



This Synthesis Paper is based on a study undertaken by ODI and co-funded by CARE.

ODI gratefully acknowledges the financial support from CARE.

**IMPROVING DROUGHT RESPONSE IN
PASTORAL AREAS OF KENYA:
Lessons and recommendations**

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The impact of recurrent drought-related crises in the Horn of Africa is rapidly escalating, with more and more people being affected each time a drought occurs. Drought is becoming more frequent, allowing less time for recovery in between droughts, and increasing the vulnerability of local populations. The current ability of pastoralists to respond to drought is limited not only due to the increasing frequency of drought, but also due to increasing population, a dwindling resource base, conflict, changes in access to land and water, as well as the impact of other shocks such as flooding and disease outbreaks. In Kenya, emergency interventions that tend to be implemented in response to drought are very effective in terms of saving lives, but they are not designed to address the chronic poverty or vulnerability that characterise the arid and semi-arid lands (ASALs). Experience suggests that the most effective way of providing aid in such situations is through protecting people's livelihoods. Livelihood interventions are defined as those that aim to protect or enhance livelihood assets, strategies and outcomes; they can contribute both to saving lives and to building resilience and addressing vulnerability.

This briefing paper explores the responses to the 2005–2006 drought in Kenya’s ASALs, focusing particularly on the extent to which livelihoods interventions were implemented among pastoral populations. It is based on research that analyses the contextual factors (i.e. practices, capacities, structures, policies and rationale) that influenced the actions taken in the 2005–2006 drought response, and identifies the mechanisms, systems, functions and institutions that need to be strengthened to allow for more timely and appropriate livelihood responses in future.

The 2005–2006 drought and the interventions implemented in response

The 2005–2006 drought in Kenya occurred after five consecutive failed or poor seasons, when the coping strategies of vulnerable populations were stretched to their limit. The impact was both widespread and severe. Nearly 3.5 million rural pastoral and farming people in 26 districts were affected. Rates of global acute malnutrition rose steeply in the north-east of the country, to between 18% and 30%, significantly higher than the World Health Organisation threshold (15%) indicating a critical situation. Thousands of head of livestock died, with 30–40% livestock losses, and up to 70% in some communities.¹

The financial contributions made in response to drought in 2005 and 2006 clearly indicate that the proportion of funding for non-food interventions² (19%) was considerably smaller than that for food aid (81%). This is not only because donors appeared to be less willing to contribute towards the cost of non-food interventions, but also because the appeals themselves requested much smaller amounts for non-food interventions. Despite the relatively limited funding, a wide range of different non-food interventions were implemented (Table 1), though these were mostly undertaken on a small scale and with varying levels of presumed impact. Whilst interventions in the water sector were considered to be largely successful in averting a water crisis, interventions in

¹ F. Grünewald, K. Robins, A. Odicoh and N. Nicholson, Kenya Real Time Evaluation Mission, Final Report, 2006.

² Non-food interventions are used here as a proxy for livelihood interventions because budgets and financial tracking tend to be based on sectoral responses. However, it is important to point out that non-food interventions are not synonymous with livelihood interventions.

the agriculture and livestock sectors were regarded to have had less impact, though there is a notable lack of impact assessments to fully substantiate these claims. Part of the reason for the lack of impact stems from the late implementation of many livelihood interventions, particularly those for which timing is crucial.

Table 1: Range of interventions implemented in response to drought in 2005–2006

Sector	Intervention
Food aid	Food aid; Food for work; Food for assets; Food and non-food vouchers
Livestock	Animal health: vaccinations, de-worming and drugs
	Livestock disease surveillance
	Livestock off-take; Slaughter and meat distribution; Re-stocking; Redistribution
	Provision of fodder and feed storage facilities
	Provision of water for livestock
	Livestock marketing
	Re-seeding pasture/rangelands
	Training of Community-based Animal Health Workers
	Herd improvement through introduction of appropriate breeds
	Capacity-building for pastoralist associations, inc. Pastoral Farmer Field Schools
Community-based Livestock EWS	
Crop Agriculture	Seed and fertiliser distribution; Seed vouchers/seed fairs
	Soil and water conservation
	Irrigation schemes and water harvesting
	Improved grain storage
	Promoting specific crops/varieties, e.g. drought-tolerant varieties
	Training and capacity building, e.g. Farmer Field Schools, cooperatives, etc
Water & Sanitation	Support to Rapid Response Teams; Borehole rehabilitation; Provision of gensets, pumps and spares
	Provision of fuel subsidy; Supply of water treatment equipment and chemicals

