



DROUGHT RESILIENCE
CHAMPIONS FOR
SOUTHERN AFRICA

CHAMPIONS OF CHANGE:

LEADING DROUGHT RESILIENCE ACROSS SOUTHERN AFRICA

FIVE VOICES FROM ZIMBABWE, SOUTH AFRICA, BOTSWANA,
AND MALAWI ON TURNING DROUGHT POLICY INTO PRACTICE



Cooperation in
International
Waters in Africa



WORLD BANK GROUP

PHOTO CREDITS

Cover: ©Veronica Bare; ©Mahadi Mofokeng-Cenenda; ©Waddilove Mandiziba; ©Tshegofatso Mosate; ©Doshanie Kadokera.

Page 3: ; **Page 4:** ©Veronica Bare; ©Adobe Stock; **Page 5:** ©Mahadi Mofokeng-Cenenda; ©Getty Images; ©Adobe Stock; **Page 6:** ©Waddilove Mandiziba; ©Adobe Stock; **Page 7:** ©Tshegofatso Mosate; ©Adobe Stock; **Page 8:** ©Doshanie Kadokera; ©Adobe Stock; ©Getty Images.

FROM REACTION TO READINESS.



Drought Resilience Champions
for southern Africa

Drought in Southern Africa is too often treated as a crisis to survive rather than a risk to manage. This collection features five senior practitioners, including disaster managers, water engineers, economists, and policy directors, whose national mandates place them at the center of that shift.

Each is a member of the Drought Resilience Champions Initiative, financed through the Cooperation in International Waters in Africa (CIWA) Program, a World Bank multi-donor trust fund supporting transboundary water cooperation across Sub-Saharan Africa.

Through regional peer exchange, technical training, and shared learning across borders, these champions are building the case, within their own institutions and beyond, for drought resilience anchored in governance, data, and proactive investment rather than crisis response.



VERONICA BARE

FROM DISASTER RESPONSE TO DROUGHT RESILIENCE: WHY POLICY IS THE REAL FRONTLINE

For ten years, I have worked at the intersection of disaster management and community protection in Zimbabwe. I have seen what drought does — to households, to water systems, to the slow unravelling of livelihoods built over generations. That experience is what drew me to the Drought Resilience Champions Program, and it is what keeps me committed to it.

As a Disaster Manager in Zimbabwe's Department of Civil Protection, my mandate is coordination — across sectors, across disciplines, across levels of government. Drought does not respect silos, and neither can our response to it.

Through the Drought Resilience Champions Program, supported by the Cooperation in International Waters in Africa (CIWA) at The World Bank Group, I have deepened my understanding of what truly effective resilience-building looks like.

Three lessons stand out:

01 – DROUGHT PLANNING CANNOT BE REACTIVE.

By the time drought is visible, it is already too late to plan. Preparedness must be embedded into governance structures long before rainfall fails.

02 – MULTI-STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT IS NOT OPTIONAL.

A comprehensive approach to drought resilience means bringing together government, communities, scientists, and development partners — and ensuring that coordination structures at every level are strong enough to translate plans into action.

03 – FUNDING MUST BE MOBILIZED PROACTIVELY.

Resilience costs money. The case must be made now — before the next drought — for sustained investment in early warning, drought-resilient seeds, borehole infrastructure, and institutional capacity. Zimbabwe has made important

strides, including the development of a Composite Drought Index, which now requires full institutionalization. The Presidential Borehole Drilling Program is another step in the right direction. But these programs need the policy frameworks to anchor them, and the political will to sustain them.

That is why I believe the primary audience for this work is not the public — it is the Cabinet Committee on Disaster Prevention and Management. Policy development at that level shapes everything downstream.

The Drought Resilience Champions Initiative has given me the tools, the connections, and the confidence to advocate at that level. Knowledge shared across borders, through in-person and virtual meetings with drought resilience experts from across Southern Africa, has made me a better practitioner and a stronger voice for my country. Drought resilience is not a technical problem with a technical solution. It is a governance challenge. And governance starts with people who are willing to champion change from within.

“

I am proud to be a Drought Resilience Champion — and grateful to the World Bank Group and CIWA for building this community.

ZIMBABWE



MAHADI MOFOKENG-CENENDA

**DROUGHT IS NOT A DISASTER. IT IS A PREDICTABLE RISK
— AND WE NEED TO MANAGE IT THAT WAY.**

South Africa has experienced drought. Devastating, economy-straining, community-breaking drought. And time and again, our response has been shaped by the assumption that drought is an emergency — something that arrives without warning and demands a crisis reaction.

It is not. Drought is a predictable risk. And the way we respond to predictable risks should look very different from the way we respond to emergencies.

