

The Drought Action Catalyst

A country platform for anticipatory, financed, government-led drought resilience

Summary

Drought affects every sector of the economy, costing an estimated USD 307 billion a year and projected to affect 75% of the world's population by 2050. Transmitted through the water–land–food–energy nexus, it is a systemic economic risk—cascading from failed rains into food, energy, trade, and fiscal shocks. Yet 88% of weather-related disaster finance still arrives after the damage has occurred, even though every dollar invested proactively can generate returns of up to tenfold. The Drought Action Catalyst, launched by the International Water Management Institute (IWMI) on behalf of CGIAR at sixteenth session of the Conference of Parties to the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD COP16), provides the missing country-level delivery layer that converts proven science, digital innovation, and global commitments into government-led drought action. More than a delivery mechanism, the Catalyst is a programmatic climate-finance architecture—a country platform that reviews National Adaptation Plan (NAP) and Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC) drought priorities to identify those with genuine investment proposal—not all will be bankable—and converts these into country-owned investment pipelines, uses public concessional finance to derisk early action, and enables multilateral development bank(MDB), domestic budget, private, and loss-and-damage finance to act before, during,

and after drought shocks, generating measurable resilience dividends. This design aligns with the country-platform models now supported by the Green Climate Fund (GCF) and the MDBs. Rather than creating a separate drought-only financing stream, the Catalyst makes existing multi-hazard and blended climate finance work for drought—supplying the drought-specific risk profiles, triggers, and governed pipelines that generic financing streams lack. Working inside national institutions through three pillars—monitoring and early warning; vulnerability and risk profiling; and preparedness and anticipatory action—the Catalyst delivers, in each partner country, mandated drought governance, risk-informed policy, financed early-action protocols, inclusive digital advisory systems, and a trained national team. The system is then transferred to national ownership by 2030. Its financing architecture works on both fronts: it realigns public capital— domestic preparedness budget lines, contingency reserves, and international climate finance—toward anticipatory action, while structuring four underutilized pools of non-public capital— corporate supply-chain investment, corporate social investment, commercial and blended finance, and environmental markets— into an investment-ready pipeline. The Catalyst seeks USD 10 million in seed co-financing (2026–27) to confirm four to five pilot countries and deliver evidence for UNCCD COP17 and beyond, including negotiations for a global drought regime.



Deduru Oya Reservoir affected by severe drought (photo: Samurdhi Ranasinghe/IWMI)

Why now: a slow-moving global catastrophe the world can anticipate—but does not

Drought is the only major natural hazard that develops slowly enough to be anticipated, yet it remains the hazard for which the world is least prepared. Between 2000 and 2024, droughts affected over 1.6 billion people in 117 countries, causing 25,000 deaths and more than USD 240 billion in direct damages (European Commission Joint Research Centre and UNCCD 2024). When taking into account trade disruption, energy failures, health impacts, and ecosystem degradation, drought now costs an estimated USD 307 billion annually. By 2050, 75% of the global population is expected to be affected (UNCCD 2025). The period from 2023–2025 brought some of the most destructive droughts on record: more than 90 million people in Eastern and Southern Africa faced severe food insecurity; hydropower generation collapsed to 7% of capacity, resulting in 21-hour daily blackouts in Zambia; Panama Canal transits were reduced by one-third, and coffee prices reached nearly a 50-year high (UNCCD 2025;

Tsegei et al. 2023). These cascading impacts show drought propagating through the water–land–food–energy nexus, warranting its treatment as a systemic economic risk rather than a sectoral agricultural hazard. Moderate to severe droughts reduce GDP per capita growth by 0.39–0.85%, with low- and middle-income countries in arid regions suffering the greatest relative losses (Zaveri et al. 2023).

The prevailing pattern of drought response is a ‘hydro-illogical cycle’: awareness surges only when water scarcity becomes critical, motivation collapses into apathy once the rains return, and the same losses repeat with the next event (Wilhite 2012). Breaking this cycle is the Catalyst’s founding purpose—making proactive drought resilience, not crisis response, the default operating mode of governments, financial institutions, and communities. Doing so requires linking observed drought conditions and projected drought risk under climate change directly to adaptation options and investment choices, so that every warning, risk profile, and pipeline entry reflects both current exposure and future trajectories.

