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Secours Islamique France (SIF)

Secours Islamique France (SIF) is an independent, humanitarian, not-for-profit, non-governmental organisation. Founded in 1991 in France, SIF is engaged in humanitarian assistance and development aid at the international level, as well as to social assistance in France. Through its operations, SIF responds to the basic needs of the most vulnerable populations, guided by solidarity and respect for human dignity and by the humanitarian principles of neutrality, independence and impartiality.



ADVOCACY

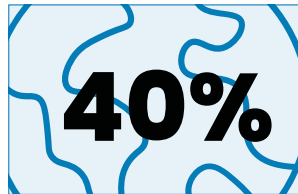
DROUGHT, DESERTIFICATION, AND INTERNAL DISPLACEMENT

CHALLENGES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

MADAGASCAR, PAKISTAN, SENEGAL, AND SOMALIA

Drawing on the expertise of SIFs, field surveys, and a review of the literature, this document analyses the challenges associated with internal displacement caused by droughts and desertification, outlines the impacts on the most vulnerable populations, and formulates operational and policy recommendations to prevent these dynamics and strengthen adaptation.

Drought and desertification are not merely climate crises. They are gradually undermining people's human rights and are major drivers of internal displacement.



NEARLY **40%** OF
THE WORLD'S LAND AREA IS
EXPERIENCING **ONGOING DEGRADATION**

The Secretariat of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) warns of the growing scale of land degradation and its direct consequences for livelihoods, food security, and territorial stability. According to estimates, **nearly 40% of the world's land area is experiencing ongoing degradation**¹. The World Meteorological Organization's (WMO) 2025 report highlighted the intensification of extreme weather events². With global warming approaching the 1.5°C threshold, the frequency and severity of droughts are increasing, even in regions that have historically been less vulnerable.

These phenomena are not merely environmental challenges: they are reshaping social and economic dynamics, exacerbating inequalities, and contributing to increased internal displacement. When land ceases to be productive, water becomes scarce, and pastoral systems collapse, human mobility becomes a survival strategy. It thus lies at the intersection of climate, humanitarian, and development issues, with impacts that vary according to gender, age, and socioeconomic status. In the face of these slow-onset but systemic crises, responses must go beyond sector-specific approaches and be part of an integrated vision of territorial resilience, combining sustainable land management, equitable access to resources, risk preparedness, and the protection of human rights.

¹ UNCCD, The Global Threat of Drying Lands: Regional and global aridity trends and future projections, 2024.

² OMM, Global Annual to Decadal Climate Update 2025-2029, 2025.

DROUGHT, DESERTIFICATION, AND LAND DEGRADATION: FROM ISOLATED PHENOMENA TO GLOBAL ISSUES

Desertification, land degradation, and drought are now major factors contributing to climate and human vulnerability.

Long confined to traditional arid zones, droughts are now spreading to new regions. Globally, more than three-quarters of the world's land area has experienced a deterioration in its water balance³ between 1990 and 2020. This increasing aridification has transformed 4.3 million km² of formerly humid areas into arid zones. **The frequency of droughts has increased by about 30% over the past twenty years⁴**, resulting in estimated annual economic losses of \$307 billion⁵, with profound consequences for food security, access to water, and the stability of communities.

+30%

THE FREQUENCY OF DROUGHTS HAS INCREASED BY ABOUT 30% OVER THE PAST TWENTY YEARS

These economic and human losses occur within a context of systemic risks in which water crises feed upon themselves. Consequently, **drought and flooding should not be viewed as opposing phenomena but as two complementary manifestations of growing hydrological instability.** Prolonged periods of drought degrade soils, reduce their absorption capacity, and weaken water infrastructure, making areas vulnerable to flash floods and water contamination.

This disruption of the water cycle is accompanied by another major challenge: **the salinisation** of soils and groundwater, which is closely linked to the dynamics of drought and desertification. It results from two main pressures: on the one hand, natural processes such as marine saline intrusion or the mineralisation of arid soils; on the other hand, human activities exacerbated by water scarcity, such as intensive groundwater pumping, inappropriate irrigation, or deforestation.

The combination of drought and salinisation profoundly transforms these regions: it contributes to reduced agricultural productivity, undermines livelihoods, limits access to drinking water, and affects food security, while increasing dependence on markets and external aid. The effects on human and animal health are also significant, with increased risks of malnutrition, waterborne diseases, and deteriorating maternal and child health. Addressing these phenomena simultaneously in resilience strategies makes it possible to move beyond a fragmented view of risks and to design sustainable interventions tailored to complex local dynamics.

Disasters linked to slow-onset events⁶ have a greater impact on people whose livelihoods depend on the environment, particularly agro-pastoral and indigenous communities. Pastoralists are among the hardest-hit populations: the loss of livestock, reduced access to pastures, and the

gradual collapse of their way of life directly threaten their survival and dignity. Sedentary farmers are facing equally alarming conditions, marked by declining harvests, soaring food prices, and the ongoing erosion of their incomes.

