

UN agency calls for global action plan on drought

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A Malian refugee pulls a jerrican of water at the Mberé refugee camp on May 3, 2012, near Bassiknou, southern Mauritania. The worst effects of drought could be avoided if countries had a disaster management plan to confront the problem, the UN World Meteorological Organization said Tuesday.

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With world food prices 6 percent higher now than at the start of the year and approaching the 2010 record, "it's time for countries affected by drought to move towards developing a policy", said Mannava Sivakumar, director of the WMO's [Climate Prediction](#) and Adaptation Branch.

Such a global approach would also help counter the "major impact" of El

Nino, said Sivakumar, in reference to the [weather system](#) credited with causing dry conditions in countries including Australia, India and much of east Africa, and flooding in Latin American countries.

Initial forecasts for [El Nino](#) show that [water temperatures](#) in the Pacific are likely to be warmer than normal for September and October, he said, echoing recent Japanese meteorological research that the phenomenon is likely to last until winter in the [northern hemisphere](#).

"If it continues through the winter months there could be some consequences but we will carefully monitor (them)," said Sivakumar.

Despite repeated droughts throughout human history and their long-term impact compared with other natural disasters, Australia is the only country in the world to develop a risk management policy for drought, Sivakumar said.

"To fill the existing vacuum in virtually every nation (for drought management)" the WMO is to host a high-level meeting on national drought policies in Geneva next March, the UN agency said in a statement.

Such measures would include better drought monitoring by countries, implementing early-warning systems and most importantly putting in place an "effective system to help the poorest of the poor", Sivakumar said.

Communicating the information to largely uneducated rural farming communities was essential, said Sivakumar, since this would enable them to avoid the worst effects of droughts by taking measures such as thinning crops to reduce the overall water requirement.

This would ensure that they would have "some crop instead of no crop",

said Sivakumar.

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