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The role of indigenous knowledge (IK) in adaptation to drought by agropastoral smallholder farmers in Uganda

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Abstract

Majority of agro pastoral smallholder farmers in developing countries are characterised by low pay status, high illiteracy levels and are tied to cultural beliefs and spirits. These drawbacks have led them into using more indigenous knowledge as a way of adapting to droughts. This study explored the contribution of IK in enhancing farmer's resilience to drought in crop and livestock production systems in semi-arid areas. The objectives were: (i) to examine the agro pastoral farmer's perceptions of drought indicators and associated impacts and (ii) determinants for the adoption of indigenous knowledge drought adaptation responses. Socio-economic data was collected using oral interviews. The farmers (240) were selected using random sampling procedures and subjected to structured questionnaires and key informant guides. This study highlights that the droughts experienced were perceived to be more severe, recurrent and pervasive but also erratic. The IK drought signs were: flowering of wild plants, blowing of strong winds and appearance of flying and crawling insects. In crop-based systems, droughts reduced yields, caused plant stunted growth, increased incidences of diseases and invasive weed species. In livestock, droughts reduced surface water levels, lowered milk and beef yields, and increased diseases. The farmers reacted to droughts by practicing indigenous agro forestry, mulching, changing planting time, crop rotation and hoeing of trenches to control fires and pests/diseases. They also took their animals to wetlands for foraging and drew water for animals to drink. The uptake of IK drought adaptation practices was related to: household size, personal farming life experience, gender and age of the agro pastoral farmers. Therefore, employing IK drought adaptation responses is an important step towards increasing the resilience of agro pastoral smallholder farmers but also the conservation of IK for forthcoming generations.

Keyword(s)

Adoption; Agro pastoral smallholder farmers; Drought; Indigenous knowledge; Uganda

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