

LESSON 6:

PUT PEOPLE AND COMMUNITIES AFFECTED BY DROUGHT AT THE CENTRE OF RESPONSES

Drought responses are more effective when communities – including women-, youth- and farmer-led groups – lead analysis, planning, implementation and monitoring.

Evidence from drought responses consistently shows that interventions are more effective, relevant and sustainable when they are grounded in the priorities, capacities and lived experiences of people affected by drought. Evaluations highlight that community-centred approaches improve targeting, strengthen accountability and increase the likelihood that assistance supports dignity and self-determined coping strategies. Where programmes are designed without meaningful engagement with communities affected by drought, they are more likely to overlook local priorities, reinforce inequalities or create unintended harm. People-centred approaches focus on how responses are designed and delivered, enabling populations affected by drought to influence decisions on timing, targeting and trade-offs across the drought cycle.

Participation in drought response is often uneven. While many programmes include consultation or feedback mechanisms, evaluations note that these are frequently limited in scope or occur late in the programme cycle, reducing their influence on key decisions. Marginalised groups – including women, pastoralists, older people, persons with disabilities and mobile populations – are often underrepresented in assessments, planning and decision-making processes. Power dynamics within communities can further shape whose voices are heard, requiring deliberate efforts to ensure inclusive and safe participation.

Community-centred approaches are most effective when they go beyond consultation and support shared decision-making. Evidence shows that programmes that enable communities to influence priorities, modality choices and implementation arrangements are more responsive to changing conditions and local risk profiles. Trust between communities and implementing actors is strengthened when feedback mechanisms are accessible, safe and demonstrably linked to programme adaptation. Where accountability systems are weak or poorly resourced, opportunities for learning and course correction are often missed.

Number of documents contributing to the lessons: 60

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

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

1 People-centred approaches, localisation and locally led action are closely connected but distinct. While people-centred approaches shape the quality and relevance of interventions for populations affected by drought, localisation determines whether the systems, partnerships and resources needed to sustain these approaches are in place. Localisation involves shifting power, resources and decision-making to local actors and systems; although widely embraced in principle, evidence shows that much remains to be done to translate this commitment into practice. Locally led action requires directly resourcing and scaling initiatives driven by local actors, often outside international aid structures. Without localisation and locally led systems, people-centred approaches risk remaining limited to consultation, rather than driving meaningful change in how drought risks are anticipated and managed.

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6 Longer-term engagement with communities supports continuity across preparedness, response and recovery. Evaluations suggest that investing in local institutions, social networks and community leadership enhances resilience and reduces reliance on repeated emergency assistance. However, short funding cycles and high staff turnover can undermine sustained relationships and institutional memory, limiting the effectiveness of people-centred approaches over time.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- 7 ● Humanitarian actors should ensure drought responses are informed by meaningful and inclusive engagement with communities affected by drought throughout the programme cycle, from assessment and design to implementation and review.
- 8 ● Humanitarian and development actors should take deliberate steps to include marginalised and underrepresented groups, such as women, pastoralists, older people, persons with disabilities and mobile populations, in decision-making processes.
- 9 ● Humanitarian actors should support approaches that enable communities to meaningfully shape and share decision-making on key programme decisions – including priorities, targeting and modality choices – rather than limiting participation to consultation alone.
- 10 ● Humanitarian actors and donors should invest in accessible, safe, well-resourced feedback and accountability mechanisms and ensure that feedback leads to visible programme adaptation.
- 11 ● Humanitarian and development actors should support longer-term engagement with communities by investing in local institutions, leadership and social networks that sustain preparedness, response and recovery across drought cycles.
- 12 ● Donors should systematically analyse how decisions on priorities, resources and actions are made and redesign programme governance, funding modalities and partnerships to shift meaningful decision-making power to local actors and institutions.
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