

Désertif'actions 2026 - Information note

General context

The world's drylands¹ account for 41% of the planet's land area and are home to almost 2 billion people. The ecosystems and agro-ecosystems found in these zones have pedoclimatic conditions² that make them particularly sensitive to climatic variability and extreme events such as drought³. Rural and pastoral populations, who are heavily dependent on healthy soils and the availability of natural resources, are the first to suffer the effects of drought and land degradation. Their livelihoods are affected and their living conditions deteriorate, leading to forced displacement, increased food insecurity and poverty.

Alarming figures

The increase in the frequency and duration of drought episodes is causing short- and long-term losses:

More than 1.4 billion people were affected by droughts from 2000 to 2019. This makes drought the natural disaster that affects the greatest number of people, after floods⁴.

- In 2017, drought led to the worst humanitarian crisis since the Second World War, when 20 million people across Africa and the Middle East were on the brink of starvation.⁵
- More than 2 billion people worldwide live in countries with high water stress.⁶
- By 2050, 75% of the world's population will be affected by drought and its consequences; an estimated 4.8 to 5.7 billion people will live in regions where water is scarce for at least one month each year, compared with 3.6 billion today.
- 700 million people are likely to be displaced by drought by 2030.⁷

¹ Dry zones represent arid, semi-arid and dry sub-humid areas with a moisture index, representing the ratio between average annual precipitation and potential evapotranspiration, of between 0.05 and 0.65 (UNCCD, 2017, *World Territorial Outlook first edition*, 335p.).

² Low biodiversity in soils, low organic carbon resources, agriculture highly dependent on water resources etc. (Bernoux M., Chevallier T., 2013, *Le carbone dans les sols des zones sèches : des fonctions multiples indispensables*, CSFD Les dossiers thématiques n°10, 40p.; UNCCD, 2017, *Perspectives Territoriales Mondiales first edition*, 335p.).

³ The term drought generally refers to a period during which abnormally below-average humidity or precipitation conditions are recorded over a given territory. This phenomenon causes a water imbalance that directly impacts the availability of water resources leading to significant environmental and human consequences (UNCCD, 2019, *Science-Policy Interface Report. Linking drought and land. Strengthening the role of land management-based interventions for drought mitigation and risk management*, Bonn, 113p.)

⁴ <https://www.unccd.int/sites/default/files/2022>

⁵ UN-OCHA

⁶ UN-Water, 2019 - ONU, 2018

⁷ UN, 2018, High-Level Panel on Water.

The potential impacts of drought are assessed through the notion of **risk**, i.e. the possibility of the impacts occurring. Risk is relative to what is being considered: it generally exists for a population, but can also be considered at the scale of the farming system. Risk is a function of the hazard (uncertain and unpredictable character), exposure and vulnerability of systems⁸. In other words, risk depends on a series of factors, some of which are of natural origin (e.g., the hazard of drought depends solely on meteorological conditions), others of human origin (e.g., exposure depends on demographics and economic activities; vulnerability depends on the configuration of human and natural systems). The unpredictable nature of hazards makes them difficult to control. The challenge for development operators and public policies therefore lies in reducing **vulnerability**, particularly in agricultural and food production systems that **are** highly **exposed** to the hazards of drought. Preventing and reducing the impact of drought on agricultural and food production systems therefore means reducing the risk of losing one of the major means of subsistence for rural and pastoral populations.

A few examples of the current impact of drought on local areas

The World Health Organization (WHO) estimates that 55 million people worldwide are directly affected by the effects of drought every year. Even today, this phenomenon represents the most serious threat to livestock and crops in almost every region of the globe⁹. Water deficits caused by drought have direct short- and long-term environmental, economic and social impacts.

Since late 2020, the Greater Horn of Africa region (Ethiopia, Eritrea, Somalia, Djibouti, Kenya and Sudan) has been experiencing a severe drought. The succession of 5 rainy seasons has led to the death of millions of head of livestock and the destruction of harvests; 22 million people are currently threatened by famine¹⁰.

In Morocco, the impact of droughts has significantly slowed the country's economy (the growth rate has fallen from 7.9% in 2021 to 1.3% in 2022), while between 1960 and 2020 available renewable water resources fell from 2,560m³ to around 620m³ per person per year, putting the country under severe water stress¹¹.

