

PARES Case Study of Engagement & Involvement for Resilience

Case Study Title/ID: Uganda–Drought–Trusted Leaders and Intermediaries

Country/location: Uganda: Katakwi and Kasese Districts

Crisis/challenge type: Drought

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PARES Domain illustrated by this case study

Social Relations & Structures: working with trusted elders & traditional leaders

Recommended Actions

For Communities: Identify and support trusted intermediaries such as elders, (Village health Teams) VHTs, and local council leaders who can interpret early warning information and mobilize collective preparedness actions. Strengthen participation in community forums where risk information is shared and collective decisions are made.

For Government: Institutionalise the role of trusted local leaders and intermediaries in drought preparedness and early warning communication systems.

Ensure district disaster management committees & extension services actively engage community leadership structures during preparedness planning.

For NGOs & health program implementors: Work through existing community leadership structures and trusted intermediaries when introducing risk communication or preparedness interventions.

Support joint interpretation of early warning information that combines indigenous knowledge and scientific forecasts.

For Funders: Invest in strengthening community-level governance structures and participatory platforms that enable trusted intermediaries to translate risk information and coordinate collective action.

Data for this case analysis

46 key informant interviews (Kampala, Kasese and Katakwi districts); 12 focus group discussions (Kasese and Katakwi) in 2023; dissemination and validation workshops with c.60 stakeholders in 2026.

Key Message

When early warning information is communicated through socially legitimate and

trusted leaders who interpret both indigenous and scientific signals, communities are more likely to recognize risk and mobilize collective preparedness actions.

Case study summary

In drought-prone districts of Kasese and Katakwi, trusted local leaders and intermediaries play a central role in translating early warning signals into coordinated preparedness actions. When ecological indicators such as delayed rains or drying water sources are discussed alongside scientific seasonal forecasts and communicated through trusted figures such as Local Council level 1 (LC1) leaders, Village Health Teams, elders, and extension workers, households are more likely to perceive risk as credible and urgent. These intermediaries interpret and validate information within community forums, linking external warnings with local experience. As a result, communities mobilize earlier and coordinate collective responses such as adjusting planting calendars, protecting shared water sources, storing food, and supporting vulnerable households. The combination of trusted authority and locally grounded interpretation transforms early warning information from advisory messages into socially reinforced obligations for collective action.

Detailed Explanation of engagement mechanisms

Context that provides the conditions in which the observed actions work

Katakwi and Kasese districts experience recurrent climate shocks including drought and flooding. These districts are characterised by strong local governance structures and established community leadership systems that include LC1 leaders, Village Health Teams, elders, extension workers, and community committees. Communities also possess long-standing ecological knowledge used to interpret environmental changes such as rainfall patterns, vegetation cycles, and water levels. However, early warning information from technical agencies is sometimes viewed with skepticism when it is perceived as disconnected from local experience. In these contexts, trusted intermediaries play an important role in bridging local knowledge and external information sources.

The actions (mechanisms) that were observed to lead to resilience outcomes

Trusted leaders and intermediaries interpret and validate early warning information within community forums such as village meetings and participatory planning sessions. These leaders combine indigenous ecological indicators with scientific seasonal forecasts shared by district authorities or meteorological services. Because these leaders hold socially recognized authority and legitimacy, their communication strengthens trust in the warning signals. They also facilitate collective discussions about appropriate preparedness actions and help mobilize

community members to take coordinated steps before drought conditions worsen.

Observed outcomes

Where early warning information is communicated through trusted intermediaries, communities are more likely to acknowledge drought risk and act collectively. Preparedness actions include adjusting planting calendars, protecting shared water sources, storing food, mobilizing savings through community groups, and supporting vulnerable households. These coordinated responses reduce delays in preparedness and strengthen community capacity to cope with slow-onset drought.

Case Evidence

Vignettes #1 and #9 in Uganda – Flood & Drought – Supporting Evidence document

Related case studies

Social Relations and Structures

Uganda – Flood – Knowledge Systems Integration

Uganda – Flood – Drought – Social Capital and Collective Action

Operational Systems

Uganda – Flood – Drought – Multistakeholder Collaboration

Learning & Capabilities

Uganda – Flood – Drought – Embedded and Equitable Partnerships

Other Relevant Case Studies

Drought Response

Ethiopia – Drought – Trusted Leaders and Communication

Ethiopia – Drought – Knowledge Integration

Ethiopia – Drought – Social Capital and Collective Action

Ethiopia – Drought – Embedded and Equitable Partnerships