	Water tankering; Provision of storage tanks; Provision of gerry cans
	De-silting pans/dams
	Promotion of hygiene & sanitation; Removal of carcasses from water points
	Drilling of replacement and contingency boreholes/strategic waterpoints
	Water resource mapping
	Training and capacity-building of water users' associations
Health & Nutrition	Therapeutic feeding; Supplementary feeding
	Basic health services; Mobile outreach clinics; Supply of emergency health kits
	Measles immunisation
	Nutrition and disease surveillance
	Provision of mosquito nets
	Enhanced capacity of health workers and nutritionists
Education	Expanded school feeding programmes
	Water provision to schools
	Supplies for boarding schools (water tanks, beds, mattresses, etc)
	Bursaries for secondary school students
Cross-cutting and miscellaneous	Conflict resolution and peace-building
	Shelter provision, inc traditional mats for shelter ³
	Cash relief; Cash for work
	Coordination

Early warning and assessments, preparedness and implementation capacity

The timeliness of interventions depends on an effective early warning and drought monitoring system, the level of preparedness (including the existence of effective contingency funds and plans) and implementation capacity on the ground. The World Bank and EC-supported Arid Lands Resource Management Project (ALRMP) manages an early-warning system in ASAL areas for which local-level data are collected to

³ Traditional thatch was used to feed animals, so locally made mats were purchased and distributed to targeted households.

produce District Monthly Bulletins, and rapid assessments are undertaken by the District Steering Committee when an emergency situation threatens. Regular, bi-annual seasonal assessments are undertaken by inter-agency teams working at district level under national coordination. Although the district-level monitoring has been seen to be effective in raising attention of ALRMP and some NGOs at the national level, the subsequent rapid assessment reports compiled by the District Steering Committees tend to be regarded at central level as 'shallow' and lacking validity, such that verifications must first be made before any actions are taken. The level of response to district-level early warning and assessment reports tends to be very low. At national level, forward-looking early warning reports are issued to alert the government, donors and other actors. However, it is the bi-annual seasonal assessments that actually trigger the appeal process that leads to an emergency response. The usefulness of the seasonal assessments in relation to decision-making has been questioned because they take a long time to be released, so their content tends to be backward-looking rather than forward-looking. The current system thus has two problems: a lack of response to early-warning information, in which stakeholders prefer to see hard evidence of an actual crisis (as opposed to an emerging crisis) before responding; and a late and inadequate response to the prevailing situation as provided by the bi-annual assessment reports.

Those agencies with their own contingency or emergency response funds were able to intervene earlier than those without access to such funds. Although contingency plans exist for the Districts where the ALRMP is operational, the quality of the plans varies, as does the ability to implement them in the event of a drought, though both the plans and the institutional structures are currently being strengthened through the EC-funded Drought Management Initiative. The level of the ALRMP contingency funding available in 2005–2006 was inadequate. Whilst the District Contingency Fund has been augmented by the Drought Management Initiative, it is still considered inadequate for effective interventions on non-food livelihood-oriented activities during mitigation, emergency and recovery phases of drought. It is in this regard that the Government of Kenya (GoK), with support from EC, is establishing a national Drought Contingency Fund, a multi-donor basket where relevant stakeholders will contribute.