“... BUT WHAT EXACTLY IS DESERTIFICATION?”

Desertification is not the natural expansion of deserts, but rather a process of land degradation—whether caused by natural or human factors—that leads to a decline in the biological and economic productivity of arid, semiarid, and dry subhumid areas. This phenomenon results from the interaction between climate disturbances and human pressures such as intensive agriculture, overgrazing, and deforestation. The loss of vegetation cover disrupts the soil's regeneration cycle, causing the soil to become depleted and more vulnerable to water and wind erosion.

Globally, the FAO estimates that one-third of arable land is threatened by this process⁷. Its consequences extend far beyond the environmental sphere. It undermines food security, reduces agricultural productivity, impairs ecosystem services, and causes a loss of biodiversity through the displacement of native species. It also has health impacts, particularly through dust storms⁸, and contributes to social instability.



³ According to the WMO, the water balance is an inventory of the water resources in a given system (a soil, a watershed, or the biosphere) over a specific period. It corresponds to the difference between inflows (precipitation) and outflows (evapotranspiration, runoff, and infiltration).

⁴ UN Office for Disaster Risk Reduction, GAR 2025 hazard explorations: Droughts, 2025.

⁵ United Nations University Institute for Water, Environment and Health, UN: Invest in nature to cut billion-dollar costs of droughts, 2025.

⁶ The Conference of the Parties to the Climate Change Convention in Cancún (COP16) identifies eight types of slow-onset events: rising temperatures, desertification, loss of biodiversity, land and forest degradation, glacier retreat, ocean acidification, sea-level rise, and soil salinization.

⁷ Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), Better land, soil and water management key to feeding 10 billion people, 2025.

⁸ Carvalho, K. Desertification: Causes, Effects, And Solutions, Earth.Org, 2024.

“... AND WHAT ABOUT DROUGHT IN ALL OF THIS?”

Drought is not just a lack of rain: it is a complex phenomenon that develops slowly, affecting soils, aquifers, waterways, and societies, and whose impacts are felt well beyond the period of water scarcity. It develops gradually, often over several seasons; its effects are indirect and cumulative; and it rarely causes immediate material damage or direct loss of life, which makes assessing its impacts more difficult and delays policy and operational responses.

There are generally **several types of drought**⁹, which correspond to different manifestations of the same water deficit. Meteorological drought occurs when precipitation is consistently below seasonal norms in a given area and often serves as the starting point for other forms of drought. Soil or agricultural drought occurs when soil moisture becomes insufficient to meet the needs of crops and vegetation, due to a lack of rain combined with high temperatures and increased evapotranspiration, making water inaccessible to plants. Hydrological (or hydrogeological) drought, on the other hand, is characterized by a significant decline in river flows, lake levels, reservoir levels, and groundwater levels, which can lead to the partial or total drying up of certain water resources, generally following a prolonged period of below-average rainfall. Finally, human activities can exacerbate or cause a form of drought known as anthropogenic drought, linked in particular to excessive water withdrawal, overexploitation of aquifers, inappropriate irrigation, or weak water resource governance, thereby amplifying natural imbalances and their socioeconomic impacts.

It is important to distinguish between drought and aridity: aridity is a permanent climatic condition characterized by a chronic lack of precipitation, whereas drought is a temporary meteorological and hydrological phenomenon that can occur even in humid regions¹⁰.

“... SO WHAT EXACTLY IS LAND/SOIL DEGRADATION?”

Land degradation refers to the sustained decline in the land's capacity to provide goods and services in all types of climates (agricultural production, biodiversity, ecosystem services¹¹), caused by natural phenomena such as erosion but primarily by human activities (water-intensive agricultural practices, deforestation, pollution, etc.)¹².

To address these challenges, it is essential to adopt an integrated approach to resource and risk management:

- » In terms of infrastructure: protect and restore aquifers, water sources, and irrigation systems, incorporating desalination or filtration techniques adapted to local contexts.
- » In terms of agriculture: promote resilient practices, such as optimised irrigation, agroecology, crop rotation, and the selection of crops tolerant to salt (biosaline agriculture) and drought.
- » In terms of governance: coordinate local stakeholders, water authorities, NGOs, and communities to anticipate shortages, ensure water quality, and plan interventions based on the vulnerability of specific regions.
- » On the social and humanitarian front: ensure access to safe drinking water and sanitation services in accordance with the fundamental human right to water and sanitation recognised by the United Nations. This means that governments and stakeholders operating in these areas must ensure that every person has access to sufficient, safe, and physically accessible water, as well as access to essential services, particularly for the most vulnerable populations.

However, in the current context marked by a slowdown in international climate finance and increased competition among budget priorities, **issues relating to drought risk are being even further down the list of priorities, even though they represent one of the most costly and underfunded aspects of the fight against climate change.** The OECD notes in this regard that the **economic impacts of an average drought are now up to six times higher than in 2000** and are projected to increase by at least 35% by 2035¹³. According to the United Nations Environment Programme's 2023 Climate Adaptation Gap Report, the financing needs for adaptation in the Global South are 10 to 18 times greater than the international public funding currently available, creating a funding gap estimated at between \$194 billion and \$366 billion per year¹⁴.

