

Concept Note on the Organization of a High Level Meeting on National Drought Policy (HMNDP) in 2013

1. Need for National Drought Policy

Drought is an insidious natural hazard that results from a deficiency of precipitation from expected or “normal”. When these conditions are extended over a season or longer period of time, this deficiency of precipitation, results in impacts on human activities and the environment. The severity of drought and the impacts associated with it are often exacerbated by high temperatures, high winds, and low relative humidity. Drought occurs frequently in almost all climatic regimes and can affect large portions of a country or may be regional in nature spanning several countries. It knows no national boundaries.

Given the current concerns with climate change, projected increases in the frequency, intensity, and duration of droughts and resulting impacts on many sectors, in particular food, water, and energy, there is cause for concern regarding the lack of drought preparedness and appropriate drought management policies for virtually all nations. The time is ripe for nations to move forward with the development of a pro-active, risk-based national drought policy. Without a coordinated, national drought policy that includes effective monitoring and early warning systems to deliver timely information to decision makers, effective impact assessment procedures, pro-active risk management measures, preparedness plans aimed at increasing the coping capacity, and effective emergency response programs directed at reducing the impacts of drought, nations will continue to respond to drought in a reactive, crisis management mode. Lack of a clear national drought policy implies that governments at the national, state, and community levels will continue with the status quo, i.e., reacting to the impacts of drought with little coordination between national, state, and local agencies. National governments must adopt policies that engender cooperation and coordination at all levels of governments in order to increase their capacity to cope with extended periods of water shortages due to drought. The ultimate goal is to create more drought resilient societies.

To succeed in the development of a national drought policy, the guiding principles should include favoring preparedness over insurance, insurance over emergency relief, and local incentives over government regulation. Research priorities should be set based on the potential of the research results to mitigate and overcome drought impacts in the particular region and for

the particular sectors of concern. While drought is a universal problem, solutions to the problem are region- and location-specific. Thus, research must address local needs.

2. What are the Goals of a National Drought Policy?

The implementation of a drought policy can alter a nation's approach to drought management. In the past decade, drought policy and preparedness has received increasing attention from governments, international and regional organizations, and nongovernmental organizations. Simply stated, a national drought policy should establish a clear set of principles or operating guidelines to govern the management of drought and its impacts. The policy should be consistent and equitable for all regions, population groups, and economic sectors and consistent with the goals of sustainable development. The overriding principle of drought policy should be an emphasis on risk management through the application of preparedness and mitigation measures. This policy should be directed toward reducing risk by developing better awareness and understanding of the drought hazard and the underlying causes of societal vulnerability. The principles of risk management can be promoted by encouraging the improvement and application of seasonal and shorter-term forecasts, developing integrated monitoring and drought early warning systems and associated information delivery systems, developing preparedness plans at various levels of government, adopting mitigation actions and programs, creating a safety net of emergency response programs that ensure timely and targeted relief, and providing an organizational structure that enhances coordination within and between levels of government and with stakeholders.

As the incidence of drought and society's vulnerability to it has increased globally, greater attention has been directed to reducing risks associated with its occurrence through the introduction of planning to improve operational capabilities (i.e., climate and water supply monitoring, building institutional capacity) and mitigation measures that are aimed at reducing drought impacts. This change in emphasis is long overdue. Mitigating the effects of drought requires the use of all components of the cycle of disaster management (Figure 1), rather than only the crisis management portion of this cycle. Typically, when a natural hazard event and resultant disaster has occurred, governments and donors have followed with impact assessment, response, recovery, and reconstruction activities to return the region or locality to a pre-disaster state. Historically, little attention has been given to preparedness, mitigation, and prediction/early warning actions (i.e., risk management) that could reduce future impacts and

lessen the need for government intervention in the future. Because of this emphasis on crisis management, society has generally moved from one disaster to another with little, if any, reduction in risk. In addition, in drought-prone regions, another drought event is likely to occur before the region fully recovers from the last event.

