

Community Level Coping Strategies For Floods in Southern Africa

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Cope with floods?

- Consider damaging floods,
- People Don't Cope with Floods, They Survive Floods
- Then, they Recover

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[Reflections]

- Communities in these parts exposed to minor floods every few years and survived reasonably well
- Major floods in 1999/2000 and in subsequent years, triggered a change in attitude about floods in the flood plains of Mozambique
- Also triggered mainstreaming of climate change in subsequent development planning in Mozambique

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[Reflections]

- Survival the key, the poor in any region are the most vulnerable
- Relief an integral part of surviving floods
- Then recovery
- Global causation of events like this predicted by IPCC. Should we worry about specific attribution of events at this local level to climate variability versus climate change?

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[Differential Impacts by wealth]

- Visit to Chokwe 4 months after major floods of 2000 showed
 - Wealthy farmers and their SUV's ok
 - The poor from displaced communities still in camps for a long time
 - Crop recovery rapid
 - Parts of country that had one or few access points were cut off: poor most limited in travel
 - Massive international interest in floods, \$\$\$ – trickle down effect to communities and locals minor

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[Story lines]

- In rest of region, general increase in serious floods
- Increased communication of flood risk and flood predictions received mixed reaction from rural people in flood plains in subsequent year (in the lower Zambezi major floods of 2001/2002)
- Cultural reasons a major factor in some communities/people in their response to threats: attachment to place
- Numerous examples of community support for each other in the short term: sharing food, shelter, etc

[Some risks to coping]

- Droughts and floods very much related: Seasonal droughts (delayed rains) often associated with torrential rains and so flash flooding
 - “Woman in central Mozambique had planted drought resistant crops after 4 years of drought, then cyclone hit and washed away her crops”
- Persistent and dynamic recovery and coping needed to deal with mix of natural disasters/adverse climate
- Ability to get seed soon after disaster crucial in coping with sudden loss of productive cycle and recovery of subsistence livelihoods

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[Reflections]

- Cannot de-couple community response and action from national and international action in terms of reaction: role of mass media; and formal declarations of disaster areas critical trigger of emergency assistance
- No cute coping strategies for floods at the rural community level in the large flood plains of southern Africa beyond moving to higher ground when flooding (but poor access to water, and production)
- Early warning systems to rural areas (solar radios, community networks etc) help alert communities to risks but does not influence severity of impact on life support systems (crops, access, water, health)

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Critical interventions?

- Improved radio access in rural areas, can save human life if events predicted or linked to larger regional connections (e.g. in large basins such as the Zambezi River basin)
- Roads, bridges and landing strips very important in coping with floods for communities (and for others to reach them)
- “Rapid response team approach” (cf. Nairobi security): Ability for communities and individuals to survive major floods and get access to emergency aid (food, clean water, medicines, shelter) critical
- Solutions must integrate national economic growth with development goals including removal of determinants of poverty for rural people

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