

LESSONS FOR RESPONDING TO DROUGHTS

LESSON 1: STRENGTHEN COORDINATION, LEADERSHIP AND GOVERNANCE

Effective drought response and resilience-building require inclusive and coordinated systems that align as many humanitarian, development, government, community and regional actors as possible under shared goals, clear roles and sustained donor support.

Despite substantial improvements in early warning – both in quality and lead time – weak coordination, fragmented leadership, low levels of political will, inconsistent funding and lack of transparency and accountability continue to undermine drought response and recovery. Planning and fundraising delays often stem from risk-averse leadership and uncertain resources, while duplication of roles across clusters, working groups and government structures results in confusion and inefficiency. By contrast, evidence from evaluations of drought responses consistently highlights when coordination mechanisms are clear, outcome-focused and inclusive, they help unlock faster, more coherent and better-resourced responses.

Government leadership is central to achieving sustainability and national ownership. Where national and subnational authorities are engaged early and empowered to act, responses tend to be timelier and better aligned with local priorities, systems and capacities. In contrast, evaluations note that highly centralised decision-making by international actors and donors can limit flexibility, slow adaptation to evolving conditions and weaken accountability to populations affected by drought. Strengthening government and national and local actors' capacity in planning, monitoring and climate risk management allows responses to align with national strategies rather than depend on parallel humanitarian systems. However, capacity support must go hand in hand with advocacy for transparency, accountability and sound governance to ensure public confidence and effective delivery.

Drought impacts often extend beyond administrative and national boundaries, particularly in pastoral, border and transboundary catchment areas. In such contexts,

Number of documents contributing to the lessons: 29

Average evidence scores of all documents contributing to the lessons: 4.2

Median evidence strength of documents contributing to the lessons: 86%

regional and cross-border coordination mechanisms have supported more coherent approaches to early warning, natural resource management and response planning. Donor engagement plays an enabling role when funding supports inclusive, multiyear coordination arrangements that align with national systems rather than reinforcing parallel humanitarian structures. Where coordination mechanisms have not functioned as intended, evaluations underline the importance of collective reflection, learning and adaptation by all actors involved.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Humanitarian actors should clearly define roles, mandates and leadership structures for drought response to ensure accountability and prevent overlap or inefficiency across participating agencies.
- Humanitarian actors should prioritise capacity development and reinforce national and local systems in coordinating and implementing drought responses, ensuring alignment with national strategies and holding governments accountable.
- Humanitarian, development and government actors should strengthen regional and cross-border coordination frameworks, leveraging intergovernmental bodies and regional organisations.
- Humanitarian, development and government actors should enable meaningful participation of local and national actors in coordination and priority-setting processes, rather than limiting their role to programme implementation.
- Donors should sustain their commitment to support coordination mechanisms and align them with government-led systems.