

LESSON 7:

ADDRESS SOCIAL AND STRUCTURAL BARRIERS TO INCLUSION

Drought responses must be inclusive of all affected people so that everyone can participate and benefit, especially those most at risk.

'Inclusion' focuses on who is reached and whether assistance and participation is equitable: it asks whether we are reaching everyone, especially those most at risk. As such, it is not an optional extra; it is central to accountability and effective action. Droughts often deepen existing inequalities and social barriers, and people in vulnerable situations or with specific needs can face both heightened risks and limited access to information, resources and decision-making. In the context of drought, inclusion requires continuous attention to who may be left out as conditions evolve, identifying and reducing barriers for people in vulnerable situations or with specific needs (including, for example, women, children, older people, persons with disabilities and groups specifically affected by drought, such as pastoralists) and ensuring that participation in identifying their specific needs and access to appropriate solutions remain fair and meaningful.

There has been progress on child- and women-centred approaches, which have proven both effective and essential in recent drought responses. Nonetheless, barriers for women and others still need to be actively considered (for example, do all women have ID cards?). Older people, persons with disabilities and remote or marginalised pastoralists can still be overlooked, and people who are displaced, stateless, migrants, indigenous or lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans or queer continue to be deprioritised. For example: older people can face physical and financial barriers and disrupted access to treatment for chronic illness; inaccessible communication, digital illiteracy and service design may exclude persons with disabilities from assistance and participation, and may expose them to protection risks; and, while not all pastoralists are marginalised, those who are require flexible support that respects mobility and maintains access to grazing and water across administrative boundaries.

Inclusion is most effective when analysis starts early and data is disaggregated by sex, age and disability to capture the diverse impacts of drought. Transparent criteria, community-based targeting committees and regular updates to recipient lists help ensure that assistance remains fair as conditions change. Programmes that link livelihoods and protection measures, such as reducing gender-based violence (GBV) risks and ensuring accessible service delivery, strengthen both equity and safety.

Number of documents contributing to the lessons: 19

Average evidence scores of all documents contributing to the lessons: 3.5

Median evidence strength of documents contributing to the lessons: 73%

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Humanitarian and development actors should integrate analysis of social and structural barriers to inclusion across all stages of drought response, including assessments, programme design, implementation, monitoring and learning.
- Humanitarian actors should ensure that gender, age, disability, displacement status and livelihood systems inform vulnerability analysis, targeting criteria and programme modalities rather than relying on generic household-level approaches that risk obscuring intra-household inequalities.
- Humanitarian actors should adapt programme design and delivery mechanisms to better reach pastoralist, mobile and remote populations, including through flexible targeting approaches, mobile service delivery and cross-border coordination where relevant.
- Humanitarian actors should ensure that assessments and data-collection methods are inclusive and accessible, including through the use of disaggregated data, adapted tools and engagement with marginalised groups, who are often excluded from standard assessment processes.
- Humanitarian and development actors should address power dynamics within households and communities that shape access to assistance and decision-making, including by supporting the safe and inclusive participation of women, girls, older people and persons with disabilities.
- Humanitarian actors should work with representative organisations – such as those run by and for women, persons with disabilities, pastoralists and older people – to improve programme relevance, accountability and reach.
- Humanitarian actors should ensure that information about assistance, eligibility and feedback mechanisms is accessible to people with different communication needs, literacy levels and access constraints, including by making such information available in multiple formats and languages, and disseminating it via trusted communication channels.
- Humanitarian actors and donors should invest in staff capacity, technical expertise and the operational adaptations required to deliver inclusive drought responses, recognising that inclusion requires additional time and resources.
- Donors should ensure funding arrangements allow sufficient flexibility and duration to support inclusive approaches, including the adaptations needed to respond to changing risks and vulnerabilities over the drought cycle and to support marginalised and hard-to-reach groups.