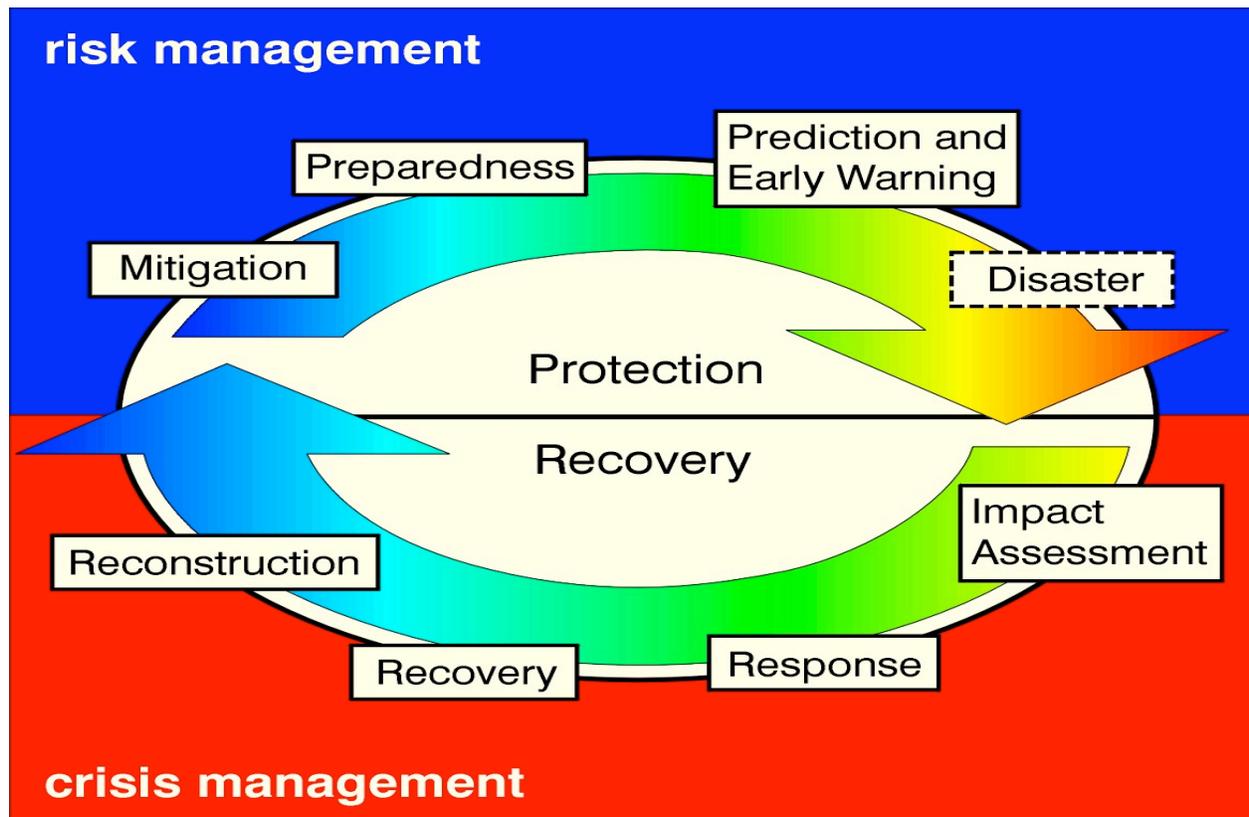


Figure 1. Cycle of Disaster Management (Source: National Drought Mitigation Center, University of Nebraska-Lincoln, U.S.A.).

In summary, a National Drought Policy could be centered around five goals.

- 1) Proactive mitigation and planning measures, risk management, public outreach and resource stewardship as key elements of effective national drought policy.
- 2) Greater collaboration to enhance the national/regional/global observation network and information delivery system to improve public understanding of and preparedness for drought.

- 3) Incorporation of comprehensive governmental and private insurance and financial strategies into drought preparedness plans.
- 4) Recognition of a safety net of emergency relief based on sound stewardship of natural resources and self-help at diverse governance levels.
- 5) Coordination of drought programs and response in an effective, efficient and customer-oriented manner.

There are examples of implementing some of the above goals in some countries. For example, in the United States, goal 2 was addressed through the establishment of a National Integrated Drought Information System (NIDIS) in 2006 and goal 5 through the creation of a Drought Council among the different agencies in the United States Department of Agriculture to coordinate its drought monitoring and program response activities.

