

5.0 How can the policy process be influenced such that risk is seen as integral component of development?

Policy makers, governments and development agencies usually recognise that development initiatives interact and relate to one another in complex ways. Decisions and policies relating to one development activity will positively or negatively impact on others. Drought, as we have seen, is no an exception to this rule and hence development actors have been seeking to integrate and incorporate drought management as a policy direction with respect to the tools and concepts of development, such as Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers, good governance, gender equity, water management, and environmental sustainability. Some organisations have been active in trying to advocate for mainstreaming of sound drought management policies but may lack the analytical tools and/or policy influence to achieve this. Nevertheless, the importance of achieving this becomes critical in countries where drought regularly and strongly impacts development advances. How, then, can interested parties engage in shifting thinking about drought risk from the natural hazards paradigm to a social-political one and in doing so open up space for new policy options?

5.1

Policy choices can either undermine or enhance resilience to drought

As we have seen from the discussion so far, there are many factors which interact in complex ways which influence the way in which a society – at whatever scale - makes use of water, often with impacts on food security. Some of these factors are within the control of policy makers at national level, some not. If we then add drought to the formula, we are essentially greatly decreasing the ability of policy makers to influence an outcome, particularly if an economy is heavily reliant on weather-dependent activities. The knock-on effects of drought on Zimbabwe's economy, cited earlier - even in sectors one might not expect to be affected - illustrates this principle. In general, the lower the average rainfall in an area the higher the variability and the lower the crop the more directly weather dependent the economy.

Adapting policy to the reality of weather and even climate uncertainty may make the difference between major and minor impacts during a drought. Indeed, in some countries drought, water management and food security may be central development issues even if they are not explicitly recognized as such. Yet even where drought occurs with frequency and has major impacts - even reversing development advances – droughts and their impacts are often portrayed as surprising, unexpected events for which one could not have prepared. International assistance is then often forthcoming, which may unwittingly act as a disincentive for investing in drought resilience. For some years now a cross-section of development actors have been talking about the need to move from relief to development, from crisis management to reducing the risk of disasters but there is little evidence that this has moved to the centre of the policy agenda.

One constraint may be a lack of understanding of the impacts of policy choices on disaster risk and specifically, for this discussion, of vulnerability to drought. It must be emphasized that there is no substitute for policy makers taking stock of their own situation and systematically analyzing their various policy options on the criteria of whether they are likely to increase vulnerability or resilience to drought. These would then be prioritized according to likely impact, then related to the feasibility of making changes and the trade-offs between them. UNDP through the Drylands Development Centre (see end of paper) is developing capacity to assist policy makers in this area and works through UNDP Country Offices, present in most countries of the world.

5.2 Drought policy principles in the context of uncertainty

The level of resilience of drought users could be enhanced if there were better communication with higher-level decision-makers who influence their world. Even in the case of national policy makers, there may be the same issue of being unaware of some of the factors external to their world but which impinge upon it. This can be a major explanation of vulnerability to drought at the level of the policy environment over which they have influence, the nation state. There may be changes in global trade patterns, climate change, changes in policies in important partner countries, development agencies *etc.* But similarly, even within an idealized self-contained policy environment, it would be difficult to predict the outcome of drought, water and food security policy choices as they are mediated through complex socio-environmental systems. Furthermore, these systems consist of actors with 'agency'; (in other words free will) who may not respond in the expected or desired manner.

Nevertheless there are a number of principles of **ecosystem management** which have been developed (FAO 2004) which we find relevant to the question of how to devise an enabling policy environment for managing uncertainty in the context of regularly drought-exposed weather-dependent economies. Among these we highlight:

- Change is inevitable
- The objectives for which land, water and living resources are managed is a societal choice
- Representatives of affected groups should be involved and all relevant knowledge systems and practices (ie scientific and indigenous) should be considered and in order to do so management should be decentralized to the lowest appropriate level
- Recognizing that various parts of the society-environment complex operate at different time scales, and with unknown interactions and lag effects, objectives should be set for the long term
- Ecosystems must be managed within the limits of their functioning (*e.g.* regulation of the hydrological cycle) in order to ensure that they continue to supply provisioning services (*e.g.* groundwater for irrigation) and should consider the potential effect on linked systems
- Ecosystems are normally also **economic systems** and must be managed with sound economic principles in mind

Furthermore, it is important to remember that in the real world management often means allocating limited resources between competing demands and groups. This is an **inherently 'political'** and potentially conflictual situation and must be recognized as such rather than hoping to wish it away by politely ignoring it. In drought-prone environments this means that water and other essential but limited resources can become a source of conflict, especially when they are shared resources (*i.e.* groundwater, grazing). In such a situation the ability to generate collective action for sensible and equitable management of resources, resulting in a net increase of resilience to drought, becomes a critical issue in influencing policy. The failure to do so can be seen for example, in recent water triggered clashes between pastoralists and farmers in several areas of Kenya, resulting in some twenty deaths. In this case the drought triggered water relate conflict is just a tip of an iceberg of historic issues of resource access, which clearly have part of the equation.

5.3

Policy options for managing drought risk;

What are we *really* trying to manage through drought-related policy?

So far we have used the terms 'vulnerability to drought' and 'resilience to drought', but what do these really mean? The term vulnerability, in particular, has been used in development circles recently, each community tending to use it in its own way, in other words with an applications-specific definition. In the case of drought we simply mean 'a condition in which an individual, household, community or society is in danger of moving to a lower state of well-being when exposed to drought and taking considerable time to recover'. Resilience is used to mean the opposite. A drought impact normally occurs by acting upon a vulnerable situation, leading to a lower state of well-being, a crisis or even a disaster. Therefore drought policy should not be focused on drought. It should focus on the conditions which make a group or situation vulnerable to the impacts of drought. Making policy choices with the implications for drought vulnerability or resilience in mind also involves managing risk and uncertainty.

In short, the risk of drought impacts is a function of both the probability of receiving unusually low levels or an unfortunate distribution of rainfall together with the current state of vulnerability of the group or system exposed, as well as the degree to which there are mechanisms and resources to respond. As such, the best way to influence policy processes in order to mainstream risk would be educate all relevant actors to recognize the fact of the complex relationship between drought and its socio-economic settings. Having established awareness, a specific diagnostic methodology must then be developed to allow policy makers to assess whether a policy option enhances or undermines resilience to drought at various scales. Once proven, this then needs to be institutionalized in to national and district level standard prioritization and planning processes.

Finally supply side activities must be complemented by demand side activities which amplify the voices of the often politically marginalized drylands users in order to help shape the higher level decisions which may create an enabling or disabling environment for their highly evolved drought risk management strategies

6.0 The role(s) of 'external' players in assisting countries enhance their resilience to drought

External players have a central role to play in assisting countries enhance their resilience to drought, among them to network and collaborate with the governments of various countries to formulate and implement sound and broad drought management systems. They can also provide resources in terms of, training, personnel, finances, and information on strategies and global best practices for reducing drought risk and vulnerability. Furthermore, they can help strengthen existing institution structures and build capacity of the countries to manage, reduce and cope with future occurrences of similar events, which will surely occur. The role(s) of external players in the process of drought-proofing, Africa will be a major topic for discussion in the expert consultation. It will ideally lead to the identification of the respective roles which development actors should play in effecting a sea change in the way we address drought risk; away from one of the dependency on emergency and humanitarian relief and towards a more proactive and integrated approach.