For more information:

> Read SIF's position paper “How Does Water Feed Us?”¹⁵, which explores the links between access to and management of water, food security, and the challenges of achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).



⁹ Metzger, A., Delus, C., Eeckman, J., et Jacob-Rousseau N. Sécheresses historiques : que nous enseignent les archives, *The Conversation*, 2022.

¹⁰ Flaminio, S. Aridité, sécheresse, pénurie d'eau, 2017.

¹¹ Limoges, B. Biodiversité, services écologiques et bien-être humain. *Le naturaliste canadien*, 2009.

Ecosystem services are the functions of ecosystems that benefit humans. These services are generally grouped into four categories: regulatory services, provisioning services, ontogenetic services, and sociocultural services. Ecosystem services contribute directly to human well-being.

¹² United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD), “United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification in Those Countries Experiencing Serious Drought, 2012.

¹³ OCDE, *Perspectives mondiales des sécheresses : Évolution, impacts et politiques d'adaptation*, 2025.

¹⁴ United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), *Adaptation Gap Report 2023: Underfunded. Underprepared. Inadequate investment and planning on climate adaptation leaves world exposed*, 2023.

¹⁵ SIF, *How does water feed us ?* 2024.

Risk Management, Early Warning, and Resilient Agriculture (Madagascar, the Great South)

In the Great South of Madagascar, communities have been facing a series of droughts for more than fifteen years, culminating in the climate-induced famine of 2021–2022¹⁶. In 2025, numerous cyclone events also contributed to the increasing vulnerability of local communities. This persistent climate instability, combined with inadequate water and agricultural infrastructure, has severely undermined the livelihoods of rural households, which rely primarily on rain-fed agriculture and pastoral livestock farming.

In this context, SIF's implemented an integrated approach to risk management and strengthening agricultural resilience. The intervention focused on installing irrigation systems adapted to arid conditions, covering 110 hectares for approximately 930 households, as well as developing 75 drought-resistant vegetable gardens to diversify and secure food production. At least 248 training sessions and 475 technical support visits were conducted with vulnerable households to improve sustainable soil management, optimise water use, and strengthen their ability to adapt to climate shocks. In addition, the targeted distribution of 2,630 kg of suitable seeds and support for pastoral livestock farming helped sustain the communities' main sources of income.

These actions helped sustain agricultural production despite extreme weather events, limiting the erosion of livelihoods and reducing the need for forced migration as a survival strategy. These actions also helped strengthen community-based monitoring and local early warning mechanisms. This resulted in the training of 288 members of local committees, promoting better risk anticipation and more effective coordination of responses to future crises. This capacity-building effort relied in particular on the distribution of equipment such as warning flags and technical fact sheets, as well as on efforts to raise the committees' awareness of hurricane season preparedness and the various alert phases.



UNITED NATIONS CONVENTION TO COMBAT DESERTIFICATION (UNCCD)

The [UNCCD](#)¹⁷ is an international treaty adopted at the Rio Conference in 1992 and entered into force in 1996.

Its objective is to **prevent, reduce, and reverse land degradation**, particularly in arid, semi-arid, and sub-humid areas, while promoting sustainable development and the resilience of affected communities.

The UNCCD is part of the international process for environmental protection and sustainable development initiated by the Rio Conference, alongside the Convention on Biological Diversity and the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC).

The UNCCD's strategy is based on a long-term, integrated approach that combines improving land productivity, sustainable management of land and water resources, and the restoration of degraded land, with participatory implementation involving States, local communities, and populations to achieve sustainable development in arid, semi-arid, and dry sub-humid areas. It prioritizes five interconnected areas of action: prevention and reduction of land degradation, soil restoration, drought mitigation, poverty eradication, and international cooperation¹⁸.

The signatory states to the UNCCD aim to achieve land degradation neutrality by 2030—that is, a world in which there is no longer any net loss of healthy and productive land.

Bio-saline agriculture and solar irrigation (Pakistan, Sindh and Balochistan)

In Pakistan, the 2024–2025 period was among the driest on record, with a rainfall deficit reaching 67% in the provinces of Sindh and Balochistan. These regions, which cover nearly 68% of the country's total land area and largely correspond to the country's arid and semi-arid zones, face a combination of climate vulnerabilities, advanced soil degradation, structural poverty, and weak water infrastructure. The prolonged decline in rainfall has severely affected agricultural and pastoral productivity, causing significant income losses and exacerbating displacement trends among households dependent on agriculture and livestock.

