

# EXPLAINED

Relevant for: Environment | Topic: Environmental Degradation - GHGs, Ozone Depletion and Climate Change

A farmer walks over dried land (file photo) | Photo Credit: AP

**The story so far:** A United Nations report has revealed that many parts of India fall under the list of regions that are [vulnerable to drought](#) globally. The report also stated that India's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) reduced by 2 to 5 per cent between 1998 and 2017 due to severe [droughts in the country](#).

These and other global findings centred on drought were collated in the [Drought in Numbers, 2022 report](#) presented by the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD).

The Drought in Numbers report is a collection of data on the effects of droughts on our ecosystem and how they can be mitigated through efficient planning for the future. The report also helps inform negotiations surrounding key decisions by the UNCCD's 197 member parties at the 15th Conference of Parties (COP15), currently underway in Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire. Drought, land restoration, and related aspects such as land rights, gender equality and youth empowerment are among the top considerations at COP15.

UNCCD's COP15 focuses on desertification, land degradation, and drought, with the theme for the conference being "Land. Life. Legacy: From scarcity to prosperity." The conference has brought together government representatives, private sector members, and civil society stakeholders to ensure that land continues to benefit present and future generations.

It proposes to tackle "the interconnected challenges of land degradation, climate change, and biodiversity loss" as we move into the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration.

The UNCCD's 197 parties, which includes 196 member States as well as the European Union, are expected to brainstorm sustainable ideas to further land restoration and drought resilience, focusing on "future-proofing land use." The UNCCD envisions restoring one billion hectares of degraded land by 2030, creating a land degradation-neutral world.

According to World Bank estimates, drought conditions can force up to 216 million people to migrate by 2050. Other factors at play along with drought could be water scarcity, declining crop productivity, rise in sea levels, and overpopulation.

Weather, climate and water hazards have accounted for 50 per cent of all disasters and 45 per cent of all reported deaths since 1970, World Meteorological Organisation data has revealed. Nine in ten of these deaths have occurred in developing countries.

Between 2020 and 2022, 23 countries have faced drought emergencies. These are Afghanistan, Angola, Brazil, Burkina Faso, Chile, Ethiopia, Iraq, Iran, Kazakhstan, Kenya, Lesotho, Mali, Mauritania, Madagascar, Malawi, Mozambique, Niger, Somalia, South Sudan, Syria, Pakistan, United States, and Zambia. According to the report, climate change alone will cause 129 countries to experience an increase in drought exposure in the next few decades.

More than a billion people around the world were affected by drought in 2000-19, making it the second-worst disaster after flooding. Africa was the worst hit, with 134 droughts, of which 70 occurred in East Africa. The World Health Organisation has noted that approximately 55 million people globally are directly affected by droughts annually, making it the most serious hazards to

livestock and crops in almost every part of the world.

The impact of drought is, however, not uniform across genders. Research shows that women and girls in emerging and developing countries suffer more in terms of education levels, nutrition, health, sanitation, and safety as a result of droughts. The burden of water collection also disproportionately falls on women (72 per cent) and girls (9 per cent). The report notes that they may spend up to 40 per cent of their caloric intake fetching water.

According to the report, if predictions are correct and global warming reaches 3° C by 2100, drought losses could be five times higher than today's levels. The largest increase in drought losses is projected in the Mediterranean and the Atlantic regions of Europe.

Australia's megadrought in 2019-2020 contributed to "megafires" resulting in one of the most extensive losses of habitat for threatened species. About three billion animals were killed or displaced in the Australian wildfires. On a related note, 84 per cent of all terrestrial ecosystems are threatened by changing and intensifying wildfires.

According to a 2017 report by the Food and Agriculture Organisation, the percentage of plants affected by drought has more than doubled in the last 40 years. Around 12 million hectares of land are lost each year due to drought and desertification.

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