SUMMARY OF LESSONS

This section provides an overview of the 17 top-level lessons we identified by reviewing evaluations, research and the documented experience of humanitarian responses to droughts between 2012 and 2024, complemented by expert input through a Delphi process. The lessons highlight areas of strong convergence on what humanitarian actors should prioritise when anticipating, responding to and supporting recovery from drought. Each lesson is explored in more detail in the following section.

01 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.

02 BUILD EFFECTIVE PARTNERSHIPS

Partnerships that combine community insight with private-sector capacity, civil society and government leadership enable faster humanitarian responses that leave behind stronger, more connected systems capable of withstanding future droughts – especially when built *before* a crisis.

03 ENSURE PREDICTABLE AND FLEXIBLE FUNDING

Effective programming depends on predictable, flexible and harmonised financing. Embrace innovative risk-transfer tools to move beyond short-term, reactive aid to include 'no regrets'[1] early action and resilience-building.

04 USE EARLY WARNINGS OF DROUGHTAND MAKE TIMELY DROUGHT DECLARATIONS

Humanitarian and development actors must anticipate risks rather than react to crises. Governments need to make evidence-based and timely drought declarations and not wait until the full impact of a drought has materialised.

05 MOVE TOWARDS ANTICIPATORY ACTION

Humanitarian and development systems must transition from reactive crisis response to proactive, anticipatory risk management to reduce the human and economic toll of drought and make the most cost-efficient use of donor funds.

1 'no regrets' refers to decisions or actions that provide a benefit, or at a minimum no harm, even if the crisis is not realised.

06 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.

07 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.

08 INTEGRATE PROTECTION ACROSS DROUGHT RESPONSE

Protection risks increase in specific ways during drought, particularly through family separation, mobility, reduced access to essential services and harmful coping strategies. Responses must integrate protection analysis across sectors and strengthen community-based, inclusive systems that reduce risks and prevent harm.

09 APPLY CONFLICT-SENSITIVE AND PEACE-POSITIVE APPROACHES

Drought responses must be conflict-sensitive and support peace-building efforts where possible.

10 DELIVER MULTISECTORAL DROUGHT RESPONSES

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

11 ADDRESS HEALTH NEEDS DURING DROUGHT

Different and specific health needs should be addressed and existing health infrastructure supported, where possible, given the extra demands on health services during drought.

12 STRENGTHEN SOCIAL PROTECTION FOR DROUGHT RESPONSE

Large-scale social protection programmes demonstrate the potential to support millions during drought. They may have systemic weaknesses, but they can be strengthened to become more dynamic and responsive.

13 SELECT APPROPRIATE PROGRAMME MODALITIES

Cash programming is effective – and communities often prefer it – but it needs to be adaptive to local contexts.

14 LINK HUMANITARIAN RESPONSE TO RESILIENCE

Humanitarian and development actors should move beyond short-term relief by integrating immediate drought response with long-term resilience-building. Linking livelihood protection with sustainable systems and coordinated, cross-sectoral collaboration enables communities to recover, adapt and thrive.

15 PROTECT AND STRENGTHEN LIVELIHOODS AND ASSETS

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

16 BUILD WATER, SANITATION AND HYGIENE (WASH) AND ECOSYSTEM RESILIENCE

Humanitarian actors should move from short-term water trucking and emergency WASH responses towards integrated, sustainable water and ecosystem management as soon as possible.

17 STRENGTHEN MONITORING, EVALUATION, ACCOUNTABILITY AND LEARNING (MEAL) AND DATA SYSTEMS

Embed MEAL systems that are inclusive and locally led, and implement data management systems that generate timely, disaggregated, actionable insights.