



DROUGHT RISK MANAGEMENT: PRACTITIONER'S PERSPECTIVES FROM AFRICA AND ASIA



Despite numerous development and humanitarian efforts in the past decades, large portions of Africa and Asia, especially drylands, remain highly vulnerable to drought, as illustrated by the recent experiences in India (2009), China (2010), the Horn of Africa (2011) and the Sahel (2012). A stocktaking exercise was undertaken under the auspices of the Africa-Asia Drought Risk Management Peer Assistance Network in 2011 with the objective

to review the current institutional and programmatic landscape in the realm of drought risk management (DRM) in the two regions and mapped out some of the main DRM capacity gaps and gap-filling opportunities.

The exercise is based upon the consultations with key individuals in both continents, an online survey of some 400 practitioners working in drought-related fields and focused discussions at the First Africa-Asia Drought Adaptation Forum held in Bangkok, Thailand, in June 2011. It highlighted important similarities in DRM issues across Africa and Asia and identified priority areas to which the inter-regional south-south cooperation could add value.

Barriers to Addressing Drought Root Causes

According to the practitioners surveyed, impacts of drought are witnessed in Africa and Asia mostly through decline in crop yields, rise in food insecurity and depletion of water for human use. On one hand, the two regions largely share the view that chronic destruction of ecosystem bases in drought-prone areas as a result of environmental degradation, poor water resource management and weak governance system is the most important underlying cause to these drought impacts and main contributing factor to drought vulnerability (Figure 1).

On the other hand, the study demonstrates that drought is addressed on a sectoral basis predominantly as food security and WASH (water, sanitation, and hygiene) issues in both regions. These facts provide a testament to the failure of ongoing drought interventions, which reflect a response to the drought impacts observed rather than to their main causes.

There is an overwhelming consensus among the participants to the exercise beyond regional borders that drought impacts

Africa-Asia Drought Risk Management Peer Assistance Network (AADP)

A rich collection of knowledge-based resources already exists in Asia for DRM and drought resilience building, both at policy and practice levels, many of which are deemed applicable in the African context, and vice versa. Yet much of this potential remains unrealized, in part due to lack of formalized institutional mechanisms to promote south-south cooperation and exchange across the regions.

AADP was commenced in late 2010, with the financial support from the Government of Japan, in order to help link DRM knowledge producers and users beyond regional boundaries. It builds on the pool of experiences from, and draws on the established operation modalities of, the ongoing African Drought Risk and Development Network (ADDN) initiative which is co-managed by the UNDP and the UN International Strategy for Disaster Reduction. AADP Secretariat works closely with various DRM-focused UNDP/non-UNDP programmes and projects and provides them with a variety of peer learning and capacity development support, based on their specific thematic priorities, operational gaps and capacity needs.

For further information on AADP, please visit http://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/ourwork/environmentandenergy/focus_areas/sustainable_landmanagement/drought_risk_management/aadp.html.

and their causes will worsen over the coming 10 to 20 years. A large number of respondents who hold this view cite lack of political will as the key factor stymying adequate risk preventive interventions. Disincentives for DRM are attributed partially to the inherent complexity of drought and its gradual, elusive effects, the seriousness of which takes a while to become apparent. The non-structural nature of drought can also create a political vacuum in which suitable interventions lose their lustre in comparison to other political priorities.

There is a widespread belief, especially among government respondents, that climate change be the top cause of drought impacts and thus drought is inevitable, which may fuel a tendency to shirk national ownership of drought mitigation measures in favour of demanding new and additional international adaptation finance. It is important to note that, in Africa, insufficient funding is perceived as a severe barrier to addressing causes of drought impacts, even though government, donors, the private sector and the public mobilize significant funding during periods of drought-incurred severe food insecurity, such as the one the Horn of Africa is currently enduring. This poses the question of

whether funds raised are used effectively and efficiently to also tackle causes and to mitigate future risks of drought disasters.

Mainstreaming Holistic DRM in Africa and Asia

Effective DRM that deals with deep-rooted drought causes and vulnerabilities requires broad support and commitments from national to local levels. To review how effectively RM concepts and principles are integrated into development planning and practices, the stocktaking exercise focused on specific key areas where progress is required: policy frameworks and plans; drought risk assessment and the dissemination of early warning; and awareness and knowledge.

In both regions, a core policy concern is that the emphasis is placed primarily on response to drought impacts and the issues of long-term investment to overcome deep-rooted drought causes are rarely represented. Meanwhile, a large percentage of respondents, especially those in Africa, acknowledged the progress made in the encouragement of NGOs and public participation in decision-making process (Africa) as well as in incorporation of localized drought risks into national policy and planning frameworks (Asia).

With respect to risk assessment and dissemination, there is a strong common view that drought warning is not well communicated to affected communities, translated into local action or linked to budgetary processes. These challenges may result not only from the lack of effectiveness of existing risk warning and communication systems but also from the limited DRM awareness and technical capacity at local level. It is also pointed out that, even if good information exists, decisions and actions are also hampered by non-climatic indicators such as political pressures and agendas.

Periodic recurrence of drought disaster in many parts of Africa and Asia stresses the importance of raising DRM awareness, sharing lessons and experiences and scaling up proven practices. Positive observations on the availability of drought knowledge and information are made mainly by government respondents. This fact may imply the need for introducing innovative methodologies to the existing knowledge sharing mechanisms so as to better cater for the local drought-affected

communities. Without clear, practical benefits of knowledge sharing efforts, network fatigue is a real threat.

Key Elements for DRM Practices

Despite the general prevalence of significant drought crises in the two regions, participants to the exercises identified a number of well-established DRM practices which are deemed replicable in other countries and regions. Some of the common elements observed among these cases include:

- An integrated development approach centred around sustainable land/water resource management practices to address multifaceted drivers of drought risks (i.e. not a segregated 'drought' project based upon and distinct stand-alone perspective, specialism, or sector);
- The importance of indigenous knowledge and local adaptive capacity as a thread which must run throughout community-based considerations;
- Utilization of a combination of locally-suitable innovative methods for community awareness raising on drought and other related emerging issues;
- A community-led participatory approach and effective use of available community resources and organizational structures (e.g. farmers' groups, water users associations, etc.); especially in relation to sustainable local natural resources management;
- A strong focus on diversification of income generating activities for resilient livelihoods building.

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The publication is available for download at: http://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/librarypage/environment-energy/sustainable_land_management/drought-risk-management-from-africa-and-asia.html.

Figure 1: Root Causes of Drought Impacts in Africa and Asia

