



Adapting to climate change and addressing drought – learning from the Red Cross Red Crescent experiences in the Horn of Africa



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ABSTRACT

The paper presented here is intended to share lessons learnt from the operations that the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) and its National Societies undertook from 2008 to 2010 in the Horn of Africa, related to the adaptation to climate change and addressing drought. It acknowledges that to avoid further suffering from drought, not only in Africa (in the Horn and the Sahel region) but also other parts of the world, we need to change the way we invest. The IFRC advocates that for a national drought policy to be effective in its implementation, the policy itself will need to be developed with an integrated approach, a strong linkage to climate change adaptation and disaster risk reduction in a country.

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1. Introduction

The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) is the world's largest humanitarian organisation, providing assistance without discrimination as to nationality, race, religious beliefs, class or political opinions. Founded in 1919, the IFRC comprises 189 member in Red Cross and Red Crescent National Societies, a secretariat in Geneva, five Zone Offices and more than 60 delegations strategically located to support activities around the world.

The IFRC carries out relief operations to assist victims of disasters, and combines this with development work to strengthen the capacities of its member National Societies to enhance the service delivery to the most vulnerable. The IFRC's work as outlined in its Strategy 2020 (IFRC, 2010a) is with three strategic aims: (1) save lives, protect livelihoods, and strengthen recovery from disasters and crises, (2) enable healthy and safe living, and (3) promote social inclusion and a culture of non-violence and peace. The unique network of National Societies – which covers almost every country in the world – is the IFRC's principal strength. Cooperation between National Societies gives the IFRC greater potential to develop capacities and assist those most in need. At a local level, the network enables the IFRC to reach individual communities.

The paper presented here is intended to share lessons learnt from the operations that the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) and its National Societies undertook from 2008 to 2010 in the Horn of Africa, related to the adaptation to climate change and addressing drought. It acknowledges that to avoid further suffering from drought, not only in Africa (in the Horn and the Sahel region) but also other parts of the world, we need to change the way we invest. The IFRC advocates that for a national drought policy to be effective in its implementation, the policy itself will need to be developed with an integrated approach, a strong linkage to climate change adaptation and disaster risk reduction in a country.

2. Climate change induced drought, its humanitarian and development consequences and the need for national drought policies

Drought is an insidious phenomenon. Unlike rapid onset disasters, drought related disaster tightens its grip over time, gradually destroying an area. In severe cases, lack of rainfall leads to inadequate water supply for plants, animals and human beings and drought can last for many years and have a devastating effect on life and livelihoods. A drought may result in food insecurity, famine, malnutrition, epidemics and displacement of populations. According to the World Meteorological Organisation (WMO), climate change is projected to increase the frequency, intensity, and duration of droughts, with impacts on many sectors, in particularly food, water and energy.

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As drought is a slow onset process, we need to move away from a crisis-driven approach and develop integrated risk-based national drought policies and consolidated efforts for implementation. A policy for reducing risk of disasters, including droughts, made with a holistic and coherent approach, which provides an integrated overview of activities meeting the local needs and building resilience is more than a necessity! In drought-affected countries, such a policy could provide guidance and facilitate coordinating supports from partners from national to local level to address drought and its consequences effectively.

Climate change risks for many people are existential – the drought phenomenon, as discussed in this paper, is just one of them, but a serious one. Drought, with its slow-onset process and effects, is creating negative impacts – economic, environmental, and social (and security, in affected countries with fragile situations) – across countries and without borders. For example, the 2012–2013 North American Drought (C2ES, 2014), expanded from the 2010–2012 Southern United States drought, included most of the US, parts of Mexico, and central and Eastern Canada (Wikipedia, 2014).

Although highly industrialised countries have widely contributed to the increase of global greenhouse gas emissions, the emissions of economies in transition and large emerging economy countries are growing rapidly (<http://www.un.org/wcm/content/site/climatechange/pages/gateway/the-negotiations>). While the per capita emissions of developing countries are low compared to the industrialised countries, it is estimated that developing countries will bear 75–80% of the costs of damages related to climate change (World Bank, 2010) as a result of increased droughts, floods and strong storms coupled with a rise in the sea level.

