

Drylands Facing Change: Changing the Narrative about Migrations

Policy Brief

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Key messages:

01. Environmental change is rarely the prime driver of migrations from drylands
02. Policy environments are needed that favor regional mobility and cross-border livestock trade



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Fig. 1 The African Union Policy Framework for Pastoralism in Africa is part of changing the narratives on mobile pastoralism on a global scale



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Fig. 2 Women empowerment: Strengthening dryland women's land rights

03. Green energy investments in drylands may cause growing pressures on resources and stimulate migrations



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Fig. 3 Abandoned ksar in Oualad Idriss (Morocco)

04. Innovative climate-smart agriculture can help dryland communities become more resilient

Challenges

Drylands cover two-fifths of the Earth's land surface, support millions of people, supply agricultural markets, contribute to national economies and provide ecosystem services. Challenges linked to climate change, population growth and political instability are becoming increasingly complex. Political concerns regarding uncontrollable largescale population movements as a consequence of climate change and environmental stressors are growing. The Mediterranean, the center of Europe's engagement with the drylands and the main entry point for migrants moving toward Europe, is itself affected by warming and socio-demographic crisis. We need a comprehensive understanding of the drivers of migrations and sustainable innovative solutions.

Findings

Empirical studies of migrations in West Africa's drylands show that migrations are a well-established strategy to diversify income, increase assets and make best use of resource availability, which varies by season and locality. Better income opportunities and the desire for progress, prosperity and a different lifestyle – inspired by the prestige and economic achievements of previous migrants – are important motives for migration.

When environmental factors drive migration, the causes are mostly slow-onset environmental changes – such as land degradation that undermine agricultural livelihoods and food security.

Governments still opt for large-scale infrastructure projects such as solar power plants or commercial crop farming despite evidence that such investments increase land degradation, alienate communities from their land and stimulate migrations.

Programs that foster informal education, youth leadership and women empowerment can be catalysts of drylands communities' development. Greater representation of women in land governance systems is beneficial for long-term adaptation of local communities to current challenges.

Actions

We must ensure that historical migratory routes stay regional and safe, rather than become inter-continental and unsafe. Dryland stewards are too important to be neglected and must be politically supported. Regional and international policy initiatives in support of the diversity of local livelihood strategies are needed to project the voices of dryland dwellers and share their knowledge of ecosystem dynamics.

The full recognition of women's rights and their leadership role in drylands communities is required to strengthen the awareness on land and home.



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Fig. 4 Smart agriculture in the western Negev region (Israel): extremely degraded cropland (left); olive trees with alfalfa intercropping (right)

Dryland communities should be provided with all means to transform and reorient agricultural systems to effectively support development and ensure food security in a changing climate. Technological solutions from the more resilient dryland countries should be transferred to the most vulnerable countries by means of demonstration objects and technology transfer.