

LESSON 15:

PROTECT AND STRENGTHEN LIVELIHOODS AND ASSETS

Prioritise protecting, diversifying and strengthening livelihoods. This should include rural and urban, and male- and female-headed households by employing adaptive, gender-sensitive and climate-informed approaches.

Livelihood insecurity lies at the heart of drought vulnerability. Effective drought response should therefore safeguard productive assets and promote adaptive coping strategies. Planning should include urban-poor populations affected by migration and market disruptions, as well as supporting rural producers and pastoralists, whose livelihoods are vital to food security and cultural identity.

Resilient livelihoods depend on investment in preparedness: infrastructure for water, housing and markets, functioning national extension services and financial tools (such as insurance, credit and climate-sensitive safety nets). Integrating these systems enables households to withstand shocks without resorting to harmful coping strategies. Households should be supported by humanitarian and development actors to diversify their livelihoods, where relevant; for example, farmers may adopt off-farm activities, while pastoralists may begin agricultural or agropastoral livelihoods.

Livestock-based livelihoods may require interventions for livestock health, production and feeding. De-stocking should be treated with sensitivity, given the cultural and economic significance of holding livestock assets. Humanitarian actors should take in to consideration the risk that livestock interventions may increase inequality between small- and large-scale herders, thereby failing to benefit the most vulnerable populations. The resilience of pastoral systems depends largely on mobility for sustainable use of rangelands and access to water and pasture, so actors should consider the political and administrative boundaries constricting mobility, particularly in conflict-affected areas. Droughts disproportionately impact women, particularly those in informal economies or with limited access to land, credit and markets. The specific needs of women pastoralists, such as access to markets and risks of GBV – particularly during displacement – should therefore be addressed by actors responding.⁷

Number of documents contributing to the lessons: 43

Average evidence scores of all documents contributing to the lessons: 3.9

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

⁷ According to the Delphi panel members, people with limited mobility, persons with disabilities, older people and those with chronic illness face barriers to traditional livelihood options. Livelihood programmes should therefore explore adapted and innovative opportunities, such as home-based or digital livelihoods, which can provide resilient income streams even during drought.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Humanitarian and development actors should prioritise early livelihood-protection measures during drought to prevent irreversible loss of productive assets and long-term dependency on assistance.
- Humanitarian actors should tailor livelihood interventions to different livelihood systems, including pastoralism, smallholder farming and informal work, recognising distinct risks and seasonal dynamics.
- Humanitarian and development actors should align livelihood support with early warning information, anticipatory-action mechanisms and seasonal calendars to maximise impact.
- Humanitarian actors and donors should support integrated livelihood responses that combine cash, services and market support, rather than relying on single-sector interventions.
- Humanitarian and development actors should strengthen linkages between livelihood interventions, social protection systems and market actors to support recovery and resilience.
- Donors should provide flexible and sufficiently long-term funding to enable sustained livelihood protection and recovery in drought-prone contexts.