



Climate change, natural disasters, and human displacement

International Conference on Environment, Forced Migration, and Social Vulnerability (EFMSV)

Bonn, 9 – 11 October 2008

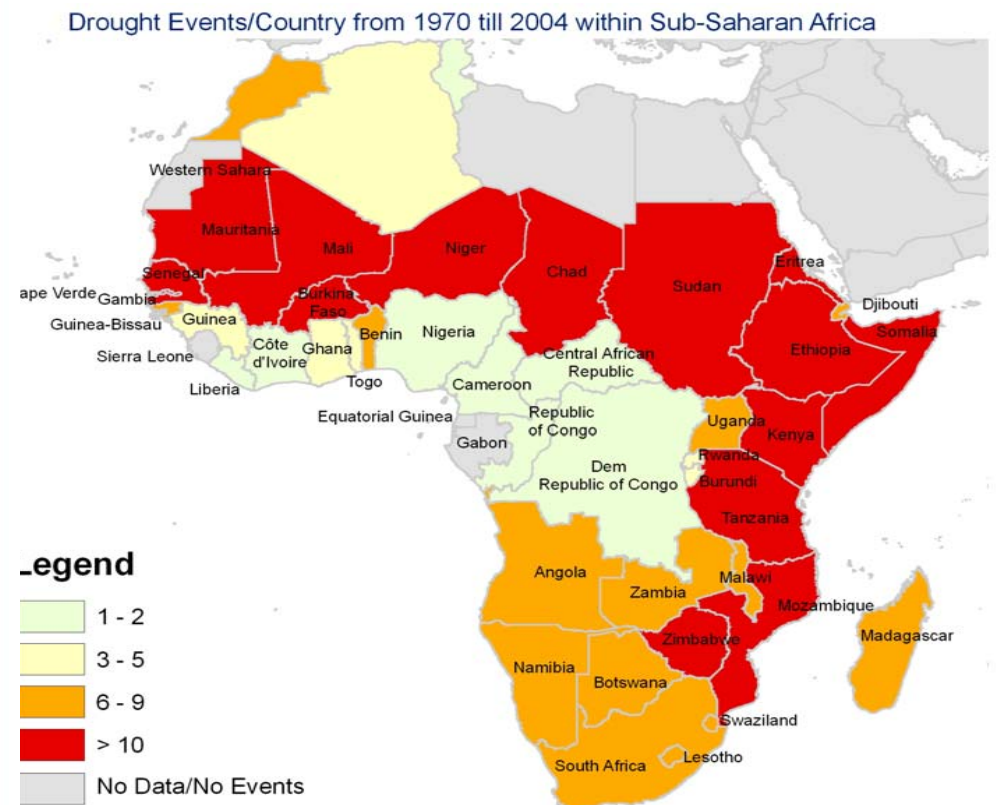
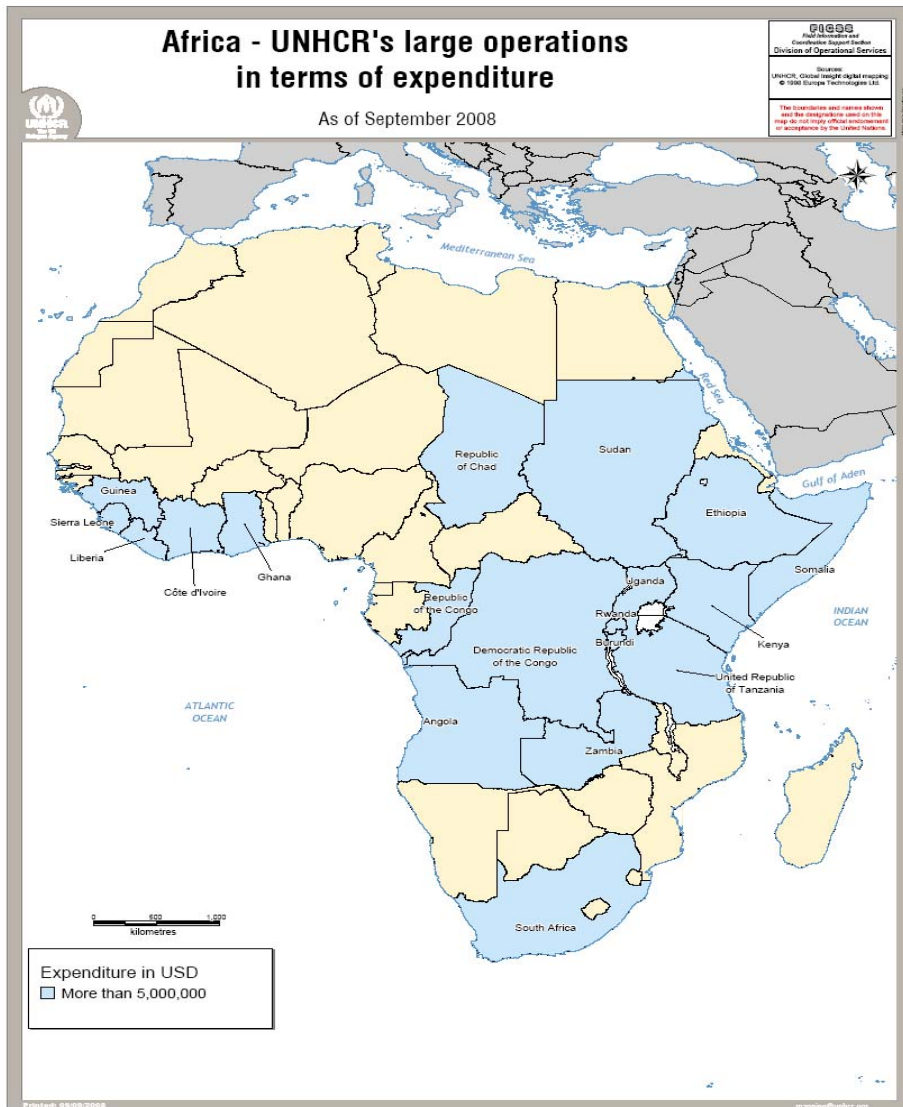
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UNHCR