USD 307 billion

estimated annual global cost of drought

75%

of the world’s population will be affected by drought by 2050

90 million+

people in Eastern and Southern Africa faced severe food insecurity between 2023–25

0.38–0.85%

GDP per capita growth lost to moderate–severe droughts

The proactive investment gap: finance still arrives after the damage is done

Despite overwhelming evidence that proactive drought management delivers returns, 88% of weather-related disaster finance still flows toward post-event response. Meanwhile, humanitarian need has almost tripled—from USD 20.3 billion in 2016 (59% funded) to USD 56.1 billion in 2023 (43% funded) (IWMI 2026). The current model is both reactive and underfunded. The economic case for reversing this approach (Figure 1) is compelling: mitigation generates returns of at least USD 2 per dollar spent, preparedness around USD 6, early warning systems up to USD 10, and nature-based drought solutions up to USD 27 in ecosystem services and livelihood benefits (OECD 2025; Thomas et al. 2024). Crucially, this is not primarily a funding-volume problem: it is a structural one. More precisely, it is a market-formation failure—and this is the additionality case for adaptation finance: without grant and concessional public climate finance to create the data,

governance, triggers and verification infrastructure, private capital, MDB lending, and domestic budget reallocations cannot price drought risk or commit to reducing it. These public goods will not be produced by markets alone, yet every other class of capital depends on them. Equally, the financial risk of anticipatory adaptation is not yet well understood by financiers—one reason even reactive adaptation struggles to attract funding—so the Catalyst leads with the opportunity: quantified avoided losses, verified returns, and appraisable pipelines that give capital something to commit to rather than a risk to avoid. Capital—public and private—is available. What is missing in most drought-prone countries is the pipeline of investable, governable propositions, supported by triggers, risk profiles, and verification mechanisms that finance can commit against. The purpose of the Catalyst is to build precisely this pipeline. The Catalyst therefore targets the drought preparedness and anticipatory-action segment—small today only because governed pipelines are missing—and connects it upward into the broader blended climate-finance architecture.

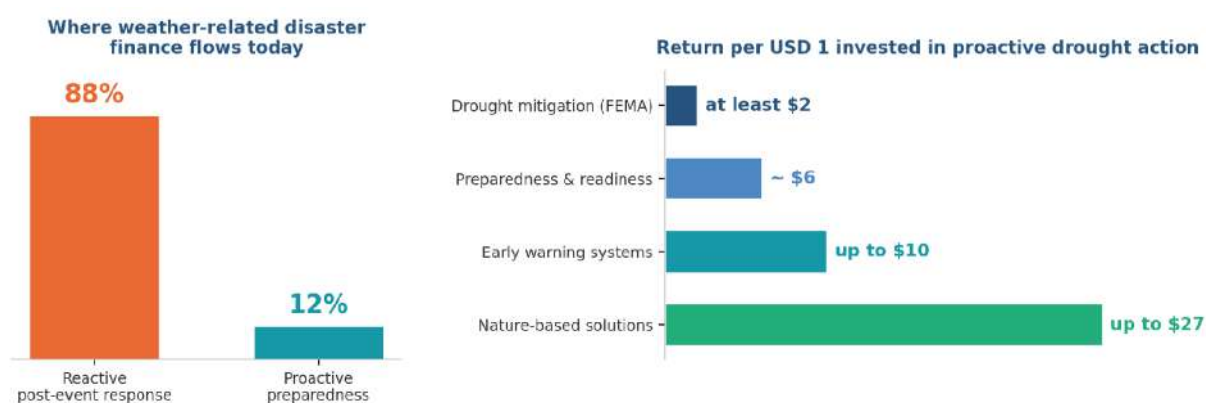


Figure 1. The drought finance imbalance and the returns on proactive investment.

Source: IWMI 2026; OECD 2025; Thomas et al. 2024; FEMA estimates.

The policy window: converging mandates, aligned capability

At UNCCD COP16 in Riyadh (December 2024), nearly 200 countries pledged to prioritize drought resilience, and the Riyadh Global Drought Resilience Partnership mobilized USD 12.15 billion for 80 vulnerable countries. However, parties were unable to agree on the structure of a global drought regime (IWMI, 2026). That negotiation continues through UNCCD COP17 (Mongolia, August 2026). The same shift the Catalyst advances—from reactive relief to anticipatory, funded, and institutionally owned drought management—is now being demanded simultaneously across several global processes.

These include the UNCCD drought-regime negotiations, which need field evidence on triggers, governance and early action; the UNFCCC Global Goal on Adaptation and the persistent National Adaptation Plan–Nationally Determined Contribution (NAP–NDC) implementation gap; the Sendai Framework and the Early Warnings for All (EW4ALL) initiative’s universal-coverage

target for 2027; climate and disaster finance instruments including the Riyadh Global Drought Resilience Partnership, the Green Climate Fund, the Fund for Responding to Loss and Damage, and development bank lending—all of which require the risk profiles and trigger architectures that the Catalyst generates. The Catalyst also supports the SDG 2 and SDG 6 review process and the 2026 UN Water Conference. On the supply side, CGIAR’s 2025–30 portfolio gives the Catalyst a permanent delivery platform.