In response to this situation, SIF has launched an integrated project aimed at strengthening community resilience and ensuring sustainable food production. The initiative is based primarily on the introduction of biosaline crops adapted to degraded, highly saline soils, including fruit trees and vegetable crops capable of producing a harvest after three to four years. These varieties make it possible to maintain viable agricultural activity despite water scarcity and low soil fertility. At the same time, solar-powered submersible pumps have been installed to ensure sustainable access to irrigation water, while reducing dependence on conventional water systems, which are often inadequate or costly. The project also includes the distribution of resilient seeds and training in "climate-smart" agricultural practices (crop rotation, water conservation techniques, and sustainable soil management) to optimise yields while limiting land degradation.

¹⁶ Nations Unies, Madagascar : l'ONU craint une aggravation de la première famine due au climat, 2021.

¹⁷ United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification.

¹⁸ Convention des Nations Unies sur la lutte contre la désertification (CNULD), Cadre stratégique de la Convention de 2018-2030, 2018.

These actions have helped secure irrigation for 5,000 hectares of crops, ensuring continued production despite the rainfall deficit. They have helped stabilise agricultural incomes and reduce reliance on migration as a negative adaptation mechanism, particularly for smallholder farmers. The project has also promoted the active engagement of local communities—especially women farmers—in the planning and management of sustainable practices. By strengthening local capacities and enhancing adaptation to extreme weather conditions, this approach builds the resilience of agricultural systems in the face of future droughts.



DROUGHT, VULNERABILITIES, AND CONFLICTS: THE COMPLEX DYNAMICS OF INTERNAL DISPLACEMENT

According to the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC), 29.9 million disaster-related internal displacements were recorded in 2025 across 140 countries and territories, a figure 13% higher than the average for the past decade¹⁹. However, these figures are likely underestimated: displacements associated with slow-onset phenomena—such as desertification, land degradation, or soil salinisation—remain insufficiently documented²⁰.



Displacements linked to drought are, in fact, more complex to identify than those caused by sudden disasters (storms, floods). They result from gradual dynamics, diffuse in time and space, whose effects may appear belatedly and occur geographically far from their point of origin. In many cases, these displacements stem from a succession of shocks—both rapid and slow—whose frequency and intensity exceed populations' capacity to adapt and recover, thereby compromising their resilience. Furthermore, the interplay with other factors—particularly poverty and conflict—makes it difficult to attribute displacement to a single cause, contributing to complex crises and to repeated and protracted displacement.

Migration linked to these phenomena is not new and can serve as a viable adaptation strategy in the face of the effects of drought, soil degradation, and desertification—provided that it is voluntary and respects people's right to determine their own conditions of mobility. However, the proportion of forced displacement is currently on the rise.

In this context, households are often forced to resort to **negative adaptation strategies** to cope in the short term, at the expense of their security, dignity, and long-term prospects. These mechanisms include, in particular, the sale of productive assets, withdrawing children from school, child labour, early marriage, drastic reductions in food intake, resorting to debt, and risky, unplanned migration. They reflect a gradual weakening of positive adaptive capacities and reinforce dynamics of vulnerability.

Gradual land degradation can render entire areas unsuitable for agriculture, thereby affecting people's livelihoods in their places of origin. **In the absence of alternatives or adaptation measures, these communities may be forced to leave.** Destinations and patterns of displacement vary depending on context, individual strategies, and the preparedness, risk reduction, and adaptation measures in place in areas of origin or destination.

However, drought crises remain difficult to anticipate and monitor compared to rapid-onset disasters, which contributes to delayed and often reactive responses. Annual economic losses are significant but do not reflect the human and social impacts, which are often invisible yet profound. Agricultural yields are sharply reduced, pastoral systems are severely affected, malnutrition increases, public health is compromised, and internal displacement places considerable pressure on urban infrastructure and host communities. **These various pressures can lead to conflicts of various kinds.** There is a risk of tensions between displaced communities and host communities, as the sharing of resources—already depleted by repeated climate crises—is inevitable. When the arrival of displaced populations is perceived as creating additional competition for access to these limited resources, local conflicts may arise, sometimes fueled by preexisting divisions²¹.

Furthermore, the gradual degradation of land and the increasing scarcity of water can exacerbate conflicts between farmers and herders, particularly in semi-arid regions. The reduction in grazing lands and changes to transhumance routes increase friction over land use. In certain fragile contexts, these local tensions can be exploited by armed actors or political groups, transforming resource-related disputes into broader violence²².

Furthermore, forced mobility can also generate conflicts at the national level. Massive internal displacement toward urban centres puts pressure on infrastructure, labour markets, and local governance systems. The authorities' inability to provide adequate services can reinforce feelings of marginalisation and injustice, fueling social unrest.

Finally, **the land issue is a fundamental challenge.** The insecurity of land use and property rights exacerbates tensions, hinders land restoration, and limits access to sustainable livelihoods. Conversely, securing land rights—particularly for

¹⁹ Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC) 2026 Global Report on International Displacement, 2026.

²⁰ Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC) Monitoring methodology for displacement associated with drought, 2020.

²¹ United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), No escape: On the frontlines of climate change, conflict and forced displacement, 2024.

