

Scope of this Paper

This paper reflects the scope of the meeting it helps inform by focussing on drought at the policy and hence national and international levels. As such, it helps set a context for the actual scales of intervention, which are typically sub-national. Much has been written about the coping strategies of particular, relatively small, groups from which one can derive principles which would assist the process of designing policy. Nevertheless this paper and the meeting it helps orient do not propose to delve into these already heavily treaded waters. Rather, it focuses on the sorts of questions which might be asked by an individual in a position to influence national policy and who is trying to grapple with the implications of various strategic development options in terms of national food security. This scenario is further refined by considering such decision-makers to operate in African countries where national development gains are regularly reversed by major droughts and/or where drought impact and food security are chronic problems. As will be seen in this paper, a number of African countries have been in a quasi-continuous state of food relief for as long as twenty years. Clearly, in such a situation, a household-level study of a particular group in a particular corner of the country will be of little direct value to policy makers in that country, though a digest of household level drought food security issues in the country would be useful if translated into national priorities and if it informs strategic options.

The objective of this paper is not to provide such a digest but rather to stimulate a debate, which will help identify elements of a proposed initiative on mainstreaming drought risk into national development thinking in Africa. The objectives and anticipated outcomes of the meeting are summarized in a separate document. One objective of the meeting which this paper directly relates is that of reflecting upon the relationship(s) between the risk of climate shocks – specifically drought – and development in drought-prone African societies and economies. As such, the emphasis is more on the macro level, on the international context, which we argue is the ‘political economy of food aid and trade’. It also concerns, within this context, the integration of drought into national development and food security options. As such there will be sessions in the meeting which address *what* needs to be integrated and *how*, as well as a session specifically on linking household level risk to national policies. This Discussion Paper hopes to introduce concepts potentially useful to those sessions and others, but without pretending to answer them.

This paper is intended rather to stimulate discussions which will help generate a number of situation-specific answers or sets of answers. The participants will then also strategize about how to operationalize these elements of the proposed initiative through the various channels at their respective and collective disposal. The long-term effect should be a change in thinking, resulting in more effective ways for development actors to carry out the business of ‘drought proofing’ the livelihood systems which sustain people across Africa. It will also have a direct and concrete output by helping orient a major UNDP program on complex food security and ‘new variant’ famines in Africa.

In order to achieve a balance between the ‘conceptual’, policy level approach to drought risk and development taken in this paper with the desire participants may have for detailed and practical information, each participant will also receive a copy of the publication *Success Stories in the Struggle Against Desertification*, which is a collection of local level case studies. It remains, however, for the reader to extract from these situation-specific projects general principles which can inform an approach to other situations. Then if we upscale this idea we come back to the topic addressed by this paper: what options exists at a national level? Furthermore, when addressing drought risk and food security at a national scale one is really addressing issues of a process of objective setting, prioritization, costing and trade offs. In short, one keeps coming back to development policy. Therefore we must strive to set the management of drought risk within the context of the processes of daily decision making at the national level and their implications for

drought-exposed populations if we are to be able to meaningfully address the question of whether Africa can be free from the consequences of recurring climate shocks.

1.0 Introduction

This section introduces the complex interaction between drought and development and highlights the fact that in chronically drought impacted countries in Africa drought risk must be seen as a central development concern and therefore mainstreamed into the national planning processes. Furthermore it draws on an important new study to demonstrate that there is no direct relationship between drought exposure and drought impact. This is because climate risk is mediated through complex socio-economic pathways which can either dampen or even exaggerate the effect of natural hazard such as drought. The policy implication of this are explored over the rest of the paper.

1.1 Drought can reverse national development gains

The impact of drought and climatic variability in both economic and mortality terms is generally larger for relatively simple, predominantly agricultural economies (e.g. Malawi or Mozambique). In the case of 'intermediate' economies (e.g. Zimbabwe) the impacts are better absorbed by a more complex and diversified economy (as in South Africa). Drought impact is mitigated in dualistic mineral exporting economies (e.g. Botswana, Namibia, and Zambia before the rapid decline in its copper industry during the 1980s) (Clay *et al* 2003) because these sectors are de-linked from other sectors of the economy and afford the opportunity of subsidizing the rainfall-dependent component of the economy. In many countries the frequency, duration and severity of drought can impact GDP and even threaten to reverse many apparently unrelated investments in national development. Drought in a simple or intermediate economy will have a particularly significant impact on the economy both directly and through knock-on effects to industries which add value to and export weather-dependent production. For example in Zimbabwe the drought of 1990/1991 resulted in a 45% drop in agricultural production but also a 62% decline in the value of the stock market, a 9% drop in manufacturing output and an 11% drop in the GDP (USAID-OFDA 1998). Similarly, in Kenya, the drought of 1999-2001 cost the economy some 2.5 billion dollars. As a proportion of the national economy this is a very significant loss and can best be thought of as 2.5 billion dollars of foregone development, for example, hospitals and schools not built.

1.2 UNDP finds drought to be the most important natural hazard in-terms of human mortality

Disasters affect a wide range socio-economic development and the range of stakeholders is broad. Every year disasters affect millions of people, cause economic losses of tens of billions of dollar, and kill tens of thousands of people (UN-ISDR 2003). The impacts are much greater for the poor, in terms of death rates, shattered livelihoods, starvation, and sometimes diseases. The economic impacts of disasters are a serious handicap to the economic development of many less developed countries, with losses sometimes equal to several years of national growth gains (UN-ISDR 2003).

The recent and influential inter-agency publication *Poverty and Climate Change* (ADB *et al.* 2004) highlights the fact that, in spite of all the science of climate modeling at our disposal, the only way we can really get an idea of how human societies might adapt to climate change is to analyze the experience of populations who have had to cope with climate uncertainty. This is principally in drylands areas and specifically the way they have adapted to the constant threat of drought. But