The CGIAR Climate Action Program anchors CGIAR’s climate financing for adaptation and mitigation through public and private as well as emerging channels, early warning and anticipatory action, while drought-tolerant systems, landscape approaches, policy engagement, scaling programs, and the CGIAR Accelerators on gender, capacity sharing, and digital transformation feed into all three pillars. IWMI leads water systems science across this portfolio. The Catalyst engages all of these processes from a single evidence base of country results, policy briefs, and regular progress reporting.



Farmers after completing pesticide spraying at the Abu Kishik Farm in Mafraq, Jordan
(photo: Seersa Abaza/IWMI)

The Catalyst: a country platform for drought resilience

Launched at UNCCD COP16 and developed by IWMI on behalf of CGIAR, the Drought Action Catalyst closes the gap between what is known about drought and what is achieved in practice. The knowledge, technology, and evidence required for early action already exist; what is missing is the mechanism to deliver them on time to the ministers, task forces, extension agents, and communities responsible for taking action. The Catalyst is that mechanism: a demand-driven platform that works within national institutions to build integrated drought monitoring, risk profiling, and anticipatory action systems that countries can own, operate, and sustain. Pipeline building is not confined to science programs: complementary initiatives such as the Water Resilience Tracker are already supporting countries including Malawi, Nepal, and Brazil to review and prioritize the water and drought commitments in their NDCs and NAPs—an operational base the Catalyst connects to and builds on. Consistent with the country-platform model emphasized by the MDBs and the GCF, the Catalyst is country-driven, strategic, tailored, and investment-linked: the government sets priorities, the platform organizes financiers and technical partners around

a single national pipeline, and every system deployed is tied to an investment case. The Catalyst nests within—rather than duplicates—these national climate and adaptation financing platforms: it provides the drought-specific entry point that multi-hazard adaptation finance routinely underserves, because drought's slow-onset nature lacks the event clarity of floods or cyclones.

The Catalyst (Figure 2) occupies a distinct and currently vacant position in the global drought architecture. Existing initiatives are strong on political mobilization (International Drought Resilience Alliance [IDRA]), normative frameworks (UNCCD and World Meteorological Organization/Global Water Partnership [WMO/GWP] Integrated Drought Management Programme [IDMP] (WMO and GWP 2014), early warning coverage (EW4All) and finance instruments (Global Shield, the Fund for Responding to Loss and Damage, and development banks). Few, however, are set up to co-design an operational system across all three drought management pillars, embed that system within national ministry for three to five years, and then transition it to national ownership. The Catalyst converts COP commitments into systems that work at the district level, and converts Riyadh Global Drought Resilience Partnership pledges into national results.