3. Why a High Level Meeting on National Drought Policy (HMNDP) is needed?

Despite the repeated occurrences of droughts throughout human history and the large impacts on different socio-economic sectors, no concerted efforts have ever been made to initiate a dialogue on the formulation and adoption of national drought policies. Amongst all the countries in the world, only Australia has developed a national drought policy based on the principles of risk management. However, the elements of this policy have deteriorated in recent years resulting in a reexamination of this policy today.

The goals of a national drought policy described above could contribute immensely to poverty alleviation, economic development, and societal and environmental wellbeing as a whole, especially in the developing countries. Droughts do impact the management of agriculture and water resources, construction, energy resources, health, tourism, recreation, transportation, markets and ecosystems. Many governments have not been proactive in the management of droughts because of the lack of a clear orientation. Consequently, it would be most useful if a high level dialogue on the national drought policies could be initiated to ensure that government actions transcend far beyond the conventional reactive approaches. In fact, it has been demonstrated that traditional drought assistance or relief programs actually result in less self-reliance and more dependence on governments, increasing the vulnerability of sectors to future

drought events. If more acceptable results are to be achieved in dealing with droughts, a new approach should be taken and a new attitude adopted. A high level meeting could help develop such a new approach through development of a common understanding of the issues involved, discussing the different approaches that could be incorporated into a national drought policy and finally, establishing a framework of a national drought policy that could help all the nations around the world.

4. Suggested Steps in the Organization of a High Level Meeting on National Drought Policy (HMNDP)

Given that we need to encourage the participation of Ministers concerned with drought issues at the High Level Meeting, it would be necessary to first seek the approval of the WMO Congress for this proposal; then take the different steps to develop a comprehensive concept note on national drought policy; engage the diplomatic missions in Geneva to seek their comments on the concept note and their final endorsement of the revised concept note and then organize the HMNDP. The following 12 steps are suggested in this process:

a) Obtain the approval of the WMO Congress for the organization of HMNDP through the introduction of a resolution in the AGM document for the WMO Congress in May 2011.

b) Advertise, immediately after the approval by the WMO Congress, in June 2011, the High Level Meeting on National Drought Policy (HMNDP) that will be held in March 2013 and start the resource mobilization process for the HMNDP.

c) Establish an HMNDP International Organizing Committee (HIOC) by July 2011 and start the plans for the first meeting of HIOC December 2011.

d) Organize a 2-day Expert Meeting on the Preparation of a Compendium on National Drought Policy from 14-15 July 2011 in Washington DC. Bring together 7-8 experts from the key countries/regions facing droughts (Sub-Saharan Africa; Central Asia; Southeastern Europe; Australia, India, China, Brazil, USA, Russia) to develop this Compendium.

e) Organize an International Symposium on Integrated Drought Information System (ISIDIS), from 9-11 November 2011, that brings together experts from all the different regions of the world to discuss the plans for an Integrated Drought Information System at the global level. This

symposium could be organized back-to-back with the Meeting of the CCI, CAgM and CHy Expert Group on “Climate, Food, Water”. The Compendium on National Drought Policy, approved by HIOC, could be circulated at ISIDIS to obtain the wider feedback from experts.

f) Discuss and approve the Compendium on National Drought Policy at the first meeting of HIOC in December 2011.

g) Organize a meeting with the representatives of the diplomatic missions in Geneva in Feb 2012 to brief them about the objectives of the HMNDP in March 2013, explain the concept of the Compendium on National Drought Policy, and provide them copies of the Compendium. Request them to send the Compendium to their capitals to obtain comments and suggestions from relevant ministries, agencies and institutions in their countries and submit them to WMO by 30 April 2012.

h) Develop the draft programme for the HMNDP by May 2012 and organize the second meeting of HIOC in June 2012 to discuss and finalize the programme for HMNDP in March 2013.

i) Organize a meeting of the diplomatic missions in Geneva in July 2012, circulate the programme for HMNDP and obtain confirmations on the number of ministers who will be participating in HMNDP.

j) Start the preparations for HMNDP and organize it in March 2013.
