

Policy issues in integrating indigenous knowledge in building community resilience to climate change risk

Many African communities have used indigenous knowledge (IK) as a critical knowledge base and survival tool for adapting to extreme climate events and other natural hazards. IK may be defined as an ancient, communal, holistic and spiritual knowledge that encompasses every aspect of human existence. Local communities through accumulated IK have gained from generation to generation, known patterns of weather; how and when local natural disasters occurred; how to plan to cope with their impacts on the natural environment, livelihoods, and lives. According to research, many African communities have developed techniques and strategies for forecasting, and managing climate variability including coping mechanisms to respond to both normal and harsh conditions of their local environments. They base their forecasting on observation of the natural environment including flora, fauna and stars. This paper discusses the close linkage between sustainability of community livelihoods and lives. Extreme climate variability such as floods and droughts often have far reaching environmental, health and socio-economic impacts in many developing countries. To counter this trend, there is need to have in place efficient and realistic climate risk reduction strategies, including availability of effective integrated early warning systems to enhance the planning efforts. This would reduce the negative impacts; take full advantage of positive impacts and adapt to climate change. Reducing this vulnerability calls for community-based adaptation through empowering local communities to take action on their vulnerability to climate variability and change. From a development point of view, wider access to knowledge and information will enhance local communities' resilience and reduce climate risks and inequalities within communities. It will open up opportunities for vulnerable members (women and youth) to benefit from integrated climate knowledge and strategies for sustainable use, management and conservation of biodiversity will enhance integrating scientific and IK resilience of the communities.