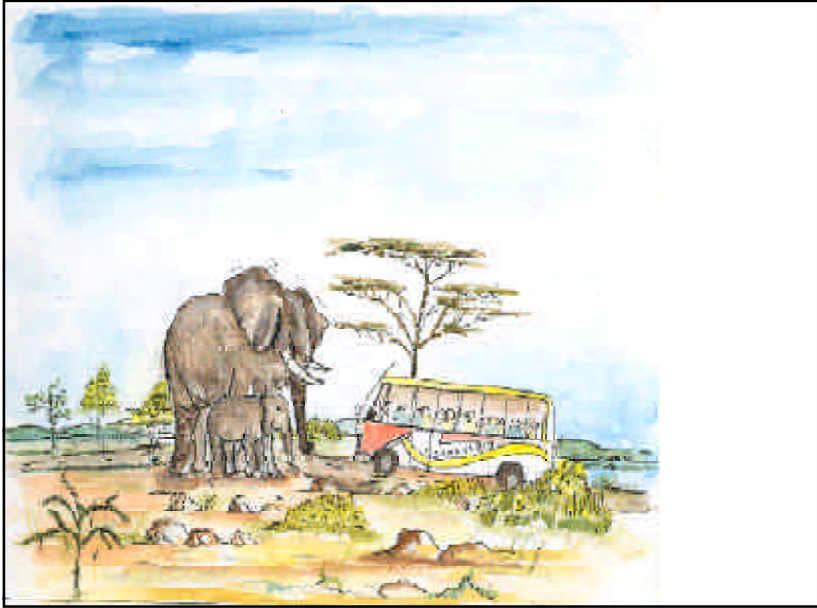
After travelling for two and a half hours the sun finally rose, and Safari noticed that the vegetation was different from back home in Kilima. The leaves on the trees were not as green, and there were fewer plants. The land was much drier, with no signs of any waterholes or rivers. Safari saw that while there were some farms in the area, their crops were brown and had dried up.



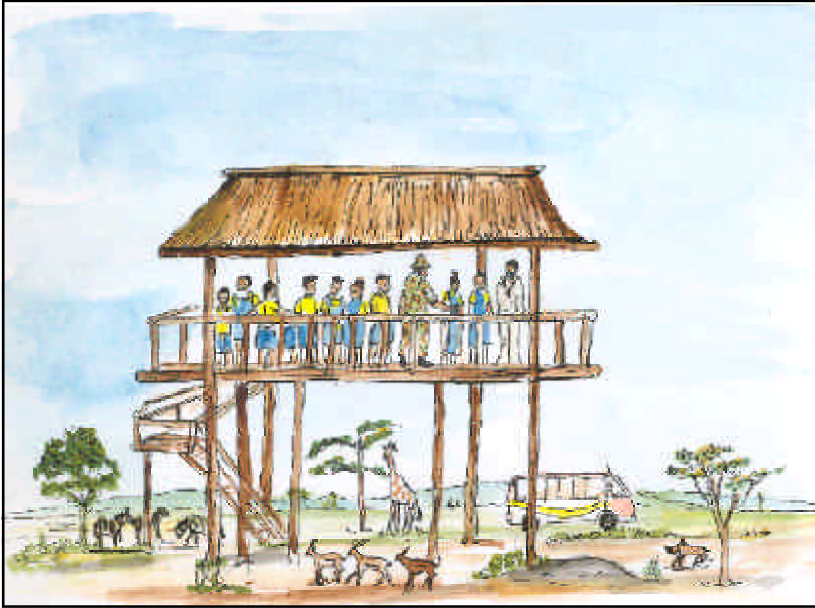
As Safari continued gazing out the bus window, he saw many women and children who were walking along the road, coming from the same direction as the bus was heading. The women and children were carrying big containers of water on their heads, and looked very tired. They seemed to have been walking for a long time.



When the bus stopped at the national park gate, Safari noticed a group of people filling containers with water from a tap near the national park entrance. He realised that the women and children he saw earlier during the journey had walked all the way from the national park. He was amazed and could not understand why the villagers had to travel so far to fetch some water. In Kilima, people only need to go to the stream just below Safari's house for water.