Drought is everyone's business, including the countries of Europe. The effects of drought are already visible in France, Spain and Northern Italy, and are causing concern for water supplies, agriculture and energy production¹². For example, Spain and France are experiencing significant water shortages. In Andalusia, water reservoirs are only reaching around 25% of capacity¹³ and this summer 2023, on August 1st, 72% of groundwater tables in France were below monthly normals¹⁴.

⁸ Risk = Hazard*Exposure*Vulnerability (UNCCD, 2021, *Good Practice Guidance for National Reporting on UNCCD Strategic Objective 3*, Bonn, 80p.)

⁹ WHO, (2021), Drought Overview, <https://www.who.int/health-topics/drought#>

¹⁰ https://www.lemonde.fr/afrique/article/2023/04/27/le-rechauffement-climatique-accelere-la-secheresse-record-dans-la-horn-of-africa_6171200_3212.html

¹¹ <https://www.banquemondiale.org/fr/news/press-release/2022/07/20/moroccan-economy-slows-in-wake-of-drought-and-commodity-price-rises>

¹² Commission European Commission, 2023 : https://edo.jrc.ec.europa.eu/documents/news/GDO-EDODroughtNews202303_Europe.pdf

¹³ Commission European Commission, 2023 : https://joint-research-centre.ec.europa.eu/jrc-news-and-updates/severe-drought-western-mediterranean-faces-low-river-flows-and-crop-yields-earlier-2023-06-13_en

¹⁴ <https://www.wwf.fr/vous-informer/actualites/le-wwf-alerte-sur-une-penurie-deau-en-europe>



Visitdrought : a issue political issue at within international negotiations

A major topic within the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification

The UNCCD pays particular attention to reducing the vulnerability of the most fragile human and natural systems to the impacts of drought. Mitigating and preventing the negative impacts of drought in the most exposed and vulnerable territories is an explicit prerogative of the UNCCD. Indeed, it is an objective stipulated in the Convention's framework agreement¹⁵ and its strategic framework 2018-2030.

The 5 strategic objectives of the UNCCD strategic framework 2018-2030 :

Strategic objective 1: Improve the condition of affected ecosystems, combat desertification and land degradation, promote sustainable land management and foster land degradation neutrality.

Strategic objective 2: Improve living conditions for affected populations.

Strategic objective 3: Mitigate, adapt to and manage the effects of drought to strengthen the resilience of vulnerable populations and ecosystems.

Strategic goal 4: Ensure that effective implementation of the Convention delivers global environmental benefits.

Strategic objective 5: Mobilize significant additional financial and non-financial resources for the implementation of the Convention through effective global and national partnerships.

Consequently, at international and national level, programs and policy instruments are being put in place to combat land degradation and the effects of drought in the most vulnerable and exposed countries. In addition, in order to reduce the vulnerability of local communities and increase the adaptive capacity of populations and countries in the face of drought risks, the UNCCD encourages governments to put in place **a national drought policy** focused on risk reduction and complemented by drought mitigation plans at different scales (national, regional in particular). To this end, the UNCCD created **the "Drought Initiative"** in 2018 (at COP13). This Initiative represents a concerted framework to support governments in drawing up and implementing their own national plans to combat drought, implement concerted actions at regional level to reduce vulnerability and the risks of drought, and provide resources to stakeholders to strengthen the resilience of populations and ecosystems to the effects of the

¹⁵ "Article 2/ Objective

1. The objective of this Convention is to combat desertification and mitigate the effects of drought in countries experiencing serious drought and/or desertification, particularly in Africa, through effective action at all levels, supported by international cooperation and partnership arrangements, within the framework of an integrated approach consistent with Agenda 21, with a view to contributing to the achievement of sustainable development in affected areas."



drought. At present, 70 countries are in the process of drawing up national drought action plans. 34 have been validated and can be consulted on the UNCCD website. These action plans show what states need to do to prevent the effects of drought, what actions need to be taken and by what means.