²² SIF, Disasters, Climate Change and Displacement, 2025.

vulnerable populations—is a key lever for preventing forced displacement, mitigating the risks of conflict, and strengthening resilience in the face of recurring climate crises.

For more information:

Climate Change, and Displacement”²³

> Read SIF's position paper on “Disasters,



Crisis Anticipation and Early Warning (Somalia)

In contexts affected by droughts and risks of displacement, SIF's bases its response actions—aimed at mitigating the impacts on the most vulnerable people—on continuous multi-source monitoring, integrating climate and hydrological data, agricultural and pastoral information, food market monitoring, and nutritional indicators. This quantitative data is supplemented by qualitative analysis from the field, capturing signs of deteriorating living conditions.

In Somalia, SIF's relies on village committees, traditional leaders, women's groups, and youth representatives to report in real time on developments regarding water shortages, crop losses, livestock losses, and initial population movements. This information is cross-referenced with technical data to identify situations where rights are being progressively violated and to activate humanitarian response mechanisms proactively.

THE HUMAN RIGHTS-BASED APPROACH (HRBA)

The HRBA provides an essential analytical and operational framework for rethinking the concept of emergency in slow-onset crises. A humanitarian emergency should not be declared solely on the basis of rainfall or agroclimatic thresholds, but as soon as the effective exercise of human rights is compromised. In the case of prolonged droughts, this compromise manifests itself before the total collapse of systems through the gradual reduction in access to safe drinking water, the exhaustion of household coping strategies, the deterioration of livelihoods, rising food prices, and the resort to negative survival strategies.

> For more information, see the expert brief by the Water Coalition, by SIF, titled “The Human Rights-Based Approach in the Water and Sanitation Sector.”²⁴



DISPLACEMENT AND THE UNCCD

Through several decisions, the States Parties to the UNCCD have recognised that land degradation, desertification, and drought are factors that exacerbate forced migration²⁵.

Furthermore, one of the expected outcomes of Strategic Objective No. 2 of the UNCCD's Strategic Framework 2018–2030²⁶—which aims to “improve the living conditions of affected populations”—is a significant reduction in the number of people forced to migrate due to these phenomena. This requires that States Parties commit to taking specific action on the multiple causes of forced migration and population displacement, and to fully integrating these issues into their strategies aimed at achieving land degradation neutrality and strengthening resilience to drought.

At COP16, held in 2024 in Saudi Arabia, a new decision specifically addressing this issue was adopted. The Saudi presidency demonstrated a strong commitment to prioritising this issue, notably by organising the ministerial dialogue titled “Impacts of Land Degradation and Drought on Forced Migration, Security, and Prosperity.”²⁷ This dialogue provided an opportunity to examine how sustainable land management and building resilience to drought can help address the interrelated challenges posed by land degradation, forced migration, and conflict.

COP16 thus reaffirmed that forced migration is exacerbated by land degradation, drought, and desertification. It also highlighted the specific impacts on the most vulnerable populations, particularly by raising the critical issue of access to land tenure. With this decision, the groundwork has been laid for COP17 to go further in explicitly integrating human mobility into its decisions, mechanisms, and operational tools.



> For more information, see the report on the event “Strengthening Synergies Between the UNCCD and the UNFCCC to Address Issues of Migration and Displacement and Accelerate Responses,” organized by SIF during COP30 on Climate Change in November 2025²⁸.



²³ SIF, “Disasters, Climate Change and Displacement,” 2025.

²⁴ Coalition eau, “L'approche basée sur les droits humains dans le secteur de l'eau et de l'assainissement,” 2021.

²⁵ Decision 28/COP.13, Decision 22/COP.14, Decision 22/COP.15, et Decision 23/COP.16.

²⁶ United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD), Strategic Framework of the Convention for 2018–2030, 2018.

²⁷ Ministerial dialogue on migration | UNCCD.

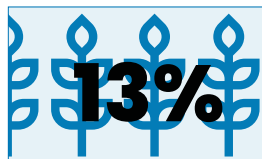
²⁸ SIF, “Strengthening UNCCD-UNFCCC synergies to address and accelerate responses to migration and displacement.”

THE INTERSECTIONALITY OF VULNERABILITIES

Gender Inequality in the Face of Droughts, Desertification, and Displacement

Women are a vital pillar of food security and climate resilience, producing up to 80% of the food in developing countries and accounting for nearly half of the agricultural workforce. Yet, globally, they own less than 20% of the land, limiting their access to credit, training, and the resources needed to adapt to and mitigate the impacts of droughts²⁹. This structural inequality reduces their ability to invest in sustainable agricultural practices, diversify production, and participate in community decisions on natural resource management, while increasing their vulnerability to climate crises.

Droughts particularly affect women and girls³⁰. Their domestic and productive workloads increase: they must travel long distances to collect water, care for children and the elderly, and maintain food production. These unpaid responsibilities limit the time and resources they have available for training and diversifying their economic activities. They are also frequently excluded from decision-making processes related to water resource management and land-use planning, despite their central role in local climate change adaptation strategies. **Only 13%³¹ of land users who make key decisions regarding agricultural land are women.**



ONLY 13% OF LAND USERS WHO MAKE KEY DECISIONS REGARDING AGRICULTURAL LAND ARE WOMEN.