In terms of implementation, the capacity to identify, design, plan, coordinate and implement timely livelihoods interventions is limited by a poor understanding of pastoral livelihood systems by some senior decision-makers and a lack of consensus on what constitutes sectoral mitigation, emergency and recovery activities. This results in a lack of capacity to prepare proposals quickly at the national level, and implementation is further hampered by rigid planning systems and cumbersome financial procedures among key ministries and UN coordinating agencies, and – in some districts – a lack of implementation capacity, both in terms of coverage and technical expertise. Assuming that funding is available, one way in which more timely interventions can be achieved in the non-food sectors is through following the example of the success of the food sector, in which plans and templates already exist, making the task of putting together proposals and appeals much easier and faster in the event of an emergency. However, the non-food aid actors in Kenya have first to demonstrate that there are effective, appropriate and beneficial livelihoods interventions which can be implemented as preparedness, mitigation, emergency and recovery measures to address drought impacts.

Coordination

Effective livelihoods interventions require effective coordination, but the key problem with the current coordination system is its fragmentation, with separate coordination structures for drought response (handled by the Office of the President-Special Programmes) and long-term development issues handled by the Agriculture Sector Coordination Unit (ASCU). This division between emergencies and long-term development provides major challenges to coordination of drought management and food security initiatives in Kenya. The causes of vulnerability and poverty in Kenya's ASALs stem not only from recurrent drought but also conflict and insecurity, together with inadequate services associated with inappropriate development policies, and years of economic and political marginalisation. However effective disaster management may be, it cannot replace the need for long-term development. Food security issues, whether chronic or acute, need to be addressed in a coordinated and harmonised fashion, through a cross-sectoral framework. Fierce competition, based on perceived mandates and resource control issues, exists between relevant government departments. For this competition to be minimised, there is a need for a permanent, legally-enshrined coordination mechanism that bridges both relief and development. At the policy level,

there is a need to approve both the draft ASAL policy and the National Disaster Management Policy and fund their implementation. The newly created Ministry of Development of Northern Kenya and other Arid Lands is a promising start.

Conclusion

The current weakness of formal policies and structures allows for an approach to the current drought response system that is based on the mistaken notion that food security can be achieved predominantly through short-term measures relating only to the productive sectors, and the conventional (yet changing) view of humanitarian relief as primarily short-term interventions that aim to save lives rather than also contributing towards preventing disaster or assisting in recovery through support to livelihoods. Both of these notions contribute towards the persistence of an institutional dependency on food aid, in which the system has become geared towards food aid delivery; this is further supported by influential economic and political power structures that work to maintain the status quo. Such short-term thinking goes against existing good practice and conceptual models. The Good Humanitarian Donorship initiative, for example, emphasises the need to prevent and support recovery. This is underlined by the recent emphasis on disaster risk reduction (DRR). New donor funding mechanisms, including ECHO's Drought Preparedness Decision, USAID's Regional Enhanced Livelihoods in Pastoral Areas, DFID's proposed Hunger Safety Net Programme and the GoK's ALRMP Phase 2 programme, all offer welcome longer-term approaches in responding to drought.

The problem of the 'divide' between relief and development also prevents greater emphasis being given to livelihoods responses. Debates about linking relief and development have persisted for well over a decade, yet the problem persists in practice due to the lack of an effective mechanism through which linkages can be made. We suggest that the principles of DRR potentially offer ways of integrating relief and development approaches, and that, with the current efforts to implement DRR in Kenya, this can provide a way forward. The GoK has recently drawn up a plan of action for DRR, which – though a positive step forward – was hurriedly prepared without adequate consultation and risks adding further confusion to the proliferation of existing structures. Rather than new structures, what is needed is for the existing structures to be guided by a

DRR approach that allows for ‘joined-up’ planning and coordination, particularly between relief and development approaches.

Recommendations

1. Recommendations to the Government of Kenya

1.1 Review seasonal assessments approach and drought response triggers: The Kenya Food Security Steering Group (KFSSG) should commission an independent review of the biannual assessment procedure and its suitability as the main trigger for drought response. Problems with the current arrangements would suggest that greater use should be made of existing early-warning systems in triggering more timely and rapid assessments and responses. Such a review might also identify alternative triggers that could be put in place. In any case, assessments should give greater emphasis to appropriate early responses, preparedness and mitigation.