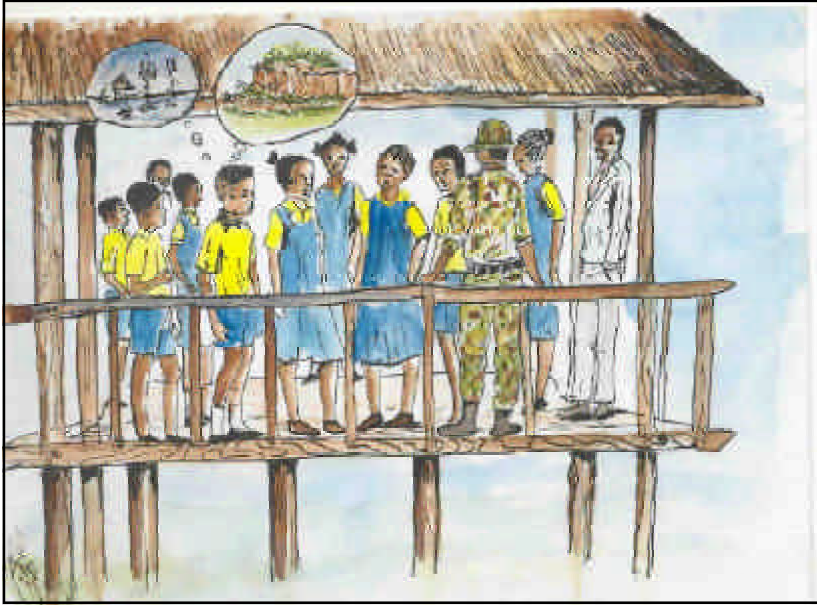


Still at the gate, the children waited for a national park warden to join them. Safari soon forgot about the villagers and their struggle for water. There were far too many other distractions, including a huge grey elephant that blocked the bus' path as they entered the national park. As Safari was watching the life on the savannah, his classmates were busy asking Mr. Kombo and a national park warden about how many and what kind of animals lived in the park.



The bus stopped and the children, followed by the park warden and Mr. Kombo, climbed a view point. The warden said that he did not know exactly how many animals lived in the park, but there were many kinds like zebra, giraffe, impala, elephant, wart hog and buffalos.

“But,” he said, “in the last year many animals had died while others had migrated since the onset of the current drought.”



As Safari attentively listened to the warden, he recalled what he had previously learned about landslides and floods. He could not help but wonder about the drought the warden was talking about.

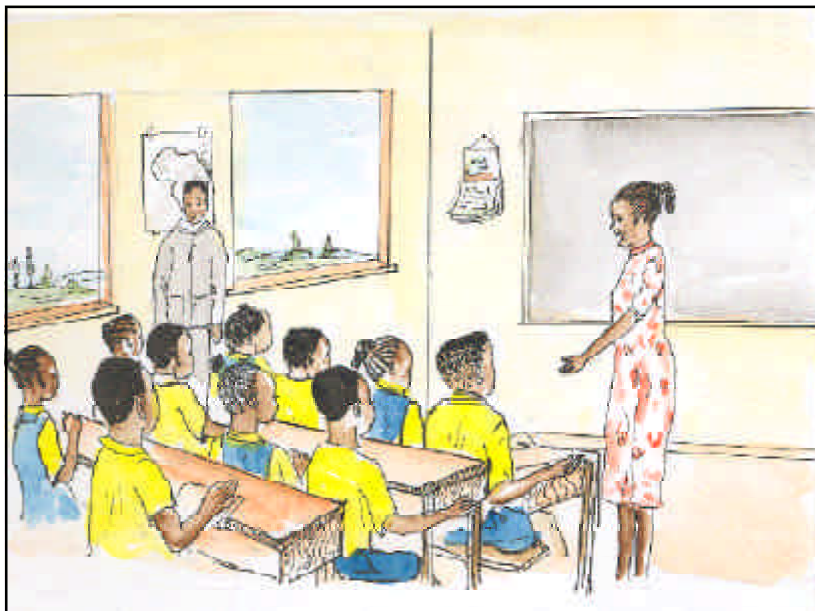
"A drought must be something very serious," he thought.



After driving in the park all morning and seeing all kinds of animals, the children were taken to the warden's compound for lunch. When they were done eating, it was time to leave the park and go back home.