Displacement caused by droughts exacerbates their vulnerability by limiting access to support networks, resources, and essential services, which has serious consequences for maternal and child health.

Despite these obstacles, women are developing innovative solutions that strengthen their communities' resilience. Supporting and investing in women-led initiatives contributes to food security, climate resilience, and equal rights. Securing women's land rights is a major strategic lever. International research and reports, including those from the FAO and the UNCCD, show that recognising these rights improves household nutrition, increases spending on children's education, and strengthens overall economic stability. It also enables women to draw on their traditional knowledge and skills to restore soils, protect ecosystems, and increase communities' resilience to droughts and desertification. According to the FAO, if women had the same access to productive resources as men, the number of people suffering from hunger worldwide could be reduced by 17 percent—or about 150 million people.

Including women in natural resource management and decision-making processes is a key driver of resilience to droughts. Their active participation not only contributes to household food and economic security but also ensures

a sustainable and equitable approach to climate change adaptation.

GENDER AND THE UNCCD

While the issue of gender equality is not specifically addressed in the UNCCD's Strategic Framework (2018–2030), the Action Plan on Gender Equality adopted by the States Parties at COP13 in 2017³² aims to ensure that gender is taken into account in its implementation.

Recognising that gender-sensitive approaches are essential to combating drought and land degradation, this plan identifies the following four priority actions:

- » Ensure that women participate in decision-making
- » Eradicate poverty
- » Strengthen women's land rights, including their access to resources
- » Improve women's access to improved knowledge and technologies.

These principles and priorities were reaffirmed at COP16³³ in 2024.

Early Warning Systems, Resilience, and Women's Empowerment (Senegal, Northern and Eastern Regions)

Rural areas in northern and eastern Senegal face recurrent droughts, erratic rainfall, and the decline of pastoral lands, undermining the livelihoods of local communities. This situation particularly affects women and young people.

To address these challenges, SIF has decentralised early warning systems: these tools are designed to alert communities to imminent risks such as cyclones, floods, droughts, heat waves, or fires. They are crucial for strengthening community resilience, enabling local producers—particularly women and youth—to anticipate risks and adapt their practices. The organisation has supported the development of agroecology and community vegetable gardens, promoting dietary diversification and household self-sufficiency. At the same time, women's groups known as AVEC (Village Savings and Credit Associations) and young agripreneurs³⁴ have been trained and supported. The AVECs enable women to come together to save collectively, access small loans, and finance income-generating activities. They also strengthen women's leadership, foster community solidarity, and support the sustainable management of natural resources at the local level.

It is estimated that these initiatives reduced drought-related agricultural production losses by 35 percent, thereby helping to strengthen local food security. The economic self-reliance of women and youth has improved significantly as a result, enabling them to better secure their incomes and actively participate in community decision-making. Communities' ability to anticipate and manage local crises has also been strengthened through their direct participation in early warning systems and activity planning.

²⁹ United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD), *Women at the Forefront of the Fight Against Drought*, 2024.

³⁰ United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD), *Women at the Forefront of the Fight Against Drought*, 2024.

³¹ Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), *Gender and Land Statistics: Recent Developments in FAO's Gender and Land Rights Database*, 2015.

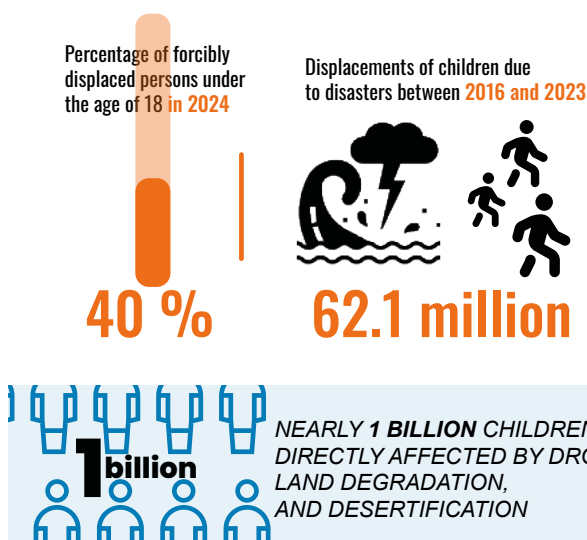
³² United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD), *ICCD/COP(13)/21/Add.1: Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment for Enhanced and Effective Implementation of the Convention*, 2028.

³³ International Institute for Sustainable Development, *Summary report, 2–13 December 2024: 16th Session of the Conference of the Parties to the UNCCD (COP 16)*, 2025.

