

Drought: a global concern

Drought characterizes, in a given area, a period marked by an important lack of water having an impact on the vegetation which then presents notable signs of hydric stress. As a consequence, drought impacts animal and human life.

"The naturally occurring phenomenon that exists when precipitation has been significantly below normal recorded levels, causing serious hydrological imbalances that adversely affect land resource production systems" UNCCD, Article 1

Warning!

Do not confuse drought with aridity. Aridity is a climatic characteristic involving normal low rainfall.

The so-called arid or dry regions can experience drought episodes during which precipitation is below normal or even absent.

Background and key figures

Drought is considered one of the most serious natural disasters, causing short and long-term economic and social losses for millions of people around the world.

- **More than two billion people** live in countries experiencing high water stress (UN-Water 2019 based on UN, 2018). Other estimates are even more pessimistic, with **up to four billion** people—more than half the world's population—already facing severe water stress for at least one month of the year (Global Land Outlook, 2017).
- In 2017, drought led to the worst humanitarian crisis since World War II, when **20 million people** across Africa and the Middle East were on the brink of starvation, (UN-OCHA).
- **700 million people are at risk of being displaced by drought by 2030.** (United Nations/World Bank High Level Panel on Water 2018)

Climate change is increasing the risk of droughts getting worse. While droughts affect all climate zones, the world's drylands are particularly vulnerable to drought and its consequences. Healthy land is a key element in regulating the water cycle, providing a natural reservoir of fresh water. Degraded land can no longer fulfill this function. Better land management, avoiding land degradation, and intensified land rehabilitation are essential to enhance drought resilience.

Policy consideration of the drought issue

Most countries and regions are organizing themselves to deal with the risk of drought with approaches ranging from drought-induced **crisis response**, to **early warning and monitoring**, to drought **risk mitigation**. However, anticipation and mitigation measures remain insufficiently implemented, as well as surface and groundwater management policies are not sufficiently effective to mitigate the consequences of droughts (water use management, etc.)

Consideration by the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification

Since its adoption in 1994, the UNCCD has recognized that drought is a global problem affecting all regions of the world and that joint action by the international community is required. The UNCCD has recently intensified its efforts to support countries through a new drought initiative focusing on drought preparedness systems and regional efforts to reduce vulnerability and risk of drought.

Actions of the Convention in the framework of the drought initiative

[An online drought toolkit](#) was launched in 2019 and continues to be disseminated. In cooperation with various partners the UNCCD has conducted capacity building activities (including webinars) mobilizing this toolkit.

Since 2017, the UNCCD has been supporting countries, upon their request, to develop national action plans. The goal is to promote a shift in the approach to drought management - from a reactive, crisis-based approach - to a proactive, risk-based approach.

The finalized and validated action plans [are available online](#) for fourteen countries.

In 2019, [an intergovernmental working group on drought](#) was established. Its mandate is to take stock of existing public policies on drought anticipation and response, and to consider options for policies and their implementation at all levels to effectively address drought. The results of the work of this working group have not been fully communicated at this stage. They will be presented at the UNCCD COP15.

Perspectives on the discussions at the UNCCD COP15 in May 2022

COP 15 will continue to review the actions taken in response to drought under the UNCCD. This includes the provision of tools and knowledge, capacity building, the adoption of action plans and the mobilization of funding and implementation of projects to anticipate and mitigate the effects of drought. The Parties to the Convention will take decisions to guide their actions, based in particular on the results of the work of the intergovernmental group.

Working on Drought at a national workshop Désertif'actions 2022

Question to be addressed: how can agroecology reduce the effects of drought on people and ecosystems?

Tips for workshop organizers:

- Contact and invite the national authorities in charge of drought
- Invite national scientists working on drought adaptation
- Read the national drought action plan (the action plans of 14 countries are available on the UNCCD website: <https://knowledge.unccd.int/drought-toolbox/page/drought-planning>)

Learn more about the Drought:

- [On the UNCCD website](#)