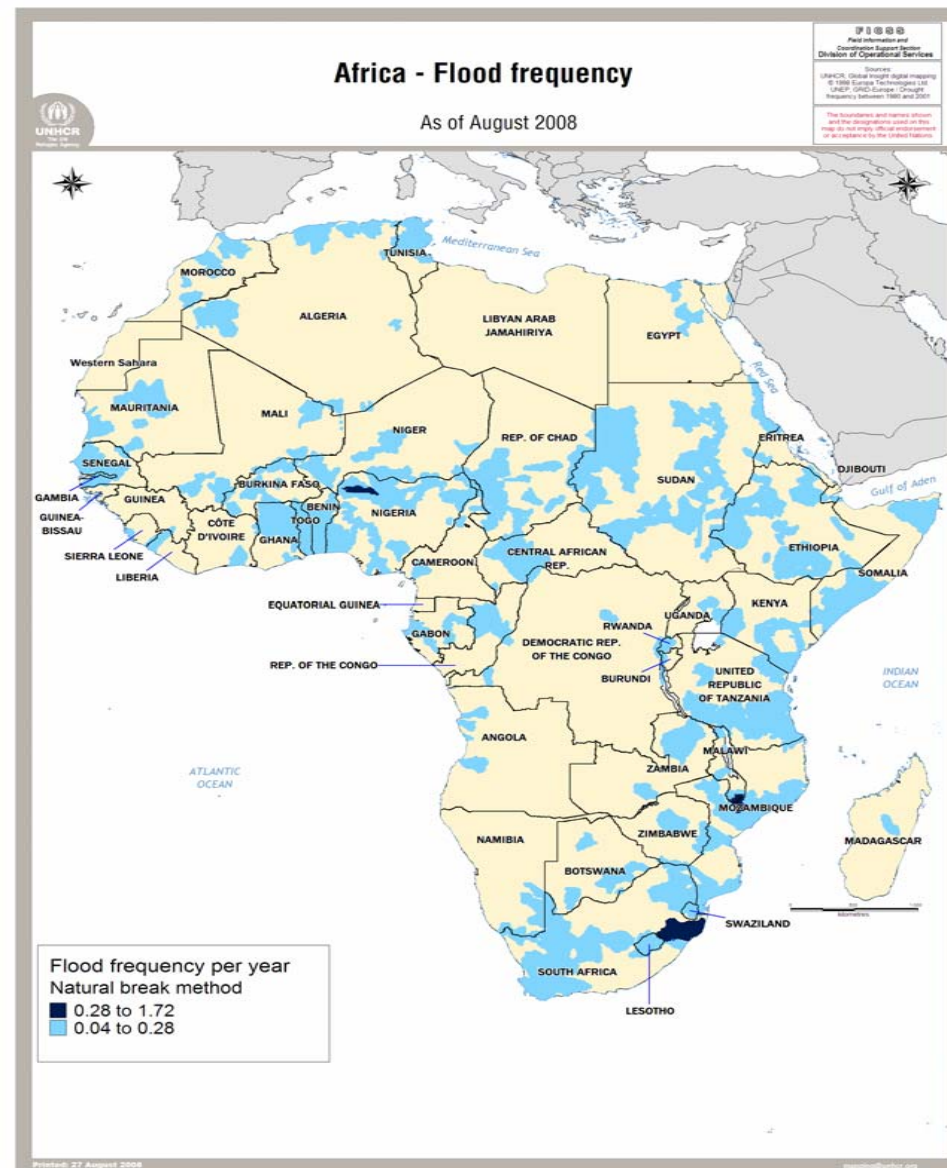
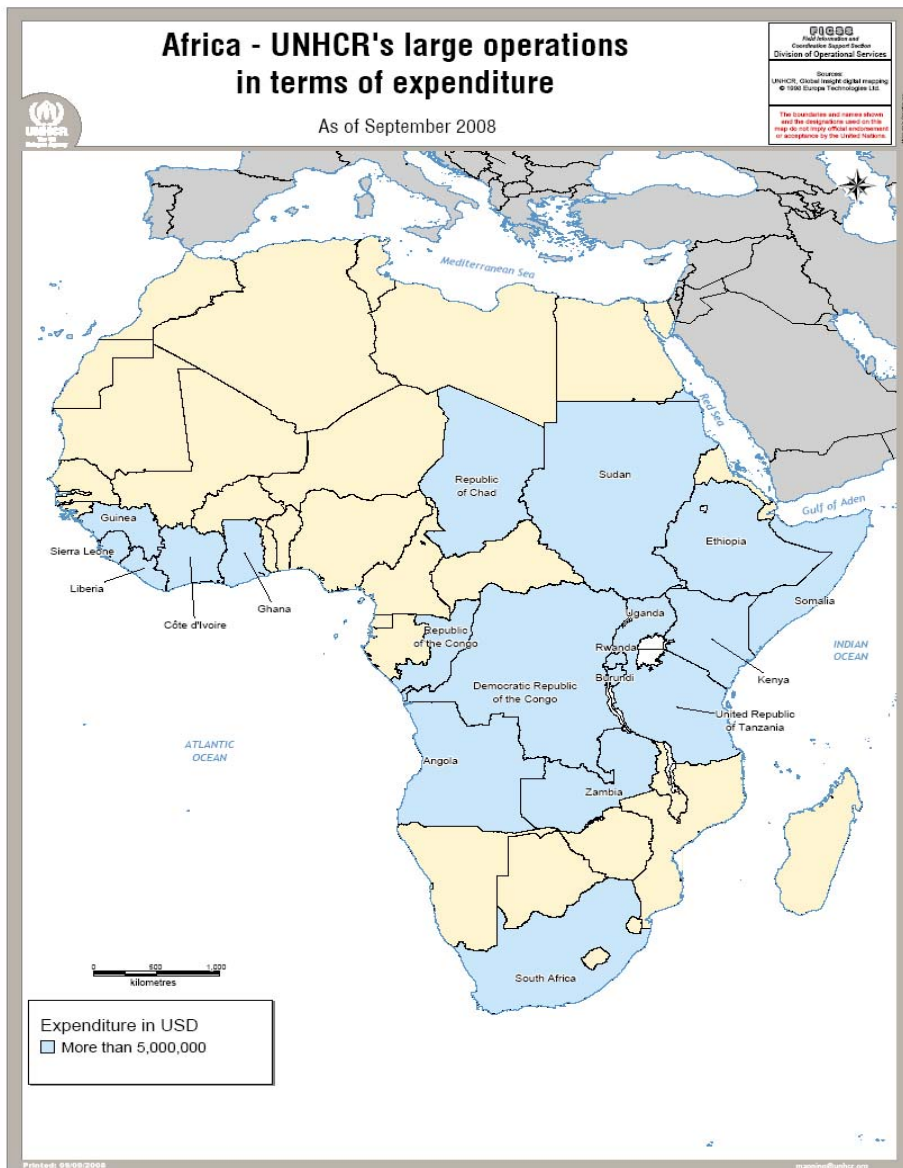
United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

