

COLLABORATIVE DECISION-MAKING FOR DROUGHT MANAGEMENT: IMPROVING MULTI-ACTOR APPROACHES

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WHY DID WE DO THIS RESEARCH

Drought management can be highly challenging and complex. To address this, Ontario uses a collaborative approach through Water Response Teams that are convened by the provincial government; teams provide policy and program recommendations. However, in some instances, the recommendations from teams are not included in final decisions. Uncertainties on the role and expectations of these collaborative groups can lead to challenges in implementing government programs and policies related to drought management.

This project explores the role of Water Response Teams in low water decision-making, and draws lessons from international drought management processes.



WHAT DID WE DO?

A multi-case study approach was used to understand how recommendations from Water Response Teams are incorporated into government decision-making processes. Data were gathered and compared from interviews, observations and document analyses. To determine how collaborative drought programs can be evaluated and improved, national and international drought programs were compared using six categories. Follow-up interviews were held to confirm findings from the program reviews.

WHAT DID WE FIND?

- Collaborative approaches for drought management generated additional outcomes compared to conventional provincial government processes. Improved communication is an important example.
- Combinations of regulatory and voluntary conservation approaches are necessary for effective drought management.
- The provincial government must maintain accountability, transparency, and balance in using collaborative recommendations.
- Common evaluation indicators for drought management are communication effectiveness and whether program objectives were met.
- Collaboration is not always well suited to emergency responses to drought.

WHAT ARE THE IMPLICATIONS FOR DECISION MAKERS?

Collaborative approaches are not always an appropriate decision making method, particularly for situations that require rapid decisions. If collaborative groups are used to support government decision making processes, then groups must clearly understand how recommendations will be used in decision making.

Documenting drought impacts is necessary, but there are few standards for what should be collected and how to account for tradeoffs between social, economic, and environmental priorities.

A possible role for collaborative groups in drought management is reporting social, economic, and environmental impacts from drought. However, standard indicators and a framework should be developed to guide data collection.

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