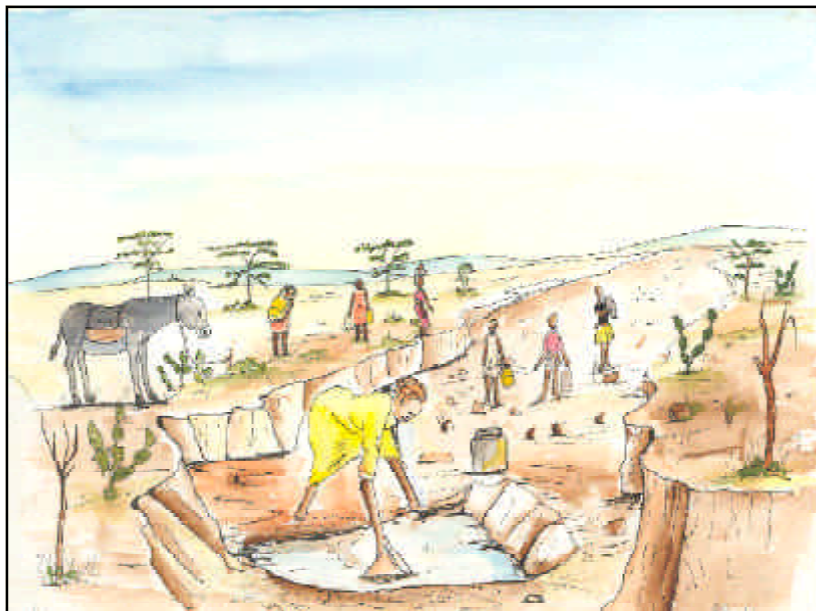


During the long drive home, Safari started to ask questions about drought, which got the other children more and more interested. Mr. Kombo could not answer many of Safari's questions. He suggested that they invite someone to speak about it at school next week.



The children were very keen to learn more about drought and they agreed to go back to school the following week, even though their holiday had already started. There, Mr. Kombo introduced them to Mrs. Fadiga, who works at a national agricultural institute.

She explained to Safari and his classmates about drought and how people can reduce the impacts of drought, "Water and life cannot be separated. When there is little or no water for a long period of time, it is hard to survive. This is called a drought."

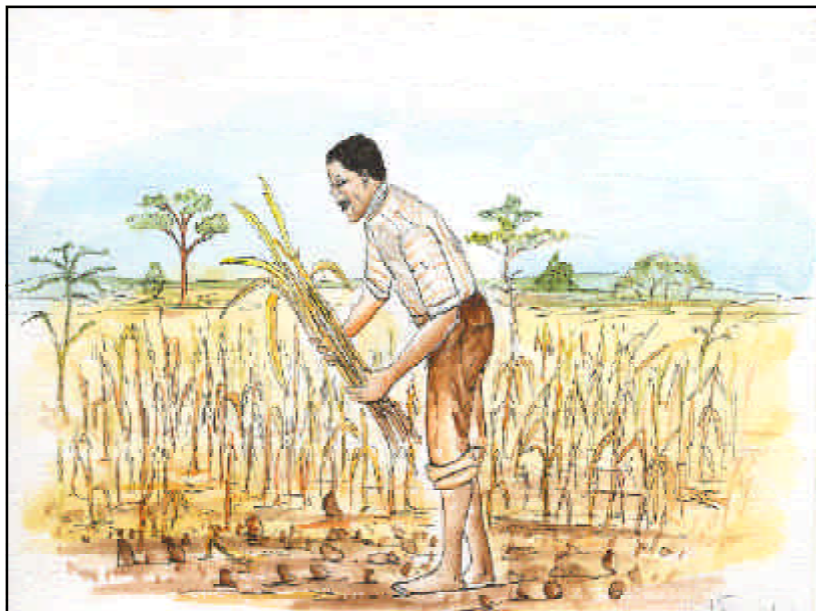


“There are three types of drought,” said Mrs. Fadiga.

Weather (meteorological) drought is when there is very little or no rainfall.



Water (hydrological) drought is when rivers and lakes dry out.



Farming (agricultural) drought is when plants dry out due to lack of water.



“Drought is the most common disaster in Africa,” continued Mrs. Fadiga, “affecting thousands of families and communities who grow their own crops and depend on them to survive. Drought does not only happen in Africa. It can happen anywhere in the world, in rich and poor countries.”

“Agriculture needs water. When there is no water, the plants die. The farmer loses his income, and households lose their food supply. In the worst case, people will starve,” said Mrs. Fadiga. “That is why we say that drought is one of the most destructive disasters.”



