

# LESSON 10:

## DELIVER MULTISECTORAL DROUGHT RESPONSES

**Actors should design context-specific, multisectoral drought responses that address both immediate needs and the structural causes of vulnerability.**

Food is often the first priority in drought response, but when aid focuses too narrowly on food distributions, other critical needs (such as agriculture, water, health and nutrition) remain underfunded.

Assessments that are too narrow or based on outdated assumptions lead to gaps in response design; for example, focusing on communities in rural arid and semi-arid lands (ASALs) overlooks emerging evidence of urban vulnerability and the interdependence between sedentary and pastoralist households. By combining food security, WASH and livelihood analyses with community input, assessments can capture a fuller picture of drought impacts, enabling more strategic and context-specific interventions that reflect the real coping strategies and needs of different groups. A balanced, multisectoral approach addresses immediate hunger and protects the assets and livelihoods that underpin recovery and future food security.

Cash is often preferred by programme participants, but cash does not consistently translate into better nutrition, health or education when services are weak or prices are high. Integrated packages that pair cash and voucher assistance with WASH, nutrition and health outreach improve food security and child nutrition, reduce harmful trade-offs and better meet diverse and specific needs, including those of persons with disabilities, older people and people who are ill.

Linking social protection support to productive activities, such as soil and water conservation, is an adaptive social protection approach that can allow food-insecure households to meet immediate needs while investing in natural resource management and community assets. It is particularly effective in contexts facing recurrent droughts, as it reduces future dependence on aid.

Households dependent on rain-fed agriculture are highly exposed to crop failure. Investments in drought-tolerant seeds, improved planting methods, terracing and integrated pest management can significantly increase yields and household incomes. However, input distribution must align with seasonal calendars and be supported by

Number of documents contributing to the lessons: 63

Average evidence scores of all documents contributing to the lessons: 3.8

Median evidence strength of documents contributing to the lessons: 80%

1 training, pest control and water access to achieve lasting results. Combining these measures helps protect agricultural systems from drought stress and builds long-term resilience.

2 WASH interventions are most impactful when they link water access with employment opportunities, agricultural support or health services, generating wider benefits for food security, education and resilience. Infrastructure, such as rehabilitated water points and new community systems, delivers strong value for money as it provides benefits across multiple dry seasons and reduces repeated emergency costs.

3 Education should be integrated into drought contingency plans to keep schools open and functional. For children in vulnerable situations, including those from migrating pastoralist families, displaced communities and children with disabilities, schools can be a critical lifeline. School meals, take-home rations and conditional transfers can sustain attendance, reducing reliance on harmful coping strategies such as early marriage or child labour. Mapping pastoralist movements, introducing flexible curricula and supporting adapted teaching methods can sustain learning.

## 8 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 9 ● Humanitarian and development actors should design drought responses based on integrated analysis that captures the interlinked impacts of drought across food security, nutrition, health, water, livelihoods and protection.
- 10 ● Humanitarian actors should strengthen coordination and joint planning across sectors to improve coherence, sequencing and complementarity of interventions.
- 11 ● Donors should support multisectoral programming through flexible funding arrangements that allow activities and budgets to be adapted across sectors as needs evolve.
- 12 ● Humanitarian actors should use cash-based approaches, where appropriate, as part of broader multisectoral strategies that are complemented by investments in services, infrastructure and market systems.
- 13 ● Humanitarian and development actors should align assessment, monitoring and reporting processes across sectors to reduce fragmentation and support integrated decision-making.
- 14 ● Humanitarian actors and donors should invest in staff capacity, coordination mechanisms and systems that enable the design and delivery of effective multisectoral drought responses.
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