Global Drought Outlook 2025

Posted at: 20/06/2025

Global Drought Outlook 2025: Rising Risks in a Drying World

Context

The **Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)** has released its latest report, **Global Drought Outlook 2025**, warning of the **worsening frequency and severity of droughts** worldwide. As per the report, nearly **40% of the Earth's surface** is now experiencing more frequent and intense droughts, making drought a major **climate and developmental challenge**.

About Global Drought Outlook 2025

- **Released by:** OECD
- **Title:** *Global Drought Outlook: Trends, Impacts and Policies to Adapt to a Drier World, 2025*
- **Focus:** Global assessment of **drought trends**, their **impacts**, and **policy measures** for adaptation

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Understanding Drought and Its Types

- **Definition:** Drought is a **hydrological imbalance** caused by prolonged periods of **drier-than-normal** conditions, reducing soil moisture, surface water, and groundwater.
- **Types of Drought:**
    - **Meteorological Drought:** Due to **significantly below-average rainfall**.
    - **Agricultural Drought:** When **soil moisture is insufficient** for crop growth.

- **Hydrological Drought:** When **rivers, lakes, and groundwater levels** fall below normal, affecting human and ecological water use.

Global Drought Trends

- **Drought-affected land area has doubled** since **1900**, due to **climate change** and unsustainable **land-use practices**.
- In **2023**, about **48% of global land** experienced at least **one month of extreme drought**.
- **Hotspots:** Western **United States**, **South America**, **Europe**, **Africa**, and **Australia**.
- Around **62% of monitored aquifers** show **declining trends**; major **river flows** are decreasing.
- If **global warming reaches +4°C**, droughts could become **7 times more frequent and intense by 2100**, posing a **global systemic risk**.

Impact of Drought

1. Ecological Impact

- **37% of global soils** have dried significantly since **1980**.
- Decreased **river flow** and **groundwater depletion** are impacting natural ecosystems.

2. Economic Impact

- **Drought-related losses** are rising by **3–7.5% annually**.
- An average drought now causes **twice the economic damage** compared to the year **2000**.
- Losses are expected to rise by **35% by 2035**.
- **Agriculture** is most affected — **crop yields can drop by 22%** in drought years.

- Severe droughts have caused up to a **40% decline in river trade** and **25% reduction in hydropower generation**.

3. Social Impact

- Though droughts account for just **6% of disasters**, they cause **34% of disaster-related deaths**.
- Major cause of **hunger**, **forced migration**, and **displacement**, especially in **Sub-Saharan Africa**.
- Linked to **social unrest** and **political instability** due to competition over scarce resources.

Policy Measures and Solutions

- **Integrated Water Resource Management (IWRM):** Promotes **efficient use**, **balanced withdrawal and renewal**, and **equitable access**.
- **Nature-Based Solutions (NbS):** Includes **urban de-sealing** and **landscape restoration** to enhance water retention.
- **Sustainable Agriculture:** Use of **drought-tolerant crops** and **efficient irrigation** — can reduce water usage by up to **76%**.
- **Urban Planning:** Urban de-sealing can help **recharge aquifers** — e.g., U.S. models show **780 million m³/year recovery**.
- **Early Warning Systems:** Emphasizes better **monitoring**, **forecasting**, and **risk mapping**.
- **Policy Integration:** Climate adaptation must be embedded in **water management** and **land-use planning**.
- **Cross-Sectoral Collaboration:** Involving **transport**, **energy**, **construction**, and **health** sectors.
- **Economic Returns:** Every **$1 invested in drought resilience** yields a **$2–$10 return** in avoided damage and enhanced productivity.

Conclusion

Droughts are no longer isolated events; they have become **global systemic threats**, impacting **water, food, energy**, and **human security**. The OECD emphasizes the need for **proactive, integrated, and collaborative strategies**. Early investment in **resilience and adaptation** will be critical to ensure **sustainable water security** for future generations — a priority for both **climate governance** and **development policy**, especially relevant to countries like India facing growing water stress.