

The Weaknesses of Centralized Drought Management: The Perception of Iranian Farmers

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Abstract

Drought, which is one of the most complex hazards, is a temporary, recurring meteorological event, originates in the lack of precipitation and is a typical feature of any climate. The psychological and environmental impacts, consequential economy, and personal hardship experienced following droughts in both developing and developed countries have revealed the vulnerability of all societies towards this natural disaster. As such, governments across the world pay attention to reduce drought impacts for victims. Iranian government is concerned with the welfare of farm communities facing the prospect of more frequent and severe droughts as a result of climate reality and anthropogenic climate change. This study aims to investigate impacts of governmental interventions during drought period with qualitative method (case study). This qualitative study provides in-depth information on the multiple realities through the lens of drought victims. More precisely, we would like to know whether government management which implemented through centralism approach has been achieving the right purposes for the right people.

We selected our cases, in three wealth classes, based on two different methods. At the beginning, we utilized key informants (ie people who know best what was going on in the respective community the best). These people were including community leaders (elected leaders), professionals (agriculture officers), or those who had firsthand knowledge about the community. We requested the local informants to introduce us to some rich, moderate, and poor farmers in the drought-affected regions. Additionally, we also used a snowball sampling method (chain referral sampling, ie current participants or informants using their own social networks to refer the researcher to others who could potentially contribute to the study). Snowball sampling is often used to find and recruit "hidden populations"; who are not easily accessible to researchers through other sampling strategies. Finally, we selected nine farmers from three different economical status, i.e. three poor farmers, three moderate and three rich ones in a village in Southern Iran and interviewed them. These study findings showed that there are some basic assumptions that decrease or negative governmental interventions' effectiveness, as government policies are not in tune with neither farmer's socio-economical nor Iran's ecological realities

Firstly, we recognized that welfarist approach is the leading approach in drought management intervention in Iran. Obviously it leads to inequalities; cuts economical growth spreads dependency and creates passive citizens. Secondly, most of governmental interventions for reducing drought impacts rely on productivism approach, as the Iranian department of Agriculture promotes full-time reliance on crop production and intensive water use, against a background of climatic uncertainty in Iran and finally the government assumes that farmers have the same situations reacting similarly to manage the drought. This assumption causes that the rich and non-poor farmers usually benefit governmental supportive services via crises program more in comparison with the poor and small farmers, while small and poor farmers suffer further as a result of their limitation to access financial sources. These three assumptions were discussed in this paper, and some recommendations to improve drought management come at the end.