

World 'at a crossroads' in management of droughts, up 29% in a generation and worsening, reports the UN

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The new report, an authoritative compendium of drought-related information and data, helps inform negotiations of one of several decisions by UNCCD's 196 member states, to be issued 20 May at the conclusion of COP15. Credit: UNCCD

Humanity is "at a crossroads" when it comes to managing drought and

accelerating mitigation must be done "urgently, using every tool we can," says a new report from the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD).

"Drought In Numbers, 2022," released today to mark Drought Day at UNCCD's 15th Conference of Parties (COP15, 9-20 May in Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire), calls for making a full global commitment to drought preparedness and resilience in all global regions a top priority.

The report, an authoritative compendium of drought-related information and data, helps inform negotiations of one of several decisions by UNCCD's 196 member states, to be issued 20 May at the conclusion of COP15.

"The facts and figures of this publication all point in the same direction: an upward trajectory in the duration of [droughts](#) and the severity of impacts, not only affecting human societies but also the ecological systems upon which the survival of all life depends, including that of our own species," says Ibrahim Thiaw, Executive Secretary of the UNCCD.

The report creates a compelling call to action. For example:

- Since 2000, the number and duration of droughts has risen 29%
- From 1970 to 2019, weather, climate and water hazards accounted for 50% of disasters and 45% of disaster-related deaths, mostly in developing countries
- Droughts represent 15% of natural disasters but took the largest human toll, approximately 650,000 deaths from 1970-2019
- From 1998 to 2017, droughts caused global economic losses of roughly 124 billion US dollars
- In 2022, more than 2.3 billion people face [water stress](#); almost 160 million children are exposed to severe and prolonged droughts

Unless action is stepped up:

- By 2030, an estimated 700 million people will be at risk of being displaced by drought
- By 2040, an estimated one in four children will live in areas with extreme water shortages
- By 2050, droughts may affect over three-quarters of the world's population, and an estimated 4.8-5.7 billion people will live in areas that are water-scarce for at least one month each year, up from 3.6 billion today. And up to 216 million people could be forced to migrate by 2050, largely due to drought in combination with other factors including water scarcity, declining crop productivity, sea-level rise, and overpopulation



“One of the best, most comprehensive solutions (to drought) is land restoration, which addresses many of the underlying factors of degraded water cycles and the loss of soil fertility. We must build and rebuild our landscapes better, mimicking nature wherever possible and creating functional ecological systems.” Ibrahim Thiaw, Executive Secretary, UNCCD. Credit: UNCCD

"We are at a crossroads," says Thiaw. "We need to steer toward the solutions rather than continuing with destructive actions, believing that marginal change can heal systemic failure.

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Beyond restoration, he adds, is the need for a paradigm shift from "reactive" and "crisis-based" approaches to "proactive" and "risk-based" drought management approaches involving coordination, communication and cooperation, driven by sufficient finance and political will.

Needed as well are:

- Sustainable and efficient agricultural management techniques that grow more food on less land and with less water
- Changes in our relationships with food, fodder and fiber, moving toward plant-based diets, and reducing or stopping the consumption of animals
- Concerted policy and partnerships at all levels
- Development and implementation of integrated drought action plans
- Setup of effective early-warning systems that work across boundaries
- Deployment of new technologies such as satellite monitoring and artificial intelligence to guide decisions

- with greater precision
- Regular monitoring and reporting to ensure continuous improvement
- Mobilization of sustainable finance to improve drought resilience at the local level
- Investments in soil health
- Working together and including and mobilizing farmers, local communities, businesses, consumers, investors, entrepreneurs and, above all, young people

The new UNCCD report notes that 128 countries have expressed willingness to achieve or exceed Land Degradation Neutrality. And nearly 70 countries participated in the UNCCD's global drought initiative, which aims to shift from reactive approaches to drought to a proactive and risk-reducing approach.

Thiaw underlined the importance of promoting public awareness about desertification and drought, and letting people know the problems can be effectively tackled "through ingenuity, commitment and solidarity."

"We all must live up to our responsibility to ensure the health of present and future generations, wholeheartedly and without delay."

The COP15 decision on drought is expected to touch on five interrelated areas:

- Drought policies
- Early warning, monitoring and assessment
- Knowledge sharing and learning
- Partnerships and coordination
- Drought finance

Provided by United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification
(UNCCD)

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