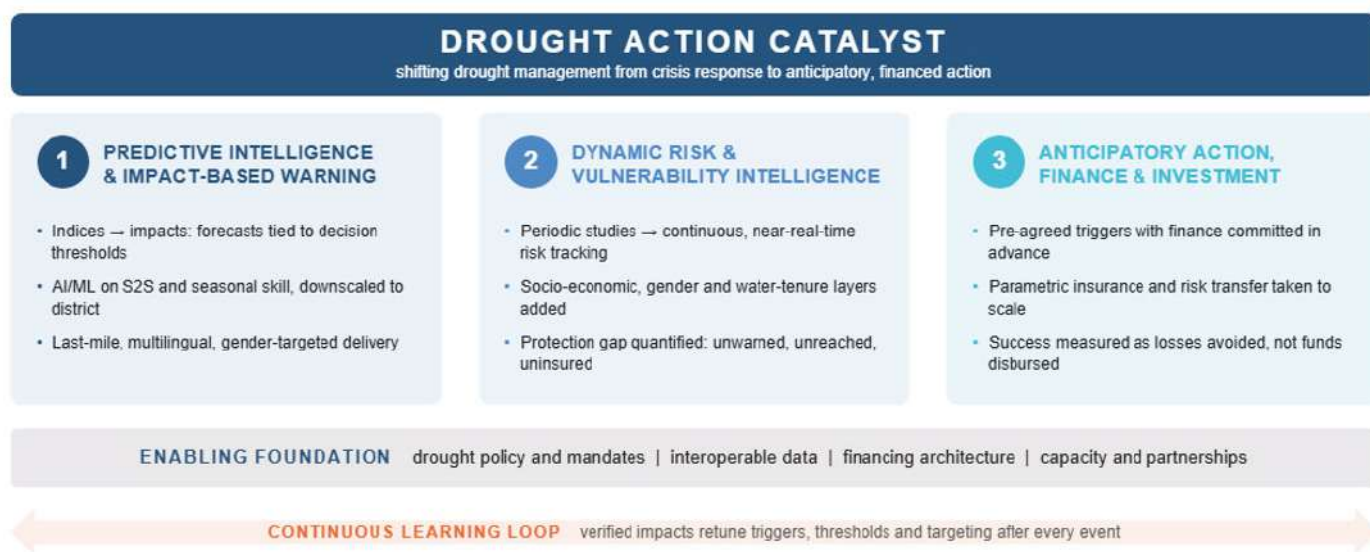


Figure 2. The three pillars of the Drought Action Catalyst, built on the WMO/GWP Integrated Drought Management framework
Source: WMO and GWP 2014.

Why IWMI and CGIAR are uniquely positioned

No other platform combines: (i) direct access to CGIAR's water, climate, agriculture, livestock, and socioeconomic science; (ii) integrated capability across all three pillars rather than one; and (iii) a track record of co-designing and transferring operational national drought systems—South Asia Drought Monitoring System (SADMS), India Drought Monitor, Pakistan Drought Monitoring System (PakDMS), MENAdrought (Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, Tunisia), Zambia Drought Monitoring System (ZADMS), Afghanistan Drought Early Warning Decision Support (AF-DEWS), and Mali Drought Monitoring System (MaliDMS)—all still in use within national institutions today. These systems

are not confined to event response: they feed continuous risk profiling and pipeline prioritization across the full drought cycle, with pre-agreed triggers serving only the anticipatory disbursement sub-stream. The Catalyst is deliberately not a new organization, a rival project, or a humanitarian response system. It is a time-bound accelerator with an explicit exit strategy, designed to make itself obsolete in every country by 2030. The comparative advantage of IWMI and CGIAR extends beyond science delivery: it lies in converting science into finance-ready public goods—risk analytics, trigger protocols, investment cases, MRV (measurement, reporting, and verification) systems, and institutional capacity—that accredited entities and governments can use across all sources of funding.

The model is proven at field scale. In pilot districts in South Asia, monitoring-linked advisories enabled real-time crop switching and irrigation scheduling that raised yields even during drought periods—soybean by 700–800 kg/acre, pigeon pea by 500–600 kg/acre and cotton by 1,200–1,400 kg/acre—equivalent to 20–40% gains over control fields (IWMI 2026). Threshold-based decision protocols now link drought indices to pre-planned interventions in Morocco and Jordan; in Zambia, monitoring triggers are wired to concrete contingency measures—seed distribution, water rationing rules, and livestock advisories; and national and provincial

contingency planning in Pakistan and Sri Lanka runs on systems co-developed by IWMI (2026).

What we deliver to partner countries

Each engagement is operationalized through a co-designed National Drought Action template, tailored to national realities with government agencies, technical institutions and community actors. Across every engagement, the Catalyst delivers eight interlocking assets — designed from day one to remain when IWMI steps back:

Governance and institutions

A multistakeholder national drought task force embedded in a permanent lead ministry—not a project unit—coordinating agriculture, water, meteorology, and disaster management, with drought triggers formally agreed and issued by a mandated national authority.

Risk knowledge

A national drought risk profile disaggregated by sector, geography, gender, and social group—identifying who and what is exposed and why—as the analytical basis for targeting interventions and for accessing climate and disaster-risk finance.

Digital innovation

Monitoring and early warning running on national data infrastructure; decision-support dashboards for scenario planning; and transfer of the SukhaRakshak AI advisory architecture—voice, SMS, and app delivery in national languages—which is open-source, interoperable and low-cost by design.

Finance and investment readiness

A pipeline of pre-appraised, bankable propositions—with triggers, outcome indicators and verification—that public budgets, climate funds, lenders and corporate capital can commit against (Section 8), shifting spending from relief lines to budgeted, anticipatory protection.

Policy and planning

A national drought plan with legal and policy standing, integrated into NAPs, NDCs, and national development strategies; dedicated preparedness budget lines, and contingency reserves with explicit trigger mechanisms, proposed through the national budget process.

Drought resilience innovation

Deployment of proven interventions across the drought cycle: drought-tolerant varieties and climate-smart agriculture; watershed restoration, managed aquifer recharge and nature-based solutions; index insurance and anticipatory cash transfers wired directly to monitoring triggers (Pek and Salman 2023; Banerjee et al. 2023).

GESI by design

Vulnerability analysis disaggregated by gender, age, and social group; at least 40% representation of women and marginalized groups in drought planning bodies; women's organizations empowered to manage contingency funds; and GESI results tracked explicitly in the MEL system.