Climate Change & UNHCR operations



Source: EM-DAT: The OFDA/CRED International Disaster Database, Université Catholique de Louvain, Brussels, Belgium.

Climate Change & UNHCR operations





Presentation Outlines

1. Displacement scenarios
2. UNHCR's responses to scenarios
3. UNHCR's role in natural disasters
4. Terminology
5. What do we need to do?



Displacement Scenarios

by Walter Kälin

Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General for the Rights of IDPs

1. Hydro-meteorological disasters .sudden onset.
2. Environmental degradation .slow onset.
3. 'Sinking small island' states
4. Armed conflict triggered by a decrease in essential resource

UNHCR's responses to displacement scenarios

1. UNHCR's role for the environmentally displaced persons seeking safety abroad may be called for.
 - Refugee movements provoked by armed conflict rooted in environmental factors.
 - 'Sinking small island states' scenario. Statelessness would be a concern to UNHCR.
 - Further analysis needed on the "forced" character of other cross border movement.
2. Conflict-induced IDPs will be dealt with by UNHCR through "Cluster Approach".

UNHCR's role in natural disasters

UNHCR is frequently called upon to assist in natural disasters as it has the experience and capability to assist.

- 2004 Indian Ocean Tsunami in Indonesia and Sri Lanka
- 2005 South Asia Earthquake in Pakistan
- 2006 Floods in Somalia
- 2007 Floods in Pakistan
- 2008 Cyclone in Myanmar

Terminology and the 1951 UN Refugee convention

UNHCR has reservations with respect to the terminology and notion of '**environmental**' or '**climate**' refugees.

1951 UN Refugee Convention defines a refugee as:

Someone who “owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of **race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion**, is **outside his country of nationality** and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country...”

Terminology and the 1951 UN Refugee Convention

The majority of environmentally displaced persons **do not cross an international border**. Thus they do not meet one of the key criteria for refugee status under 1951 UN Refugee Convention.



What do we need to do?

- Understanding the issue
 - Prevention
 - A rights-based response
- * UNHCR stands ready to contribute to initiatives on these issues.