



## **Droughts will change our world unless we act now**

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Droughts have always happened, but they are becoming more frequent and severe. Over the last two decades, droughts have impacted 1.4 billion people in the world, increasing in number and duration by almost 30% since 2000. While Africa is seeing the greatest increase in severity and frequency of droughts, they are progressively affecting every continent, from Asia-Pacific to Europe. By 2050, it is estimated that drought may affect over three-quarters of the world's population, and 216 million people could be forced to migrate.

If things do not change, we are heading for a world where fresh water and rich, productive soil are only a dream for billions, not just millions, of people. This will likely lead to unrest, famine, and huge economic losses that, in this globally connected world, will affect us all, and hinder progress towards the SDGs, including those on zero hunger (Goal 2) and clean water and sanitation (Goal 6).

There is, however, a solution. Droughts, unlike many other natural and human-induced hazards, are highly predictable and happen slowly and cyclically. This means, crucially, that we can get ahead of them.

Droughts don't have to become disasters.

The solution lies in mass knowledge sharing, training, good governance, and sufficient funding. Every single community feeling the effects of the climate change crisis needs to be supported to adapt their farming and land management techniques, restore degraded land, and develop the resilience to bounce back when droughts strike.

Forests are central to this. Deforestation and forest degradation amplify conditions for droughts to become disasters and for floods, wildfires, and sand storms to wreak havoc in their wake. Restoring forests that have been decimated in recent decades will dramatically reduce the impact of droughts.

Huge efforts are afoot towards drought proofing the world and progress is being made – perhaps most impressively with the Great Green Wall initiative in Africa. By 2030, in Africa alone, the initiative aims to restore 100 million hectares, while the AFR100 initiative is targeting a similar total of 100 million hectares and another 200 million hectares are planned by the Pan-African Agenda on Ecosystem Restoration. Through Action Against Desertification, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the UN (FAO) has developed an innovative model for large-scale land restoration, and since 2014, the project has restored 70,000 hectares in 11 countries.

But however encouraging these achievements are, and as we mark the World Day to Combat Desertification and Drought today, we need to recognize that we are still only nibbling at the problem we urgently need to solve.

So why is this?

What's needed is truly dedicated political will to follow through on pledges such as that made by over 140 countries at the Glasgow Climate Change Conference last year to halt and reverse forest loss and land degradation by 2030.

The agreements and targets set in recent years are not legally binding, which makes them not much more than hot air unless governments make them a priority.

Governments must show they are serious by putting systems and policies in place to achieve the changes we need at a scale that matters. They must ensure all stakeholders are on board and, crucially, unlock the finance needed to make all this happen.

It is a false economy not to invest enough right now in doing what needs to be done to meet the targets we have set for 2030 and beyond.

Between 1998 and 2017, droughts have led to global economic losses of approximately USD 124 billion. If global warming reaches 3°C by 2100, as has been predicted, drought losses could be five times higher than they are today.

Limiting global warming to 1.5°C, along with regenerative land and improved water management practices, is expected to substantially reduce the probability of extreme drought events.

We know that every US dollar invested in land restoration can potentially yield USD 7-30, yet governments seem to find investing in prevention rather than cure hard to justify.

Last month publication, 'The State of the World's Forests,' set out restoration as one of the three pathways vital to prevent environmental deterioration while increasing resilience and transforming economies, and the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration is under way.

The COVID-19 pandemic showed only too painfully what happens when you don't invest in preparing for disasters you know will come. We need to consider what kind of world we want to leave to future generations, and act decisively.

Source: <https://sdg.iisd.org/commentary/guest-articles/droughts-will-change-our-world-unless-we-act-now/>