This shift in thinking is at the heart of my work as Acting Director of Policy and Strategy in South Africa's Department of Water and Sanitation — and it is something the Drought Resilience Champions Initiative, supported by CIWA at the World Bank, has helped me sharpen and articulate.

South Africa's constitution places gender equality and social inclusion at the centre of everything we do. Our water governance must reflect this. Drought hits the most vulnerable first and hardest — and a resilient water system is one that is designed with those communities in mind, not as an afterthought.

Equally, every policy framework must now contend with climate change. Adaptation is not a future aspiration; it is a present necessity. And data — reliable, timely, actionable data — is what makes early warning possible and early action effective.

My participation in the Drought Resilience Champions Initiative has reinforced one critical insight: resilience is not built by responding better to each successive drought. It is built by embedding drought risk management into the permanent architecture of national and local governance.

That means advocating drought risk to be integrated into planning at every sphere of government. It means strengthening the National Disaster Management Centre's role as the primary institutional driver of this agenda. And it means recognizing that the Department of Agriculture and the Department of Water and Sanitation must work in concert — not in parallel.

I may not have attended the physical training in September that launched the Eswatini Drought Centre of Excellence as well as this Drought Resilience Champions program, but my virtual engagement with champions across the region enabled by this effort has been deeply valuable. Learning from what others have done — what has worked, what has not — accelerates our own progress.

South Africa has the legal frameworks. We have institutions. What we need now is the systemic will to treat drought not as a crisis we endure, but as a risk we manage.

That shift starts with leadership. And I am committed to leading it.

“

I am proud to serve as a Drought Champion, in service of a more resilient South Africa.

SOUTH AFRICA



WADDILOVE MANDIZIBA

GROUNDWATER, RESILIENCE, AND THE INFRASTRUCTURE THAT KEEPS ZIMBABWE MOVING

Rainfall in Zimbabwe has become increasingly unpredictable. Over the past decade, I have watched water supply infrastructure — boreholes, dams, distribution networks — buckle under the pressure of prolonged dry spells. I have seen communities that depend on these systems face shortages that cascade quickly into food insecurity, health risks, and economic losses.

As Director for Water Supplies and Rural Development at the Zimbabwe National Water Authority (ZINWA), my work is about ensuring that infrastructure exists not just to serve communities during good rainfall years, but to sustain them through the hard ones.

The Drought Resilience Champions Initiative, supported by the World Bank's Cooperation in International Waters in Africa program, has sharpened my ability to do that. It has given me access to technical skills in drought risk assessment, exposure to management tools from across the region, and — perhaps most importantly — the experience of peers who have faced similar challenges and found ways through.

SEVERAL LESSONS HAVE STAYED WITH ME:

Mapping matters. Drought risk assessment and vulnerability mapping are not bureaucratic exercises. They are the foundation of any credible, continuous resilience intervention. You cannot plan for what you have not measured.

Preparedness pays. The economics of drought resilience are compelling: investing in preparedness significantly reduces the cost of response when drought arrives. Risk-based budgeting should be standard practice across government.

Groundwater is underutilized. In Southern Africa, groundwater development and management is one of the most powerful levers we have for drought response — in both urban and rural contexts. We need to invest in assessing, developing, and protecting aquifer systems.

Stakeholder engagement from the start. From assessment to planning to implementation, drought risk management requires government ministries, development partners, and communities at the table — not just at the end when decisions have already been made. Zimbabwe's rural development

programmes provide water for communities that have historically been left behind. This work aligns directly with gender and social inclusion — because water access for vulnerable communities is not just a humanitarian imperative, it is a development one.

The Drought Resilience Champions Initiative has not just added to my professional toolkit. It has connected me to a regional network of practitioners who share knowledge generously and push each other to do more. That community of practice is itself a form of resilience.

“

I am a Drought Champion for Zimbabwe — committed to water, to infrastructure, and to the communities that depend on both.

ZIMBABWE



TSHEGOFATSO MOSATE

WHAT A DRY DAM TAUGHT ME ABOUT DROUGHT — AND WHY I BECAME A CHAMPION

In the 2015/2016 hydrological year, the Gaborone Dam ran dry.

The dam supplies the capital city and its surrounding areas. Watching it approach empty was not just an environmental event — it was a moment of national reckoning. Botswana's Limpopo Basin, home to the majority of the country's population and its major water infrastructure, had been hit by extreme hydrological drought. And we were not ready.

That experience shaped my professional path as a hydrologist. It made me want to understand drought more deeply — how other countries were managing it, what Botswana could learn, and what we had to offer from our own hard-won experience.