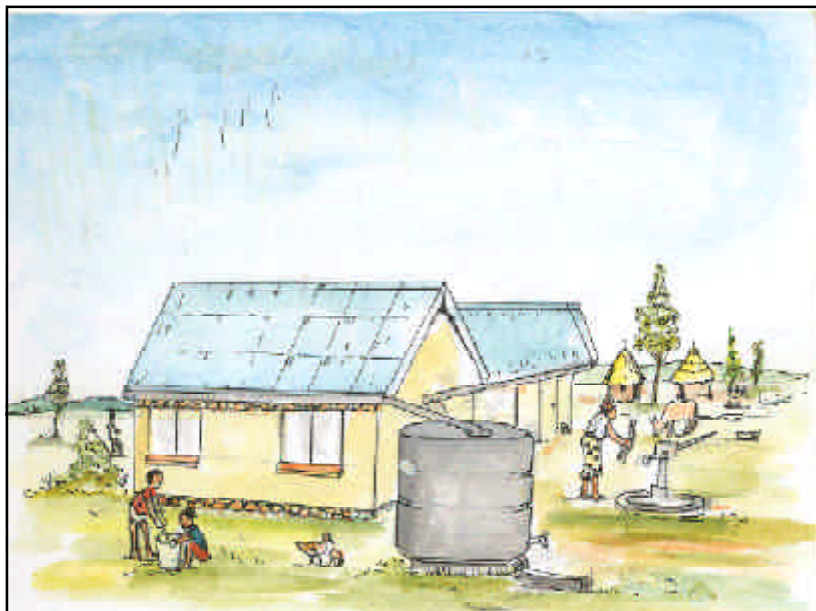
The first question came from Fatuma, Safari's friend, who wanted to know why there was a drought near the national park, but none in their village Kilima.

Mrs. Fadiga responded, "Every year some places receive more rain and some places less. If a community is prepared for a drought, they can protect themselves and their village from its impacts. People can help stop a drought from becoming a disaster."

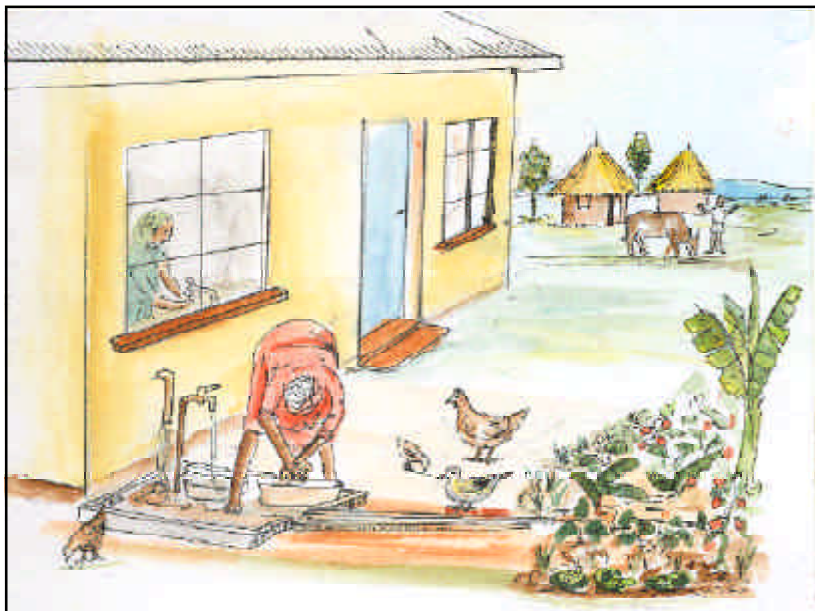


Safari asked, "How can they prepare for a drought?"

"A drought is a slow event," replied Mrs. Fadiga, "and it is important to recognise the signs early on. Each type of drought that I told you about can be dealt with in different ways."



