



A UN-WATER INITIATIVE ORGANIZED BY:



Convention on
Biological Diversity



Capacity Development to Support National Drought Management Policies

Summary Report

Workshop for the Near East and North Africa Region
Cairo, Egypt
17-20 November 2014



Background of the Initiative

Drought is the world's costliest natural disaster and affects more people than any other form of natural disaster. Due to climate change and associated effects, the duration and intensity of droughts is expected to increase in the coming decades.

The implementation of drought policy based on the principles of risk reduction can change a nation's approach to drought management by reducing the associated impacts. However, to date most countries continue to pursue emergency and recovery strategies and respond only after droughts have taken their toll. Such reactive and 'piecemeal' approaches are not only ineffective but also not sustainable. Proactive and risk-based national drought management policies and practices would greatly assist countries to build societal resilience to drought.

To this end, the World Meteorological Organization (WMO), the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) and the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) together with the UN-Water Decade Programme on

Capacity Development (UNW-DPC) are collaborating to implement a UN-Water capacity development initiative on National Drought Management Policies (NDMP). The objective of this joint UN-Water initiative is to increase the capacities in developing countries and countries in transition on the development of risk-based national drought management policies. This is based on the identification of the capacity needs from national to local levels to be better prepared for drought and mitigating the impacts through proactive, risk-based national drought management strategies. The initiative was launched by Michel Jarraud, UN-Water Chair, at the occasion of the High-level Meeting on National Drought Policy (HMNDP) held in March 2013 in Geneva, Switzerland.

So far, five regional workshops have been carried out: for the Eastern European region, from 9-11 July 2013; for Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) region, from 4-6 December 2013; for the Asia-Pacific region, from 6-9 May 2014, for Eastern/Southern Africa region, from 5-8 August 2014; and for the Near East and North Africa (NENA) region, the subject of the current report, which took place from 17-20 November 2014.

Regional workshop for the NENA region (17-20 November 2014)

Egypt was selected to be the location of the regional workshop for the Near East and North Africa region. Based on the expressed interest and experience in organizing international events, the FAO regional office for the NENA region and the Ministry of Agriculture and Land Reclamation of the Arab Republic of Egypt hosted and served as active local partners throughout the workshop.

The workshop, held from 17-20 November 2014 at the Sofitel Hotel in Cairo, was attended by 34 representatives from the NENA region: Algeria, Egypt, Eritrea, Iran (Islamic republic of), Jordan, Mauritania, Morocco, Oman, Palestine, Sudan, Tunisia, and Yemen. The participants of the workshop were primarily experts who lead the development of drought management policies at the national level and high-level policymakers as well as researchers. Workshop participants represented a wide range of ministries including agriculture, environment, meteorology and water, reflecting the interdisciplinary nature of drought. The ministries in the above-mentioned countries were asked to nominate participants based on the following criteria:

- Willingness and ability to produce, collectively with other country representatives, a preliminary synopsis on the status of drought and its management in their respective countries, including existing capacities and perceived capacity needs (to be submitted before the workshop).
- Ability to work jointly in multisectoral teams for organizing and coordinating a network of stakeholders at country level.
- Ability to influence policy development and contribute to subsequent activities at country level.

The three and half-day workshop started with high-level opening speeches (shown in photos on next page, from left to right) by Dr Hassan Al Shaer, Professor at the Desert Research Center (DRC), Ministry of Agriculture and Land Reclamation in Egypt, Dr Mohamed Soliman, Assistant to the Minister of Water Resources and Irrigation and Dr Pasquale Steduto, FAO - Deputy Regional Representative for the Near East and North Africa and FAO Representative in Egypt, who gave an opening speech on behalf of the organizing team. The FAO regional initiative on water scarcity in the Near East and North Africa region was also presented by Dr Steduto. The opening session emphasized on the relevance of drought issues as part of climate change and the increasing frequency of drought globally and the NENA region in particular, while highlighting the need for timely and effective measures for improved preparedness and mitigation measures.



