

CO-CHAIRS COMMUNIQUÉ¹

The **International Seminar on Drought and Agriculture** was organized jointly by the governments of the Islamic Republic of Iran, the Kingdom of Netherlands, and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the UN (FAO) as part of celebrations on the World Day to Combat Desertification and Drought. The Seminar was held at FAO Headquarters in Rome, on 19 June 2017, and attended by delegates from Member Countries, as well as representatives from international organizations, civil society, private sector and other stakeholders.

The seminar was convened to express concern about the significant negative effects of drought worldwide and to call for a move away from crisis-led drought responses to more proactive, integrated approaches that build the resilience of communities and nations in drought-prone regions.

Drought is a devastating natural hazard. It threatens all people globally – not just those living in arid and semiarid regions. Climate change is only going to intensify droughts and increase their frequency across the globe. The consequences can be stark, often **reversing gains in food security and poverty reduction and hampering efforts to reach Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) 1 and 2**. Drought can exacerbate social tensions and fuel civil unrest.

Despite the known impacts of droughts and the **availability of technologies** to prepare for them, drought management and planning is often **overlooked until a crisis unfolds**. Reactive, crisis-led responses give rise to fragmented policy spaces in which drought mitigation efforts lack cross-sectoral coordination and inevitably underperform.

The international community has recognized the severe consequences of drought and the need for **innovative approaches** for managing and preventing it, including in various initiatives, declarations and frameworks.² National, bilateral and multilateral responses to the most recent drought and famine in Africa and the Near East have been strong.

¹ *This Communiqué represents the views of the seminar organizers and encompasses the substantive discussions held during its organization and at the seminar.*

² *E.g. the International Drought Initiative (2010); the Lincoln Declaration on Drought Indices (2010); the High-Level Meeting on National Drought Policy (2013); the Declaration of the Drought Disaster Resilience and Sustainability Initiative (2013); the Declaration of the Third African Ministerial Meeting for Disaster Risk Reduction and the Declaration of the Summit (2014); the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015–2030 (2015); the Paris Agreement on climate change (2015); and the Windhoek Declaration for Enhancing Resilience to Drought in Africa (2016).*

Nevertheless, there is a continuing need to learn from **best practices, share knowledge, and promote proactive, integrated approaches** that engage actors within and beyond the “drought community”, to engage actors across sectors. There was strong consensus among seminar participants on the **four thematic areas** for coping with drought to avoid it becoming famine:

- 1) **Fostering integrated water and soil management.**
- 2) **Connecting farmers to technologies.**
- 3) **Moving from reactive to proactive management in drought emergencies.**
- 4) **Mainstreaming drought management in the context of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.**

The **Seminar Convenors** recognize the need to further develop technological and institutional measures for the coordinated management of water and soils by adopting cross-sectoral mechanisms – drawing on participatory planning processes and lessons learned – to ensure efficient responses to drought. The global community, including governments, intergovernmental organizations, bilateral aid agencies, civil society, non-governmental organizations and the private sector, should **strengthen coordination and foster partnerships** for the effective delivery of interventions to increase drought resilience. Public and private investments are needed to train farmers in integrated land and water management practices as a way of enhancing their **drought preparedness**.

The **Seminar Convenors** recognize the need to transfer knowledge from governments and scientific entities to farmers and food producers, to promote and develop farmer capacities, and to bridge the yawning gap in access to information. Local-level drought indices and early-warning systems are needed, and these should be developed using multidisciplinary approaches and to ensure equal access by developed and developing countries. The **Seminar Convenors** agree that assistance for developing countries should include identifying effective adaptation practices and needs, determining country and regional priorities, and systematically prioritizing investment in technology-transfer projects and programmes aimed at effective drought management.

Responding to drought at the onset of a crisis is a reactive strategy that misses opportunities for cost-effective mitigation. Institutions and policy-makers need to shift paradigms in drought management, away from **emergency response models** towards **proactive preparedness plans** that reduce **vulnerability** to, and the **impacts** of, drought. Modern monitoring and forecasting systems are crucial for predicting drought and thereby allowing time for preventive action; the **Seminar Convenors**, therefore, underline the need for further capacity building in drought monitoring, forecasting, assessment, mitigation, adaptation and preparedness techniques and methodologies.

The political momentum for implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development provides an opportunity to mainstream innovative drought-management approaches that increase resilience, reduce risks and create partnerships. National policies should include proactive measures on drought management and mitigation and embed the key role of agrometeorological data. The **Seminar Convenors** advocate the development of **national drought plans** in all countries. Such plans should aim to **build the resilience** of the most vulnerable groups living in **drought-prone areas** and to strengthen the capacity of such groups to prepare for and cope with drought.

The **Seminar Convenors** commit to supporting further **regional and global consultations** to ensure the timely sharing of best practices, the review of progress on proactive and coordinated drought management, and the identification of the collective actions needed to help drought-prone countries and regions prepare for, respond to, and effectively manage drought.

The **Seminar Convenors** agree to establish, in consultation with all relevant stakeholders, a **common learning, sharing and planning platform on best practices in drought management** to enable the design of multi-sectoral initiatives that benefit all stakeholders. FAO is invited to host this platform.

The **Seminar Convenors** commit to **working together and through existing regional and international bodies** to address structural issues as a way of fostering proactive and **coordinated drought preparedness and management**, including integrated water and soil management, technology transfer for agriculture adaptation to extreme climatic events, and resource mobilization to support such actions.

Recognizing the need for more attention on drought preparedness, the **Seminar Convenors** highly commend the seminar's outcomes and pledge to ensure their wide dissemination.