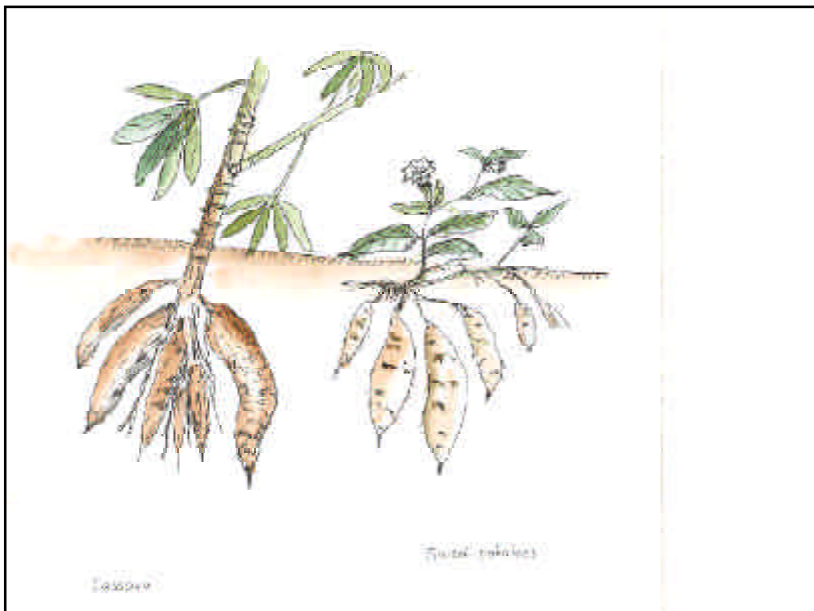
If the drought is a weather drought – that is, when there is little or no rainfall – it is important that communities prepare themselves by collecting water when it rains and saving it for use when it is needed most.



If the drought is a water drought and rivers and lakes have dried out, it is important to think about how we are using water, and if we can use less or even reuse the water for plants and animals. Sometimes we need to change our habits to make better use of the water and make sure we do not waste it.



“If the drought is a farming or agricultural drought, it is important that we make sure to use certain types of plants and trees that can survive droughts and can hold on to the water in the soil. If there are no plants or trees, the bare soil dries out very quickly,” Mrs. Fadiga explained.



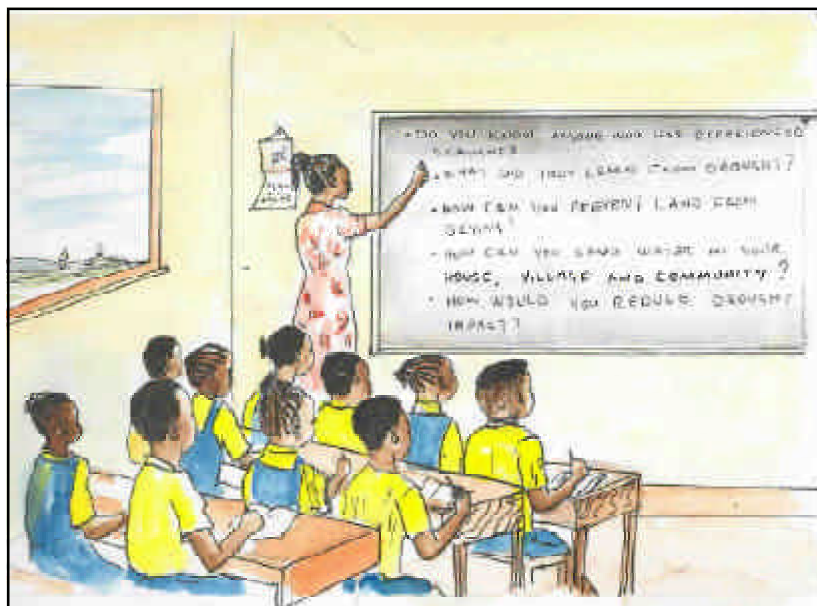
Mrs. Fadiga mentioned the cassava plant as one type of plant which can survive droughts. Cassava needs little water and is food for both people and animals. Other useful plants include arrowroot and yam. These are some traditional crops that communities can use to prepare for drought.



“But what can we do?” asked Fatuma. “We don’t know anything about water tanks, cassava trees, or agriculture.”

Mrs. Fadiga smiled and told the class, “Maybe you know more than you think.”

She wrote a few questions on the board, and both Fatuma and Safari discovered that they knew many of the answers. They realised that there was a lot they could do to prepare for droughts and reduce their impacts.



Here is the set of questions Mrs. Fadiga gave to the class. Can you answer them too?

Questions

Do you know anyone or any community who has experienced drought?

What did they do to face it? What did they learn from the drought?

How can you prevent the land from drying out?

What can be done to save water in your house, village and community?

What can **YOU do? (inform villagers, plant trees, save water)**



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