1.2 Contingency plans and funds: The level of contingency funds has recently been increased, but there is a need to establish simple yet effective triggers and disbursement mechanisms to ensure that funds are available at district level prior to the declaration of an emergency. Since this study was undertaken, work has started on developing the capacity for undertaking detailed and regularly updated contingency planning at district level; steps will need to be taken to ensure that this capacity will be maintained through regular refresher training. Contingency plans should follow the Drought Cycle Management framework and specify actions to be taken at alert, alarm and emergency phases, with budget outlines or templates into which figures can be inserted when needed.

1.3 Implementation structures for key livelihood interventions: For specific interventions (e.g. water provision, destocking, vet services, animal feed distribution), appropriate lead agencies at district level and appropriate coordinating agencies at national level should be identified and agreed by the District Steering Group (DSG), the KFSSG and the Kenya Food Security Meeting (KFSM). These agencies should then take responsibility for developing detailed contingency plans for these interventions and for leading and coordinating the implementation of these plans when necessary. Relevant ministries in the food security sector should mainstream emergency response and preparedness into their programmes through improved funding, contingency planning, developing relations with DSGs and with implementing partners outside of the ministries.

1.4 Coordination: Effective coordinating mechanisms should be established for developing interventions at district and national levels which also link into emergency coordination structures, particularly in relation to disaster preparedness and mitigation strategies. Such coordination might best be promoted under the new food security and nutritional policy framework, with a lead Coordinating Ministry (preferably the Office of the President or the Ministry of Planning) taking the lead role in consolidating current and future efforts, while at the same time linking these initiatives to the drought coordination structures spearheaded by the Office of the President. Drought coordination structures need to be embedded within a permanent, legal framework, preferably the same as is used for general Disaster Management.

1.5 Disaster Risk Reduction: The implementation of the DRR Plan of Action should ensure that DRR is integrated into existing policies, structures and practices, rather than creating new, parallel systems.

1.6 Food Security Analysis Unit: Such a unit might be established within the Office of the President to undertake food security analysis and enhance the understanding of food security among ministries.

1.7 Policy initiatives: Both the ASAL policy and the proposed National Disaster Management Policy must be approved and implemented as a matter of urgency.

2. Recommendations to UN agencies, NGOs and the Kenya Red Cross Society

2.1 Develop the evidence base and best-practice guidelines for livelihood interventions:

Agencies involved in designing and implementing livelihood interventions must undertake a review (or a series of sectoral-based reviews) to develop the evidence base to demonstrate that such interventions are effective, appropriate and beneficial as preparedness, mitigation, emergency and recovery measures to address drought impacts. Such a review should highlight ‘best-practice’ lessons that are specific to Kenya and can also be used to persuade donors of the merits of such interventions.

2.2 Review FAO procedures: Current internal FAO procedures for approval and disbursements of funds will need to be revised if FAO is to act as an international partner agency in emergency responses. Where existing procedures cannot easily be changed, options for providing contingency funding should be explored.

2.3 Document alternative social protection/transfer mechanisms: A number of agencies have piloted alternative approaches to aid transfers through the use of cash, vouchers or a

mixture of cash and food transfers. Lessons from these experiments need to be documented and shared with other agencies to promote innovation in programming approaches.

2.4 Contingency funds: Agencies should strive to establish their own internal contingency funds, based on the models used by WFP, CARE, Oxfam GB, CORDAID, etc.

2.5 Disaster Risk Reduction: Many agencies are already adopting DRR principles in their work, and this should be further promoted through sharing of approaches and practices.

3. Recommendations to donors

3.1 Learn from innovative funding approaches: Lessons from innovative funding approaches (e.g. ECHO Drought Preparedness; USAID – RELPA, funding for capacity-building) should be monitored, learnt from and incorporated into the design of future funding schemes. Lessons can be shared through the existing *ad hoc* Donor Group on Vulnerability and Risk Reduction. This group should be maintained and possibly expanded to include a broader range of agencies. Lessons include the need for long-term, more flexible funds.

3.2 Explore alternative, longer-term funding options: Following the examples of ECHO (for Drought Preparedness) and DFID (for Social Protection), alternative, longer-term funding mechanisms should be explored for drought responses that allow for preparedness, mitigation and recovery interventions that build the resilience of local communities.