In the following session, Dr Donald Wilhite, Professor at the University of Nebraska and founder of the National Drought Mitigation Center in Lincoln, Nebraska, USA, presented a keynote on 'Managing drought risk in a changing climate: the role of national drought policy'. A step-by-step process towards developing national drought management policies was presented. Participants were exposed to the biodiversity aspect of drought and the impact of drought on ecosystem services. The rest of the session was dedicated to presentations and discussions of country reports prepared by the participants ahead of the workshop, shown in photos below. The country reports mainly assessed the state of the national drought management practices of the respective countries. Preparing the country reports in advance provided participants from the same countries an opportunity to work together ahead of the workshop, creating a network among different ministries and sectors.



The sessions that followed focused on a set of key elements of national drought policy which fall under the following three key areas: (i) Drought Monitoring and Early Warning Systems; (ii) Vulnerability Assessment and Impacts and (iii) Mitigation and Response. As situations vary significantly from country to country, no prescriptive or stringent set of elements of a national drought policy was defined, but participants were exposed to a suite of strategies guiding the drought policy development in each country's individual and specific situation. The workshop's thematic presentations were streamlined to follow the above-mentioned three key areas. Each thematic presentation was followed by extended round table discussions in breakout groups.

The UN-Water entities engaged in this initiative were represented by Dr Mohamed Bazza (Senior Officer, FAO); Dr Robert Stefanski (Chief of Agricultural Meteorology Division in the Climate and Water Department, WMO), Dr David Coates (Environmental Affairs Officer, CBD), Dr Simone Schiele (Junior Professional Officer, CBD), Mr Boubacar Cisse (Programme Officer, Regional Coordination Unit for Africa, UNCCD) and Dr Daniel Tsegai (Programme Officer, UNW-DPC).

Workshop Outcomes

The thematic presentations and the breakout group discussions covered several key areas and exposed the participants to a wide spectrum of drought management policies and their context-specific relevance. Issues discussed in depth ranged from drought monitoring and early warning systems to various drought indices and data issues in drought monitoring systems. The major components of drought monitoring systems were emphasized, namely timely data and acquisition, impact data and synthesis/analysis of data used to 'trigger' actions and the need for efficient dissemination networks (web, media, extension, etc.). Approaches of drought monitoring were clarified, ranging from single index/parameter, to multiple indices/parameters and composite index. The steps on drought vulnerability and risk assessment and the typologies of different drought risk management measures were also discussed, including drought preparedness, mitigation, response and recovery. A range of risk management options were underlined in order to build societal resilience through national drought policies and preparedness plans, which comprise short and long-term measures. Most notably, the steps towards drought plans were discussed: (i) drought characterization; (ii) monitoring and early warning; (iii) vulnerability and impact assessment and (iv) mitigation and response options. The generic 10-step process of formulating drought policies formed the backbone of the entire discussion during the three and half day workshop. The cost of inaction on drought and the long-term cost effectiveness of risk-based drought management strategies when compared with the cost of disaster response and crisis management were highlighted. On the fourth day, the participants presented their take-home messages, the immediate action steps planned and the implementation challenges foreseen back home in their countries. In the end, participants received certificates for their successful participation.

In general, the achievements of the workshop can be summarized as follows:



- The workshop improved the awareness of participants in drought management issues and moreover the needs and strategies for national drought policies based on the principles of 'risk reduction'.
- The workshop equipped participants with tools and strategies for improved decision support, risk assessments of vulnerable sectors, population groups, regions and, most importantly, mitigating drought effects.
- The workshop furnished participants with up-to-date methodologies to develop/improve drought monitoring, seasonal forecasts, and early warning and information delivery systems.
- The workshop also improved participants' understanding and the long-term benefits of risk-based drought management policies versus crisis-based policies.

As in the past, the workshop was able to promote national and regional networks of stakeholders working in various ministries including agriculture, the environment and meteorology and encouraged mutual learning, which can help ensure the effectiveness of measures to address drought impacts and pave the way for formulating comprehensive national drought policies for their countries.