³⁴ Entrepreneurial Farmers

Displaced Children and Youth: Structural Vulnerability to Droughts and Desertification

Children and youth constitute a distinct category of vulnerable people, representing a disproportionate share of displaced populations: according to UNHCR, **40% of the world's forcibly displaced people in 2024 were under the age of 18**³⁵. The scale of the phenomenon is massive, with weather-related disasters alone causing 62.1 million internal displacements of children between 2016 and 2023—an alarming average of 20,000 displacements per day³⁶.

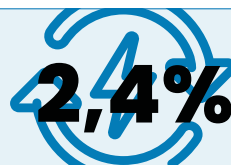


Nearly 1 billion children are directly affected by drought, land degradation, and desertification—that is, almost half of the world's children. By 2045, up to 135 million children could be displaced as a result of these trends³⁷.

Because of their age and their dependence on basic social services, the destruction or weakening of these services disproportionately affects them. Prolonged displacement leads to frequent interruptions in schooling, an increase in school dropout rates, and, in the most precarious situations, a higher risk of child labour and exploitation. Their food security is directly threatened by a decline in dietary diversity and rising prices for staple foods. These shortages, combined with increased pressure on already fragile health services, heighten the risks of acute and chronic malnutrition. These conditions permanently compromise children's physical and cognitive development, with irreversible consequences for their health in adulthood.

Displacement also weakens protective mechanisms. Women and children face increased risks of gender-based and sexual violence during their journey into exile. Beyond physical risks, the psychosocial consequences of uprooting and the violence they experience are profound and often underestimated, disrupting developmental trajectories and emotional well-being for decades. Finally, young people face long-term economic marginalisation, as the erosion of employment opportunities in both their areas of origin and their destinations limits their future prospects and their ability to contribute to their communities' resilience.

Despite these disproportionate impacts, **children and young people remain largely invisible in environmental data and policies. Only 2.4% of funds allocated to combating climate change are directed toward child-focused programs.** The same limitations apply to UNCCD funding initiatives³⁸.



ONLY 2.4% OF FUNDS ALLOCATED TO COMBATING CLIMATE CHANGE ARE DIRECTED TOWARD CHILD-FOCUSED PROGRAMS

To better understand the effects of displacement on young people—particularly in terms of social and economic inclusion—and to identify courses of action based on their experiences and priorities, SIF conducted a survey in 2025 of more than 1,800 young people in Pakistan (see below). The results highlight **the urgent need to implement an integrated response centred on children and youth, aimed at reducing their vulnerabilities, strengthening their resilience, and ensuring that their rights are respected in the face of climate challenges and displacement.**

³⁵ United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), Global Trends 2024 – Demographics of people who have been forcibly displaced end-2024, 2025.

³⁶ UNICEF, Children Displaced in a Changing Climate: Preparing for a Future Already Underway, 2023.

³⁷ UNICEF, A future at risk, the policy challenge of land degradation for children's wellbeing, 2024.

³⁸ UNICEF, A future at risk, the policy challenge of land degradation for children's wellbeing, 2024.

Pakistani Youth and Internal Displacement Linked to Disasters and Climate Change

In 2025, SIF's conducted a survey in Pakistan among more than 1,800 Pakistani youth affected by disasters, who had been internally displaced, or who were at risk of displacement. The survey aimed to gather their perceptions, priorities, and recommendations in the face of intensifying climate crises.

The results reveal a high level of climate awareness among the youth surveyed: 87% link the increase in disasters to climate change, and 90% identify these disasters as the main cause of internal displacement, ahead of conflicts or economic factors. Furthermore, 91% believe that the government bears the primary responsibility for responding to climate change.

The social and psychological impacts are particularly concerning. More than half of young people (57%) report a negative impact on their mental health, a proportion that rises to 65% among displaced youth and 64% among young women. Education is also severely affected: 53% cite lost school years, school closures, or a lack of catch-up programs. Economic prospects are deteriorating, with 58% of respondents reporting an impact on their career opportunities and 94% of displaced youth believing that their economic inclusion has been compromised. Added to this is a weakening of the social fabric: 96% feel a loss of their sense of belonging and report increased discrimination. The effects vary by gender: young women face greater job insecurity and increased dependence on aid, while young men experience heightened pressure related to the responsibility of providing for their families.

The recommendations put forward by young people highlight five priorities. First, strengthen preparedness and resilience through investments in early warning systems, appropriate infrastructure, and community-based disaster management mechanisms. Second, promote climate education and awareness of rights to empower young people to take action. They also call for ambitious economic inclusion policies that promote employment, vocational training, and entrepreneurship among displaced youth or those at risk. Social cohesion is another key focus, achieved through the engagement of local leaders and the promotion of inclusive governance. Finally, they emphasize the urgent need to strengthen mental health and protection services, with particular attention to the specific needs of young women.

To learn more:

- > See the detailed analysis of the results of the study³⁹



Multisectoral Response and Community Resilience (Somalia, Puntland, and Somaliland)

In 2025, more than 316,000 people were internally displaced in Somalia due to consecutive droughts and poor rainy seasons. With inadequate basic infrastructure and essential services under severe strain, women and children were particularly vulnerable to food and health crises.