Capacity and handover

Trained and certified national teams across government—not only project staff—sustained through Training-of-Trainers and South–South exchanges, with a time-bound, three-phase transition to complete national operational ownership by 2030.

These deliverables operate at three distinct levels: outputs (operational systems, plans, and trained teams); investment assets (risk profiles, triggers, and MRV data that make projects appraisable); and financeable sub-program (bundled early warning, anticipatory action, and resilient water investments that can enter national budgets, GCF and Adaptation Fund proposals, or MDB operations as discrete, costed components). Together they constitute a finance-ready asset package that a government or accredited entity can take directly into any funding window.

The last-mile layer deserves emphasis: SukhaRakshak AI, IWMI's multilingual drought advisory system, currently reaches approximately 50,000 farmers and is on track to reach one

million within 24 months. Unlike generic chatbots, every advisory draws on IWMI's own monitoring systems and vetted agronomic evidence, making each response traceable and defensible. Under the Catalyst, the architecture—not any single country implementation—is transferred, running on each country's data, languages, cropping systems, and institutional channels (IWMI 2026).

Delivery follows a demand-driven, locally led sequence in each country: forming the multistakeholder drought task team; creating or revising the national drought plan in line with NAPs and NDCs; deploying monitoring systems, dashboards, and AI advisory services; piloting community-based measures such as anticipatory cash transfers, water conservation, and

climate-smart farming; building capacity through training, workshops and South–South exchanges; and integrating with existing social protection systems, extension services, and adaptation plans. IWMI’s role deliberately evolves across three phases—(i) principal implementer (2026–27), (ii) technical advisor and quality assurer (2027–28), and (iii) light-touch peer-learning facilitator (2028–30)—until national institutions hold complete operational ownership. By the end of Phase 3, every participating country runs independent monitoring on national infrastructure, institutionalized drought governance with dedicated funding, trained personnel maintaining all tools and plans, and active membership of regional and global learning networks that outlast the project.

Theory of Change: pre-agreed triggers, financed actions, and national ownership

The Catalyst’s Theory of Change (Figure 3) starts from a diagnosis of why proven drought solutions keep falling short: knowledge does not reach decision-makers; responsibility is fragmented across ministries with no agreed trigger; finance is misaligned toward crisis response; and warnings systematically bypass women, youth, and pastoralists.

Its core causal claim is that if a country has operational monitoring with agreed triggers (Pillar 1), risk profiles that name who and what is exposed (Pillar 2), and pre-agreed, financed early actions embedded in permanent institutions (Pillar 3), then warnings convert to action inside the lead time—and if that action is inclusive and nationally owned, the gains outlast the project. Investments span the full cycle: pre-drought (recharge, storage, restoration, drought-tolerant systems, insurance, and readiness), during drought (including trigger-based anticipatory transfers, emergency water and fodder, and safety-net scale-up) and post-drought (restocking, rehabilitation, and after-action learning fed back into plans and budgets). The adaptation impact pathway is explicit: investment in monitoring, risk knowledge, and pre-agreed finance enables institutions to act within the warning lead time, producing avoided losses and protected assets whose resilience dividends are reinvested. The pathway rests on stated assumptions—sustained government commitment, timely data access, and finance disbursing against triggers—while its principal risks (political turnover, data gaps, and contested triggers) are mitigated through legally mandated task forces, open data standards, and independent trigger audits.

