

ABSTRACT

Recurring droughts are an endemic feature for agriculture in Zimbabwe, a country whose majority of the population (70%) depends on agricultural based activities as their livelihoods resource. Concern is growing that drought might become more frequent in the region as a result of global warming. If this occurs it will exacerbate problems for vulnerable households, communities and economies. The study reviews coping strategies of the community towards drought, and assesses the capacity of local institutions in dealing with drought. The objectives of the study was to identify and examine coping mechanisms in place by individual

households and the community, to identify local institutions involved in drought mitigation, to assess how local institutions have responded to disaster risk reduction and appraise the capacity of local institutions involved in risk reduction. Participatory, consultative and deductive research methods including household surveys, focused group discussions, key informants interviews, observations and review of literature allowed for the collection of empirical, descriptive, and spatial data to provide for the appraisal.

The study revealed that households in the district have developed sophisticated (ex ante) risk-management and (ex post) risk-coping strategies to cope with food shortages or drought.

In the initial phases of difficulty, tendency to reduce meal portions, go the whole day without food, sale of labour and use of available resources such as savings, were the most common. As the situation intensified, recourse was sought in broader social and economic interactions such as sending some members of the family to other relatives, cross border trading, sale of small stock; barter exchange and even begging were established. Finally, sale of productive assets such as large stock, implements and non productive, but difficult to replace assets, such as valuable roofing material in the form of asbestos sheets occur. The study established that various institutions were involved in drought management in the district. They included government departments, CBOs/NGOs/INGOs, local leadership and the community, social networks that include friends and relatives and some religious organisations. However, not much support had been coming from government institutions as compared to NGOs. Challenges common to both NGOs and Government departments included political interference in day-to-day activities that sometimes derailed implementation of drought risk reduction activities. The existing economic environment had also led to high staff turn-over in most government departments and shortages of inputs and materials required for drought risk reduction. The current global economic crisis exacerbated the situation affecting funding inflows for some NGOs. Recommendations were proposed and key among them were to design sustainable interventions for a drought prone area and a local and participatory agro ecosystem appraisal is necessary. The most effective interventions will prove to be those that enhance household coping strategies. A user friendly

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satellite remote sensing must be designed and vulnerability maps in the early warning systems. To establish civil protection committees at grassroots level is of paramount importance.