To address this situation, SIF's implemented a multisectoral approach combining humanitarian assistance with community resilience-building. SIF's distributed food and non-food items and provided support for access to water, hygiene, and sanitation, reaching 670 households. At the same time, existing water points were restored and participatory boreholes were drilled to ensure sustainable access to drinking water. Village committees were established to monitor the status of crops, livestock, and water resources in real time, enabling the rapid detection of emerging crises and the launch of appropriate interventions.

These actions enabled an early response to humanitarian needs, helping to reduce the risk of malnutrition among displaced populations and host communities. The active participation of local communities in planning and validating these actions strengthened their ownership of the solutions and their sense of responsibility. Coordination with local authorities, humanitarian clusters, and UN agencies has also improved, ensuring an integrated, rapid, and effective response to recurring crises.

the following notes: "Disasters, Climate Change, and Displacement," "How Does Water Feed Us?", "Pakistani Youth

- > SIF reiterates all the recommendations set forth in the following notes: "Disasters, Climate Change, and Displacement," "How Does Water Feed Us?", "Pakistani Youth"⁴⁰



³⁹ SIF, Youth facing displacements, 2025.

⁴⁰ SIF, Disasters, Climate Change and Displacement, 2025.

⁴¹ SIF, How does water feed us? 2024.

⁴² SIF, Youth facing displacements, 2025.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In the face of intensifying droughts, the expansion of arid zones, and the increase in internal displacement, States must adopt a systemic and multisectoral approach grounded in human rights, ensuring coherence between climate change mitigation, sustainable land management, and human mobility policies. Drought and desertification are not merely environmental crises, but systemic human rights crises that shape the dynamics of internal displacement, conflict, and fragility, and that require specific protection responses and an evolution of analytical frameworks and intervention mechanisms.

1. Guarantee the right of populations at risk of displacement caused by drought and desertification to freely choose their mobility strategies, ensuring a genuine balance between the options of staying—by preparing and adapting—and leaving.

To ensure that migration is never a forced choice but a voluntary option, it is a priority to guarantee the realisation of human rights in people's places of origin by strengthening preparedness and adaptation measures (access to water, food, essential services, and livelihoods). **The prevention of forced displacement must be at the heart of any strategy aimed at combating drought, desertification, and land degradation.**

2. Adopt a human rights-based approach that takes into account people's specific vulnerabilities and their intersectionality, and ensures their active participation, in accordance with the principle of "leaving no one behind."

This involves the **effective integration of gender issues** by ensuring safe spaces for participation and by supporting women's empowerment and decision-making authority. Age-

related issues must also be included to account for **the specific needs of children and youth** in efforts to prevent, adapt to, and respond to displacement, taking into consideration the increased risks to which they are exposed, particularly in terms of protection, education, and livelihoods.

3. Adopt human rights-based early warning and preparedness mechanisms that integrate environmental, social, humanitarian, and conflict data.

Because droughts develop gradually, they require integrated early warning systems that combine climate, hydrological, agricultural, and socioeconomic data. The triggering of a response should not rely solely on rainfall thresholds, but also on **indicators of actual human rights violations**, particularly regarding access to water, food, education, and healthcare.

4. Increase international funding for preparedness and adaptation, and develop mechanisms for proactive financing to address droughts.

Funding to combat climate change, desertification, and drought (the Global Environment Facility, the Green Climate Fund, the Loss and Damage Response Fund, etc.) must be directly accessible to affected communities and the civil society organizations supporting them, and must be more **flexible and better adapted to slow-onset crises**. Multi-year and locally targeted funding are essential to ensure the continuity of resilience efforts.

5. Ensure participatory governance of natural resources and secure the land rights of vulnerable and mobile populations to prevent conflicts.

The response to droughts and desertification must pay particular attention to vulnerable populations, pastoralist or mobile communities, and their land rights as an integral part of the solutions. Strengthening local governance and mediation mechanisms regarding access to resources, as well as adopting a **conflict-sensitive approach**, are essential to reducing community tensions. Responses must be grounded in the triple nexus approach of humanitarian aid, development, and peace.

6. Strengthen coherence among policies under the UNFCCC, the UNCCD, and other relevant international processes, in order to promote an integrated approach to issues related to climate change, droughts, and human mobility.

To this end, issues related to human mobility must be fully integrated into the conventions' policy frameworks⁴³, while improving the coordination and complementarity of the associated financing mechanisms⁴⁴. Furthermore, the development of initiatives and the sharing of tools among the relevant mechanisms of the UNFCCC and the UNCCD (notably the Working Group on Displacement of the Warsaw International Mechanism) must be actively supported.



⁴³ National Adaptation Plans (NAPs), Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs), National Action Plans (NAPs), and any strategy that contributes to combating drought, desertification, and land degradation.

⁴⁴ Green Climate Fund, Adaptation Fund, and Loss and Damage Fund.



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