➤ **Monitoring the implementation of these strategic orientations by States**

Through the Convention's Performance Review and Assessment System (PRAIS), States Parties to the UNCCD provide data according to a number of indicators for each specific objective. In 2022, the data collected by the PRAIS4¹⁶ were centralized and analyzed. Subsequently, the UNCCD secretariat prepared summary reports for each of the 5 objectives for review by the CRIC21¹⁷. In all, 126 countries from the 5 annexes to the Convention (Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean, Northern Mediterranean, Central and Eastern Europe) completed the PRAIS4.

106 countries have contributed to reporting on strategic objective 3 on mitigating the effects of drought and strengthening the resilience of the most vulnerable populations and ecosystems. CRIC21's first preliminary analyses show that, overall, the **impacts of drought have not diminished**, and that there is a **lack of national statistics** capable of providing accurate information on the 3 drought indicators based on (i) changes in the surface area of land affected by drought, as a proportion of the land surface, based on intensity classes established by the SPI (Risk), (ii) changes in the proportion of the total population exposed to drought (Exposure), and (iii) changes in the degree of vulnerability to drought (Vulnerability). In addition, following preliminary analyses of the UNCCD's PRAIS4 results¹⁸, the Convention calls on the States Parties to :

Further engage in the implementation of proactive national drought policies by articulating them around integrated drought risk management including 1/ monitoring and early warning, 2/ vulnerability and impact assessment and 3/ mitigation, preparedness and response measures designed to strengthen the resilience of populations and ecosystems ;

- Assess their vulnerability to drought with greater precision so that the Drought Vulnerability Index (DVI) better reflects their national situation and can develop more effective national drought resilience plans.

➤ **Intergovernmental Working Group on Drought**

In September 2019 on the occasion of the UNCCD COP14¹⁹, an intergovernmental working group on drought was set up with the task of taking stock of existing policies, institutional arrangements and partnerships related to drought prevention, monitoring and management. Its aim is to provide recommendations on measures that can be taken by States to effectively manage drought-related issues within the framework of the Convention, adopting an integrated approach to disaster risk reduction (DRR) and increasing the resilience of populations, economies and ecosystems.

¹⁶ Reporting system used for the 2022 cycle.

¹⁷ <https://www.unccd.int/convention/official-documents/cric-21-samarkand-uzbekistan-2023>

¹⁸ See the full summary report on Strategic Objective 3 here: <https://www.unccd.int/sites/default/files/2023-09/2315450E.pdf>

¹⁹ Decision 23/COP14: <https://www.unccd.int/sites/default/files/sessions/documents/2019-11/23-cop14.pdf>



Following its assessment at UNCCD COP15 (May 2022, Abidjan), the Intergovernmental Working Group on Drought made several recommendations:

- The relevance of sustainable land management techniques in mitigating the risks and impacts of droughts;
- The need to provide financial and technological resources to countries particularly affected by drought, such as those in Africa ;
- The need to set up early warning and drought monitoring systems in all countries;
- The introduction of a drought target under the Convention to encourage political commitments at national level and concrete action at local level.

The working group also pointed out that the introduction of national drought plans has not yet led to stronger coordination between the various sectors and actors working to combat drought. However, these national plans are still seen as a good start to proactive action, and are supported by the UNCCD Secretariat and the Global Mechanism.

Towards the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) taking drought issues into account

Recently, some attention seems to be being paid to drought within the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). In November 2022, at the 27^{ème} Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (COP27), an international alliance for drought resilience²⁰ was launched by Senegalese President Macky Sall and Spanish government leader Pedro Sánchez. The initiative aims to create a platform for global collaboration to establish new political commitments to drought resilience, and to mobilize more dedicated financial resources. It also aims to further support stakeholder engagement, particularly that of the private sector, in drought resilience work. It also aims to collaborate closely with other international organizations such as the World Meteorological Organization (WMO). The operationalization of this international initiative has also been supported by the UNCCD.

This initiative is in line with the UNCCD's observation that too many countries currently lack operational drought monitoring, early warning and response systems. The Alliance should thus help improve resilience to drought in countries by setting up effective, coordinated drought early warning systems for the most exposed countries. An initiative to be followed closely.

A cross-cutting issue for the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD)

The United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) is a framework for international negotiations that calls for the protection and preservation of biodiversity to ensure the proper functioning of ecosystem functions and services. While issues directly linked to drought are not among its topics of discussion, the reduction and prevention of natural disasters based on the preservation and restoration of ecosystem services, and the sustainable use of land and natural resources are, on the other hand, among its objectives.