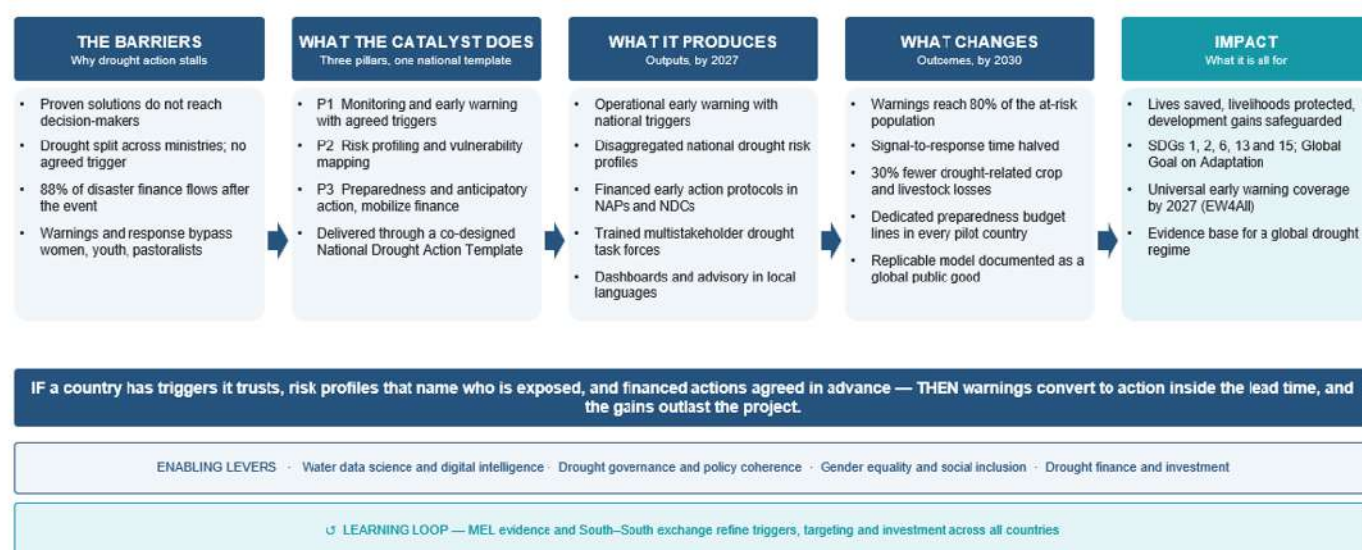


Figure 3. Theory of Change: from barriers to a replicable global public good by 2030

Source: IWMI 2026



Recession agriculture in a river bed in Myanmar (photo: Matthew McCartney)

Financing the shift: align public capital, unlock non-public capital

Public capital is—and will remain—the foundation of drought finance, but today it is locked into the wrong end of the cycle. The Catalyst realigns this capital across three layers: domestic budgets (dedicated preparedness budget lines, and contingency reserves with explicit triggers linked to early warning levels, plus evidence-based reallocation from reactive relief spending); international public finance (the Green Climate Fund, Adaptation Fund, Fund for Responding to Loss and Damage, development bank lending, and Riyadh Global Drought Resilience Partnership commitments—all of which disburse against exactly the risk profiles, triggers, and national plans the Catalyst generates)—noting that the Fund for Responding to Loss and Damage is engaged strictly within its mandate for economic and non-economic loss and damage from extreme and slow-onset events such as drought, complementing rather than substituting for adaptation finance; and anticipatory humanitarian finance (pre-arranged, trigger-based instruments that release funds before impacts escalate) (IWMI 2026; Ikeda, 2021).

Realigned public capital is necessary but not sufficient. Public sources dominate drought finance to a degree that is

neither sustainable nor necessary. The binding constraint on broadening the base is rarely capital availability but the absence of investable, governable propositions. Four largely untapped pools are available, each requiring a different unlock (Table 1). The Catalyst's diagnostics, mandated triggers, disaggregated risk profiles, and verification-ready data supply precisely these unlocks—layering each pool on top of, and de-risking each pool through, the public foundation.

A layered financing architecture matches each instrument to its purpose: readiness grants for systems and institutions; investment grants for public goods such as monitoring, risk analytics, and MRV; concessional loans for revenue-linked assets including irrigation, storage, and value-chain infrastructure; guarantees and first-loss capital to crowd in private investment; parametric insurance and contingent finance for shocks; and results-based payments for verified resilience outcomes. These instruments operate on deliberately different time horizons: anticipatory instruments release within days to weeks of agreed triggers; response and recovery finance disburses over months; and long-term resilience investment—where the broader climate-finance strategy's instruments sit—matures over years. The Catalyst adds value at the short end of this spectrum while building the pipelines that connect it to the long end.

Table 1. Four pools of non-public capital for drought resilience, and the unlock each requires

Pool	Scale and evidence	What it will fund	Unlock required
Corporate supply-chain capital	Agribusinesses already co-invest in drought-proofing sourcing catchments, partnering with governments on watershed programs spanning millions of hectares.	Catchment-level water security where a firm has a sourcing interest.	Credible, shared measurement of catchment water balance and yield stability.
Corporate social investment	Mandatory and voluntary corporate-responsibility regimes channel billions of dollars a year, with environmental sustainability a fast-growing share.	Community assets, the corpus layer of local resilience funds, GESI-targeted components.	Pre-appraised project pipelines, so corporate committees can commit inside their own approval cycles.
Commercial and blended capital	Subnational resilience financing backed by development banks increasingly carries explicit private-capital mobilization components.	Revenue-linked assets: micro-irrigation, solar aggregation, and value-chain infrastructure.	Outcome verification and disbursement-linked indicators that a lender will accept.
Environmental markets	Verified restoration outcomes are already generated at scale—large watershed portfolios have produced substantial verified net carbon balances.	Restoration, agroforestry, soil carbon, and groundwater recharge.	Registry-grade MRV and clarity on who holds the credit.

