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Examining the Effects of Drought on the Livelihoods of Selected Rural Households in Ongino Sub-County, in Kumi District

Once a thriving settlement with many fortunes of livelihoods, drought situations in Ongino sub-county have plunged communities living in this area into a desolate enclave of poverty and a chronically food insecure zone in Kumi district. Drought has become more frequent in this zone, especially during the last two decades characterised by low and variable rainfall distribution. In the past, rural households thrived through the cattle, crop, fish and forest economy as a major source for family incomes, which supported the family's ambitions to improve their economic wellbeing, until a few years ago when frequent droughts started reversing their fortunes. This study attempts to report on the effects of drought on the livelihood and coping mechanisms of the people living in Ongino sub-county during drought situations. The study is based on both quantitative and qualitative data collected from households and local leaders in the community. These data were based on the livelihood and coping mechanisms during the drought and lean period of the years 2008-2009 in which households experienced intense drought hazards. The findings from the study show that, increase of the frequency and intensity of drought has affected the agriculture and livestock sectors which are the key sources of these households' livelihoods. The scarcity of rainfall due to changing weather patterns resulted in massive crop failure, death of livestock and also poor quality livestock products. A loss or a reduction in the non-farm livelihoods was also experienced by these households. The drought phenomenon also affected the prices of agricultural products in the area due to acute scarcity; as a result of these, some people like traders and commercial producers gained from this drought. During this period, the households of this area adapted a range of livelihood coping mechanisms to reduce their vulnerability. The present study reports some of these as being; relying on the social support system, reduction of food consumption and change in the nature of the food consumed in households with low food and income stocks. Majority of the people depended on external markets for food stuff and seed/planting materials, selling of livestock and labour for family income. Many households also either sold or mortgaged their land and household assets for survival. Some of the people, including young children migrated temporary to other places to seek other sources of livelihood. The consequences of direct or primary effects illustrate indirect or secondary effects and the study analysed these in that order. Other consequences of drought were land and water resources degradation and loss of biodiversity due to deforestation. There is enormous evidence of deforestation; the greatest danger in a situation of poverty. Various studies from other drought prone areas were reviewed and discussed briefly in light of the present study results. In conclusion the study proposes various interventions to reduce drought effects. These include; building the resilience of communities to drought by promoting afforestation, encouraging water harvesting and better water management practices like promoting small scale irrigation. In addition, there is need to encourage appropriate farming practices and increasing the knowledge and skills of the local communities to effectively participate in drought risk reduction and to diversify their source of livelihoods. Finally, rehabilitation of food security stocks and gardens within communities as well as effectively do disaster risk reduction programmes so as to mitigate drought. These need to be considered by government, non-governmental organisations and communities as top priorities in Ongino sub-county as recommended by this study.

Keywords: Drought, Livelihoods, Rural Households, Kumi District