It is also what led me to the Drought Resilience Champions Initiative, supported by World Bank's Cooperation in International Waters in Africa program.

As a Water Resources Engineer at Botswana's Ministry of Water and Human Settlement, my work sits at the intersection of technical expertise and public communication. Early warning systems are only as good as

the data feeding them — which means our monitoring and data collection efforts must be continuous, relevant, and aligned to both national and regional objectives. This is not an optional infrastructure. It is the foundation of everything.

What the Drought Resilience Champions Initiative has added is perspective. Specifically, the lesson that has stayed with me most is the value of integrating indigenous and local knowledge into scientific research and early warning systems. Community members often carry observational knowledge about land, water, and seasonal patterns that do not appear in any dataset — and that knowledge can strengthen the decisions we make.

The Initiative has also connected me with peers across the region who are grappling with similar challenges. That exchange — learning from others' lessons and adapting them for Botswana's context — is invaluable. It is faster and more grounded than starting from scratch. My primary audience for this

work is broad: government leaders and decision-makers, yes — but also farmers and local communities who live with drought risk every season. Technical expertise in a government ministry must translate into real-world capacity. That means outreach, awareness campaigns, and knowledge-sharing that reaches people where they are.

Drought resilience in Botswana is a work in progress. But the Gaborone Dam eventually refilled. And with stronger systems, better data, and a regional community of practice behind us, we are building the capacity to ensure the next drought finds us better prepared.

“

I am proud to be a Drought Resilience Champion, representing Botswana and the Limpopo Basin.



DOSHANIE KADOKERA

**MALAWI CANNOT AFFORD TO KEEP REACTING TO DROUGHT.
HERE IS WHAT A PROACTIVE SYSTEM LOOKS LIKE.**

Malawi's economy runs on rain. More than 80% of the population depends on rain-fed agriculture. When rainfall fails — and it fails with increasing frequency — the consequences move quickly: crop losses, food insecurity, fiscal strain on government, and prolonged recovery periods for the communities least equipped to absorb the shock.

I have seen this cycle repeatedly. And I have become convinced that reactive responses alone are not enough.

As Chief Economist in Malawi's Ministry of Agriculture, my work in disaster risk financing and food security has brought me close to both the scale of the problem and the possibilities for change. Through coordinating the African Risk Capacity (ARC) program and supporting the Africa Disaster Risk Financing Initiative (ADRFi), I have seen what sovereign insurance payouts can do — how timely resources enable timely response. I have also seen the gaps: particularly at the farmer level, where the protective architecture thins out precisely where vulnerability is greatest.

The Drought Resilience Champions Initiative, supported by World Bank's Cooperation in International Waters in Africa program, has given me the platform, tools, and peer network to go further.

The Drought Risk and Resilience Assessment (DRRA) process has been especially valuable — helping to map not just where drought risk exists, but how it moves through sectors, what it touches, and where proactive investment can reduce vulnerability before shocks occur. This kind of risk-informed planning is the shift Malawi needs.

Three interconnected principles have emerged as central to my thinking:

01 – FROM DATA TO DECISION

Early warning systems are only valuable if they are linked to early action. Data that sits in dashboards without triggering financing or field response is an infrastructure that falls short of its potential.

02 – FROM SOVEREIGN TO SMALLHOLDER

Malawi has made progress with sovereign risk insurance. The next frontier is connecting those instruments to farmer-level solutions and social protection mechanisms, so that the chain of protection reaches the people most exposed to drought.

03 – FROM COORDINATION TO INTEGRATION.

Drought resilience is not an agriculture problem, a finance problem, or a disaster management problem. It is all three — and it requires that national policymakers, technical institutions, and development partners work within a genuinely integrated framework.

My ambition, shaped by the Drought Resilience Champions Initiative and the peers I have learned from across the region, is to help Malawi build a system where drought risks are anticipated, financed, and mitigated — not just endured.

The stories of other champions, from Eswatini to Zimbabwe to Botswana to South Africa, have enriched my thinking and given me adaptable models to bring home. That regional learning community is one of the program's most underappreciated assets.

Malawi can build this system. We have the people, the institutional will, and now a growing evidence base. What we need is sustained commitment — from government, from development partners, and from champions willing to keep making the case.

“

I am a Drought Resilience Champion for Malawi — and I am committed to the full chain: from data, to decision, to financing, to delivery.

MALAWI





www.ciwaprogram.org



linkedin.com/company/cooperation-in-international-waters-in-africa



Co-funded by
the European Union



MINISTRY OF
FOREIGN AFFAIRS
OF DENMARK
Danida



Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the
Netherlands



Norwegian Ministry
of Foreign Affairs



Sweden
Sverige



UKaid
from the British people