

Activity 9. Famine in the Modern World

Source: Ó Gráda, C. 2009. *Famine: A short history*. Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press.

Instructions: Famines caused by drought, flooding, unusual cold, plant diseases, volcanic eruptions, and human actions or inactions have impacted on human history since the agricultural revolution led to permanent settlements about 10,000 BC. This chart lists famines in the modern era that led to over one million deaths. Examine the chart and answer questions 1 – 4. As follow-up activities, use the Internet to (a) examine how natural phenomenon contributed to food shortages; (b) explore government actions and inactions that made food shortages worse in the past; and (c) learn about the problem of famine in the world today and efforts to prevent it.

Modern Era Famines That Caused Over One Million Deaths

Year	Country	Deaths (est.)	Mortality rate	Causes
1693-1694	France	1.5 million	7%	Poor harvest
1846-1852	Ireland	1 million	13%	Potato blight, government policy
1876-1879	India	7 million	3%	Drought, government policy
1877-1879	China	13 million	3%	Drought, floods
1921-1922	USSR	9 million	6%	Drought, civil war
1927	China	6 million	1%	Natural disasters
1932-1933	USSR	6 million	4%	Poor harvest, government policy
1942-1944	Bengal	2 million	3%	Poor harvest, government policy
1946-1947	USSR	1.2 million	Less than 1%	Poor harvest, government policy
1959-1961	China	25 million	4%	Drought, floods, government policy

Questions

1. According to this chart, which country had the most famine related deaths?
2. What natural phenomenon caused famines?
3. In your opinion, why does government policy frequently play a role in transforming food shortages into famines?
4. How does the problem of famine illustrate the continued impact of environment on history?