

We consider the wider interaction of drought with environmental and societal dynamics. These rapidly changing dynamics significantly shape the nature and extent of drought impacts, and, equally, shape the chances of success of drought response measures – they may also outpace climatic change. Using examples from research in East Africa we illustrate the interaction of drought with a set of other dynamics in the lives of pastoralists and agro-pastoralists.

KEY FINDINGS

Populations in our case study sites had experienced consecutive years of drought. Managing water scarcity is therefore a continual and not an exceptional task. Bringing together insights from different strands of the research, we used examples to illustrate the interaction of drought with a set of other environmental, social, cultural, economic and political-administrative dynamics in the lives of pastoralists and agro-pastoralists. These dynamics were found to shape the nature and extent of drought impacts, and, equally, shape the chances of success of drought-response measures.

The landscape in the case studies is predominantly rangeland, which is undergoing shifts in composition and vegetation cover. Soil and vegetation have been degraded by overgrazing, but there are other ecological, social, economic and climatic factors (e.g., spread of alien invasive plants in Middle Awash Valley, Ethiopia). Shifting human land use is causing change – dryland livelihood activities are altering as different economic sectors develop – at the same time as non-traditional sources of information are complementing *and* challenging community-based knowledge mechanisms and advice channels.

WHAT WAS DONE, AND WHAT WAS NOVEL?

This 'Think Note' draws on empirical research conducted in Ethiopia and Kenya. We drew primarily on qualitative data, focussing especially on case studies in the Middle Awash Valley in Afar, Ethiopia, and Isiolo and Meru Counties in northern Kenya. We applied social and environmental research to understand land use, livelihoods and wellbeing dynamics along the rural-urban continuum. We raised questions around how the implications of drought should be understood and how such analyses should inform risk management in the region and beyond.

KEY IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICY, PRACTICE AND RESEARCH

The paper emphasises the importance of setting drought analysis in its wider, dynamic context, both for researchers and for those designing and implementing drought-risk reduction and adaptation interventions.

The research showed that the key to reducing risk is to understand that the effects of drought both shape and influence the full range of dynamics. The impacts of drought and responses to it must be understood within the context of wider stresses and changes – including environmental, economic, social, cultural, demographic and managerial dynamics.

Furthermore, the effective reduction of drought risk can seldom be achieved as a standalone measure. A more integrated approach can bring co-benefits and enhance sustainability.

