

STRUCTURED SUMMARY

HOW TO MANAGE CRISES DIFFERENTLY IN ASALs WITHOUT TALKING ABOUT A NEXUS

What can we learn from the water sector?

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Motivation

SPARC research on the contribution of new water sources to resilience in arid and semi-arid lands (ASALs) revealed a structural problem in how water sources are planned and managed. Development planners typically do not take into account the likely effect of shocks and crises, even when these undermine investments made, leaving responsibility for dealing with shocks to agencies tasked with emergency interventions. By identifying the specific problems caused by the separation of planning for emergency water interventions and for water development, practical solutions can be found without getting bogged down in 'nexus' jargon.

Purpose

This brief highlights the impacts of parallel but disconnected emergency and development planning. We show how adopting a common purpose for water in ASALs provides a solution that may be applied to the wider disconnect between humanitarian and development aid.

Approach and methods

We examined recently created permanent water sources in ASALs several years after completion to assess: their functioning and management; their impact on people's resilience and ability to cope with drought and other shocks; their impact on access to resources and power relations; and the perceptions of stakeholders on the role of new water supplies in adapting to climate change and coping with shocks.

We analysed water policy in ASALs and the language used to describe new water development. We compared this with evidence from visits to 25 boreholes across four sites in Marsabit County, Kenya, and five sites in Somali Region, Ethiopia.

Findings

Both emergency water interventions and water developments exist side by side in ASALs, but their planning and implementation often contradict each other. New water supplies are installed with no provision for dealing with climate

shocks. Emergency interventions which seek only to rapidly restore water access in emergencies ignore the roles and responsibilities of local actors.

Repeated humanitarian interventions have deterred local authorities and water managers from maintaining water services effectively. Perverse incentives foster corruption and mistrust within communities and between citizens and the state.

Water users lose in this system, facing lengthy interruptions to water supplies and repeated water shortages in dry periods.

Attempts to create a 'nexus' of humanitarian, development and peace interventions focus too much on the institutional structures for coordination, instead of agreeing on common, practical, risk-informed plans and actions.

Policy implications

Predictable crises must be factored into planning. Actors focused on drought response and those focused on natural resource development should agree in advance who will finance what and in which eventualities. All actors have to respect the agreed strategy, so they should only agree to plans and actions they can live with.

Government or non-governmental agencies installing or repairing water supplies must think about how supply will be maintained, and how surge capacity in droughts can be funded. If there is no plan for these, the development should stop. Agencies should not assume that operating and maintaining water supply is someone else's problem or that capacity already exists. They should assume that it doesn't.

Those responsible for maintaining water sources have to be accountable to users: authority to collect fees from users cannot be conferred without corresponding accountability.

Water is just one illustration of how long- and short-term thinking need to be integrated. 'Nexus' thinking does not mean that agencies coordinate on the implementation of their individual strategies, nor that everyone covers both short- and long-term priorities. It means working to a shared strategy and plan for reliable services with resources to deal with potential crises; it means respecting that strategy if and when crisis strikes.

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