²⁰ International Drought Resilience Alliance (IDRA): <https://idralliance.global/>



Adopted in December 2022 at the CBD COP15, the Global Biodiversity Framework²¹ set clear targets up to 2030 for preserving and restoring ecosystems and halting biodiversity loss. It calls for "restoring, conserving and enhancing nature's contributions to people, including ecosystem functions and services, such as air, water and climate regulation, soil health, pollination and disease risk reduction, **as well as protection against natural hazards and disasters**, through nature-based solutions and/or ecosystem approaches for the benefit of all people and nature." (Target 11). A framework that remains relevant to follow in order to identify possible synergies with other Conventions.

A 6^{ème} edition of Désertif'actions, the International Summit of Civil Society

At international meetings, civil society can take part in dialogue, make recommendations and challenge decision-makers, with the aim of influencing international decision-making on climate change, sustainable land and natural resource management, and human development. It is on this occasion that CSOs bring to the attention of decision-makers the realities on the ground, in order to better connect action strategies with the real needs of populations and ecosystems.

Initiated in 2006 by the Centre d'Actions et des Réalisations Internationales (CARI - France) and its partners, the international **Désertif'actions** summit has successively met in Montpellier (2006/2015/2022), Strasbourg (2017), and Ouagadougou (2019), as part of a drive to meet the challenge of land degradation in the face of climate change. This summit enables the various stakeholders to discuss and prepare collectively for the institutional negotiation meetings of the Conferences of the Parties to the three "Rio" conventions, with priority given to the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification. After its first 5 editions²², the Désertif'actions summit has become a not-to-be-missed event, providing a framework for multi-stakeholder dialogue and synergy on a wide range of issues relating to land degradation, desertification and the fight against drought and its consequences.

As part of the preparations for Désertif'actions 2026, CARI and its partners propose to focus on the topical issues of anticipating and managing the effects of drought. Below are a few ideas that will be explored in greater depth between now and 2026, through collaborative work between organizers on the one hand, and through an international consultation process on the other (webinars, national workshops, etc.).

1/ In view of the environmental and human development challenges posed by the impact of droughts in drylands, working on the best ways to anticipate these crises, manage them and then rebuild once they've passed is a pertinent way to face up to the future that awaits us. This approach should lead us to discuss concepts such as the resilience of agricultural and food systems in dry zones:

- What models can be used to improve the resilience of agricultural and food systems?
- What action principles should be favored in local and national intervention dynamics?

²¹ Frame Mondial of the biodiversity of Kunming à Montréal : <https://www.cbd.int/doc/c/0bde/b7c0/00c058bbfd77574515f170bd/cop-15-l-25-fr.pdf>

²² <https://desertif-actions.org/>



2/ Questions are also being asked about **the operational implementation of commitments made by decision-makers, which are not being translated into strong transformative policies at local level.**

Beyond written commitments, such as drought action plans, are technical and financial resources provided to enable effective implementation in the territories?

Objectives and procedures for the next Désertif'actions

The 6^{ème} edition of Désertifi'actions will aim to :

- Raising the alarm about the acceleration of land degradation and the approach of tipping points;
- Build a plea, with a view to the 17^{ème} Conference of the Parties of the UNCCD in 2026, based on concrete and relevant solutions to meet the environmental and socio-economic challenges linked to the fight against drought, and more particularly those that better anticipate and prevent the risks of drought on ecosystems and populations;
- Share experience and scientific knowledge on drought risk prevention and mitigation issues;
- Raising public awareness of the challenges of combating desertification and sustainable land management.

The Désertif'actions 2026 dynamic will begin as early as 2025, with the organization of national preparatory workshops to involve as many players as possible in the discussions. A webinar will consolidate these achievements and finalize the definition of precise objectives and modalities for the international summit to be held in early 2026. This international multi-stakeholder meeting will take place prior to the 17^{ème} Conference of the Parties (COP17) of the UNCCD, and will be held **in Djerba, Tunisia.**

CARI will be joining forces with **the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD)** and **the Sahara and Sahel Observatory (OSS)** to organize this event, in partnership with **the Association de Citoyenneté et de Développement Durable (ACDD)** and **WWF North Africa.**

