

Abstract

In Kenya, the ability of local people to resist the impact of disasters has not been given adequate attention. A descriptive cross sectional study sought to investigate community perceptions and responses to flood risks in low and high risk areas of the Nyando District, Western Kenya. A total of 528 households, six government officials and five project managers of Community Based Organizations (CBOs) and Non Governmental Organizations (NGOs) were interviewed. Additionally, seven Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) involving three women, two male and two teacher groups were conducted. Data were analysed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) Program. The Chi-square test was used to determine associations and differences between variables. In the study, 83% of the respondents were aware of Traditional Flood Knowledge (TFK) and 80% acknowledged its use. Perception of the risk is influenced by several variables, most notably past experience of major floods and having survived them. Residents in the high risk areas had significantly higher levels of awareness and use of traditional flood knowledge. They were more aware of the nature of the flood related health risks they were exposed to and appeared better prepared for future flood risk. They were, however, more dependent on external aid. On the other hand, residents living in the low risk area reported better success with their response mechanisms.