

Challenging the myths around semi-arid lands

Myth 1

Semi-arid lands (SALs) are remote, sparsely populated places, in which few people live.

Fact 1

The number of people living in SALs is growing rapidly.ⁱ SALs cover 16% of the world's land surfaceⁱⁱ and are already home to almost 1 billion people.ⁱⁱⁱ



Myth 2

Semi-arid lands (SALs) contribute little to national economies.

Fact 2

SALs make a major contribution to national economies, as PRISE [research](#) on the beef, milk, and cotton sectors in semi-arid areas shows. The livestock sector and pastoralists are vital in the SALs of Kenya, Senegal and Tajikistan. In Kenya, the livestock sector contributes to around 12% of the country's GDP^{iv} and employs about 50% of Kenya's agricultural workforce.^v The textile sector in Pakistan, which includes cotton produced in the country's SALs, is the largest industrial sector and accounts for around 40% of the country's industrial labour force. Ten million farming families in Pakistan rely on the textile industry.^{vi}



Myth 3

It is not possible to achieve climate-resilient economic development in semi-arid lands (SALs).

Fact 3

Temperatures in SALs are likely to rise above the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) global target of a 1.5°C increase, and rainfall will become more unpredictable over the next century.^{vii} Strong social networks and diverse, multi-local livelihoods are already examples of autonomous adaptation to the natural variability found in the climate and environments of SALs. PRISE [research](#) shows that if these approaches could be harnessed and scaled up, there are real opportunities for inclusive, climate-resilient economic development.



Myth 4

There is very little private sector investment in semi-arid lands (SALs).

Fact 4

The private sector plays a key role in SALs and their economic development. Individuals, groups and small businesses in semi-arid areas engage in vibrant economic activity in key sectors, such as livestock and agricultural trade. Remittances sent back by migrants to their homes in the semi-arid areas of [Senegal](#) and Tajikistan are also used to fund collective investments that benefit entire communities and economies, such as investments in solar energy.



Myth 5

Migration away from rural, semi-arid areas only creates socioeconomic problems.

Fact 5

Migration has the potential to create opportunities for rural people and contribute to rural development through remittances, strengthening social networks, and the transfer of technology and innovative ideas. PRISE research in [Pakistan](#), Kenya and Burkina Faso explores the role that planned rural-to-urban migration, for example as part of national adaptation plans, can play in enhancing livelihood resilience and introducing new economic opportunities for communities in semi-arid regions, while taking climate change into consideration.



The Pathways to Resilience in Semi-arid Economies (PRISE) research project aims to promote climate-resilient economic development in semi-arid areas by harnessing the opportunities, and building economic resilience to the challenges, that climate change may bring. It does so by:

- Developing and nurturing relationships of trust with key stakeholders involved in shaping the economic development of semi-arid areas in countries where PRISE works: Senegal, Burkina Faso, Kenya, Tanzania, Ethiopia, Pakistan, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan;
- Reshaping the narrative around semi-arid lands (SALs) in the international community and in other non-PRISE countries.

The PRISE consortium has four member organisations:

- Overseas Development Institute (UK) – lead organisation;
- Grantham Research Institute on Climate Change and the Environment at the London School of Economics and Political Science (UK);
- Sustainable Development Policy Institute (Pakistan);
- Innovation, Environnement, Développement en Afrique (Senegal);

And four country research partners:

- Kenya Markets Trust (Kenya);
- University of Ouagadougou (Burkina Faso);
- Regional Environment Center for Central Asia (CAREC) (Tajikistan);
- Mountain Societies Research Institute at the University of Central Asia (Kyrgyzstan).

ⁱ Pray, C. and Nagarajan, L. (2009). Pearl Millet and Sorghum Improvement in India. Discussion paper 00919 Washington, D.C.: International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI).

ⁱⁱ Middleton, N., Stringer, L., Goudie, A. and Thomas, D. (2011). The Forgotten Billion: MDG Achievement in the Drylands. United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification, United Nations Development Programme, UNCCD Secretariat, p.15.

ⁱⁱⁱ Koohafkan, P. and Stewart, B.A., (2008). Drylands, people and land use. In: Water and Cereals in Drylands. Roma: Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and Earthscan. Available at: <http://www.fao.org/docrep/012/i0372e/i0372e01.pdf>

^{iv} Behnke R. and Muthami D. (2011). The Contribution of Livestock to the Kenyan Economy. IGAD LPI Working Paper No. 03-11.

^v Ministry of Livestock Development (2010). Strategic Plan: 2008-2012. Government of Kenya (GoK).

^{vi} Batool, S. and Saeed, F. (2017). Mapping the cotton value chain in Pakistan: A preliminary assessment for identification of climate vulnerabilities and pathways to adaptation. PRISE Working paper. Islamabad: Sustainable Development Policy Institute (SDPI).

^{vii} Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) (2014). Climate Change 2014: Synthesis Report. Contribution of Working Groups I, II and III to the Fifth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change [Core Writing Team, R.K. Pachauri and L.A. Meyer (eds.)]. IPCC, Geneva, Switzerland, 151 pp. Available at: <https://www.ipcc.ch/report/ar5/syr/>

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