What success looks like by 2030

Outcome area	2030 target (baselines set in year one of each country's engagement)
Early warning coverage	80% of target population receiving timely, gender-disaggregated drought warnings
Response time	50% reduction in average time from drought signal to institutional response
Agricultural resilience	30% reduction in drought-related crop and livestock losses in pilot areas
Financing shift	Dedicated drought preparedness budget lines or contingency facilities in all pilot countries
Governance	Operational national drought plans integrated into NAPs/NDCs in all pilot countries
GESI	40% representation of women and marginalized groups in drought planning bodies
Beneficiaries reached	Number of direct and indirect beneficiaries of early warning and anticipatory action (aligned with GCF core indicators), disaggregated by gender and quantified against year-one baselines
Avoided losses and assets protected	Economic value of avoided crop, livestock, and infrastructure losses, and value of productive assets protected, verified through counterfactual evaluation

Intermediate milestones by 2027 keep the platform accountable early: in every pilot country, at least one anticipatory action triggered by an agreed threshold rather than a crisis; a functioning national drought task force with women and pastoralist representation; a preparedness budget line

proposed through the national budget process; and formally mandated drought triggers. Independent counterfactual evaluations in at least two pilot countries will test the return-on-investment thesis directly, and impact monitoring will follow established WMO/IDMP baselines (Smith et al. 2025).

Roadmap and the ask

Phase 1 . 2026-27

Foundation: Global Hub, 2-3 pilot countries confirmed, baselines by Q4 2026, seed finance and MOUs, and first tools deployed

Phase 2 . 2027-28

Prove: full three-pillar operation, first threshold-triggered anticipatory actions, interim model assessment, and evidence at **COP17**

Phase 3 . 2028-30

Scale: regional delivery hubs, policy and finance mainstreaming, full national handover, and impact verification

In climate-finance terms, this roadmap corresponds to four phases: (1) readiness (2026)—readiness grants, countryplatform establishment, and baselines; (2) incubation (2026-27)—pilots, feasibility studies, and the first threshold-triggered actions; (3) programmatic scale-up (2027-29)—full platform operation and programmatic funding proposals; and (4) integration (2029-30)—national budget integration and the crowding-in of private and blended finance.

The Catalyst seeks approximately USD 5-10 million in initial co-financing (2026-27) from climate funds (GCF, Adaptation Fund), development banks, and bilateral partners to: (i) operate the IWMI-hosted Global Hub; (ii) confirm two to three pilot

countries across South Asia, Eastern and Southern Africa and MENA, with baselines by Q4 2026; (iii) stand up national drought task forces and deploy triggers, dashboards, and the AI advisory architecture; and (iv) deliver evidence into UNCCD COP17 (Mongolia, August 2026), the 2026 UN Water Conference, and the negotiations for a global drought regime.

For governments, the Catalyst offers a ready-made, nationally owned pathway to meet NAP, NDC, Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction, and EW4All commitments—and to convert relief line items into budgeted, anticipatory For nonpublic capital, it offers the diagnostics, triggers, and verification that turn drought resilience into an investable asset class.



Dried out river in the North West Province of Sri Lanka (photo: Samurdhi Ranasinghe/IWMI)