In addition to an increase in the number of climate-related disasters, higher temperature and increased vulnerability, together with population growth, will result in increased incidence of food shortages and vector-borne diseases (IPCC, 2007). From a humanitarian point of view, this will stretch existing resources substantially, particularly considering the increased number of small-scale weather events that are increasingly undermining people's capacities to cope with and recover from disasters. The most vulnerable people will be the ones hardest hit by these changes in climate. For example, African countries dominate the top 10 list in terms of disaster victims as a proportion of total population size (Sylvain et al., 2012), mainly due to major droughts and the consecutive famines that have affected parts of the continent.

2.1. *Linking drought policies with National Adaptation Plans (NAPs) at country level*

Under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), all developing countries are invited to establish so-called National Adaptation Plans (NAPs). NAPs are an emerging concept to plan and prioritise national adaptation activities. The concept was introduced through the Cancun Adaptation Framework (http://unfccc.int/adaptation/cancun_adaptation_framework/items/5852.php, paras 11–35) that was adopted during the Conference of the Parties (COP) of the UNFCCC held in Cancun in 2010.

In other words, governments determine their long-term priorities for climate change adaptation in their NAPs. Once a NAP has been established, the national government is likely to remain on the adaptation path identified in it. Nevertheless, the adaptation plans will be reviewed on a regular basis to include new information. Most available or planned funding for climate change adaptation and mitigation from multilateral and bilateral donors is being channelled through national governments and conditional to activities identified as priorities in the NAP. Therefore, the priorities identified in the NAP will determine where and what types of adaptation activities will take place in that specific country.

The NAPs can be understood as a list of priorities for climate change adaptation activities developed by the national governments. This priority list is meant to kick-off the planning for adaptation in developing countries and give an overall framework for the concrete implementation of the activities. Therefore, NAPs will not only play a major role in determining the future path that climate change adaptation will take in a country, but they will also be closely linked to available funding sources. For developing countries, the success of the implementation of a national drought policy will depend on the level of integration within NAP. It is important that relevant governmental officials in charge of developing and implementing a national drought policy and NAPs connect and consult each other and understand where the government stands in the process of developing a NAP, who the key stakeholders are and in which form a national drought policy can contribute to the development and implementation of the NAP.

As climate change adaptation can benefit from enhanced mitigation measures and some of these measures contribute to reduce drought impact, in particular in the land-use sector (afforestation and reforestation including agroforestry, provision of safe water or water for irrigation with clean technologies e.g., solar pumping, drip irrigation, water filters, etc.), national drought policy makers also need to take into account of National Appropriate Mitigation Actions (NAMAs) of the UNFCCC (http://unfccc.int/cooperation_support/nama/items/6945.php).

2.2. *Linking drought policies with disaster risk reduction (DRR)*

The Horn of Africa, for example, provides an extremely complex developmental and humanitarian context with which to engage. Political structures in the region, for instance ranging enormously from stateless to highly centralised states, also create challenges in good governance. Political volatility is high and conflict is recurrent. Extremely high levels of poverty and vulnerability to natural and man-made shocks are evident. Seasonal hunger and seasonal stress occur to varying extents virtually every year and many or most large-scale crises have a slow-onset character (IFRC, 2010b).

In the region, drought is not the only natural hazard impacting the daily life of people and communities. For example, in the case of Kenya, flood and drought crises are inextricably linked. As a consequence, food security is affected on all sides. While a drought can be the worst memory for a farmer, one can still be afraid of a coming flood. In this case, a drought policy not providing for flood protection could mean that rivers that could help families grow crops could instead ruin the land and destroy livelihoods. Where flood protection is appropriate, techniques such as rock-filled metal mesh gabions covered with earth can defend the land at critical points where the river is most likely to burst its banks. The protected land can be cleared and pumps can feed the irrigation system.

This kind of flood protection combined with upgraded irrigation systems, with canals that bring water to fields far from the river and using ponds as reservoirs for pumping the water further, not only protect the farmers from flood, but also contribute to avoiding the drought.

This is evidence of why disaster risk reduction in communities must become a priority. What assails the Horn of Africa today is a chronic crisis rooted in past complexity and major socio-economic developments. Lives and livelihoods have been undermined paving the way for recurring drought to exacerbate poverty, ill health, malnutrition and hunger. With outdated means of coping bound to fail, the Horn of Africa limps in and out of disaster. The bottom line is this: drought will remain a common occurrence in the region. What happens today will be repeated in the near future.

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