References

- Banerjee, Rupsha, Francesco Fava, Nkoji Kahi et al. 2023. *Strengthening Financial Resilience to Drought: A Feasibility Study For An Index-based Drought Risk Financing Solution For Pastoralists In Niger*. World Bank. <https://hdl.handle.net/10568/151871>
- European Commission Joint Research Centre and UNCCD (United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification). 2024. *World Drought Atlas*, edited by Alessandro Toreti, Daouda Tsegai, and Lorenzo Rossi. Publications Office of the European Union. <https://doi.org/10.2760/3842670>.
- Ikeda, John. 2021. *Guidance Note on Drought Finance: Innovative Financial Instruments for Drought Mitigation, Preparedness, Response and Recovery*. United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) Global Mechanism.
- International Water Management Institute (IWMI). 2026. *Positioning the Drought Action Catalyst for Drought Resilience: A Strategic Framework*. International Water Management Institute (IWMI). <https://doi.org/10.5337/2026.221>.
- OECD. 2025. *Global Drought Outlook: Trends, Impacts and Policies to Adapt to a Drier World*. OECD Publishing. <https://doi.org/10.1787/d492583a-en>.
- Pek, Eva, and Maher Salman. 2023. *Enabling pathways for drought finance in agriculture*. Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO). <https://doi.org/10.4060/cc7453en>.
- Smith, Kelly Helm, David W. Walker, Beichen Zhang, et al. 2025. *Baseline Assessment of Drought Impact Monitoring*. Drought Management Tools and Guidelines Series 3. World Meteorological Organization (WMO) and Integrated Drought Management Programme (IDMP).
- Thomas, Richard, Jonathan Davies, Caroline King, et al. 2024. *Economics of Drought: Investing in Nature-Based Solutions for Drought Resilience – Proaction Pays*. UNCCD (United Nations Convention to Combat Diversification); ELD (Economics of Land Degradation) Initiative; UNU-INWEH (United Nations University Institute for Water, Environment and Health).
- Tsegai, Daniel, Patrick Augenstein, and Zhuojing Huang. 2023. *Global Drought Snapshot 2023: The Need for Proactive Action*. United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD).
- UNCCD (United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification). 2025. *Drought Hotspots Around the World 2023–2025*. United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification.
- Wilhite, Donald A. 2012. “Breaking the Hydro-Illogical Cycle: Changing the Paradigm for Drought Management.” *Drought Mitigation Center Faculty Publications*. 53. <http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/droughtfacpub/53>.
- WMO (World Meteorological Organization) and Global Water Partnership (GWP). 2014. *National Drought Management Policy Guidelines: A Template for Action*. Integrated Drought Management Programme (IDMP) Tools and Guidelines Series 1. WMO; GWP.
- Zaveri, Esha, Richard Damania, and Nathan Engle. 2023. *Droughts and Deficits: Summary Evidence of the Global Impact on Economic Growth*. World Bank.

Authors

Giriraj Amarnath, Research Group Leader – Water Data for Climate Resilience (WDCR), International Water Management Institute (IWMI), Colombo, Sri Lanka

Petra Schmitter, Research Group Leader – Climate Mitigation & Adaptation Pathways (CMAP), IWMI, Colombo, Sri Lanka

Bapon Fakhruddin, Climate Investment Principal, Green Climate Fund, Auckland, New Zealand

Ashish Agrawal, President and Head, Agribusiness at Bajaj General Insurance Co. Ltd., Pune, India

Darshini Ravindranath, Research Group Leader - Climate Policies, Finance and Processes, IWMI, Colombo, Sri Lanka

Mohsin Hafeez, Director of Water-Food and Ecosystems, IWMI, Lahore, Pakistan

Author Contributions

Conceptualization: Giriraj Amarnath; Methodology: Giriraj Amarnath; Validation: Giriraj Amarnath, Petra Schmitter, Bapon Fakhruddin, Darshini Ravindranath, Ashish Agrawal; Formal analysis: Giriraj Amarnath; Data curation: Giriraj Amarnath; Writing – original draft: Giriraj Amarnath; Writing – review & editing: Giriraj Amarnath, Petra Schmitter, Bapon Fakhruddin, Darshini Ravindranath, Ashish Agrawal, Mohsin Hafeez; Funding acquisition: Giriraj Amarnath.

Acknowledgments

This work was partially supported by the CGIAR Climate Action Program. We gratefully acknowledge all funders whose contributions to the CGIAR Trust Fund made this research possible (www.cgiar.org/funders/).



Suggested citation

Amarnath, Giriraj, Petra Schmitter, Bapon Fakhruddin, Ashish Agrawal, Darshini Ravindranath, and Mohsin Hafeez. 2026. *The Drought Action Catalyst: A Country Platform for Anticipatory, Financed, Government-led Drought Resilience*. International Water Management Institute. <https://doi.org/10.5337/2026.223>.

© 2026 International Water Management Institute. Some rights reserved. This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC BY 4.0).

Please send inquiries and comments to IWMI-Publications@cgiar.org

For access to all IWMI publications, visit www.iwmi.org/publications/



The International Water Management Institute (IWMI) is an international, research-for-development organization that works with governments, civil society and the private sector to solve water problems in developing countries and scale up solutions. Through partnership, IWMI combines research on the sustainable use of water and land resources, knowledge services and products with capacity strengthening, dialogue and policy analysis to support implementation of water management solutions for agriculture, ecosystems, climate change and inclusive economic growth. Headquartered in Colombo, Sri Lanka, IWMI is a CGIAR Research Center with offices in 17 countries and a global network of scientists operating in more than 55 countries.

International Water Management Institute (IWMI)

Headquarters

127 Sunil Mawatha, Pelawatte, Battaramulla, Sri Lanka

Mailing address:

P. O. Box 2075, Colombo, Sri Lanka

Tel: +94 11 2880000

Fax: +94 11 2786854

