

ASSESSMENT OF THE IMPACT OF FLOODS ON PEOPLE LIVING WITH DISABILITIES IN MASVINGO PROVINCE, ZIMBABWE.

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ABSTRACT: *The paper explores the impact of floods on people living disabilities in Masvingo province, Zimbabwe. It discusses the impact of flooding on the livelihoods of people living with disabilities as well as the challenges they are facing in the course of their relocation. The research employed purposive sampling. Data was gathered through key informant interviews and observation in the Tokwe-Mukosi basin, transit camps and the Nuanetsi relocation site. Research revealed that women with disabilities were adversely impacted by the floods. Their livelihood assets were destroyed and environmental and access barriers became more pronounced. The research also revealed that the relocation exercise was not sensitive to the disabled thus, further compounded the situation for people living with disabilities. The paper concludes that there is a need for the government of Zimbabwe to improve disaster management by taking on board representatives of people with disabilities.*

Keywords: People living with disabilities, flooding, livelihoods, Masvingo, Zimbabwe

1.0 INTRODUCTION

This study analysed the impact of flooding on people living with disabilities in the Masvingo province. Tarisayi (2014:02) states, “The heavy rains and subsequent floods adversely affected twelve villages, explicitly Chekai, Jahwa, Zifunzi, Mharadzano, Chikandigwa and Vhomo in Nemaushe communal lands; and Tagwirei, Ndove, Matandizvo, Chikosi, Mashenjere and Nongera in Neruvanga communal lands”. Various studies have been carried out on the impact of floods on livelihoods around the world, in Ghana (Fredrick et al, 2010), in India (Afro, 2009) and in Zimbabwe (Tarisayi, 2014), however there is an ostensible dearth of research on the impact of flooding on people living with disabilities. Grech (2009) argues, “Disability still remains overwhelming marginalised at mainstream developmental research, institutional, policy and programme levels”. Repercussions of flooding on people living with disabilities remains a *terra incognita* for researchers especially in developing countries. Hence, this study sought to interrogate the effects

of floods on people living with disabilities aptly referred to as the “forgotten tribe” by Choruma (2007). Thus it can be reasoned that people living with disabilities are not only marginalized in many aspects of day-to-day life but also in as far as research is concerned. This is concurred by Charowa (2005) who states that the disabled people are so excluded as not to be considered even worthy of research as they are among the most severely marginalised people in the world.

1.1 The Study Area

The study area covers twelve villages in Chivi and Masvingo district, six from each district. The study area lies within the Tokwe-Mukosi basin. Tokwe-Mukosi dam is expected to be one of the largest dams in Zimbabwe when completed. It is located in the semi-arid district of Chivi, Masvingo province in Zimbabwe. However the usually arid area in January/ February 2014 received 850 mm of rainfall which is double its usual rainfall. Consequently, these heavy rains led to flooding which adversely affected parts of both Masvingo and Chivi

districts in Masvingo province. The floods affected twelve villages within the Tokwe-Mukosi basin and the President of Zimbabwe declared a state of disaster in the Tokwe-Mukosi area.

2.0 Review of related literature

2.1 Flooding

A scrutiny of the definitions proffered by various scholars in their studies reveals that they particularize these definitions to their relevant study areas. For instance United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) (2000) on the lower Limpopo basin, Mozambique defines a flood as an unusually high stage of a river where the river channel becomes filled with water and above which it overflows its banks. While, in an impact assessment of flooding in the Nuna valley in Bangladesh, Leslie (2006) defined flooding as water being found where it is not wanted. Thus, it can be reasoned that there is no apparent consensus on the definition of flooding as it is evidently influenced by the magnitude of its impact.

Flooding is a phenomena that has been widely researched and covered by the media over the past few years. Floods by nature are complex events caused by a range of human vulnerabilities, inappropriate development planning and climate variability (ADPC, 2005). While, The Fourth Assessment Report (2007) of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) predicts that heavy precipitation events, which are very likely to increase in frequency, will augment flood risk. Flooding at an unexpected scale (damaging flood) and with excessive frequency causes damage to life, livelihoods and the environment.

2.2 Prevalence of floods in Zimbabwe

Table 1 below categorizes some of the hazards in general and floods in particular that have affected Zimbabwe over the past three decades and the number of people affected by these hazards. However, this paper focuses on the incidence of flooding and thus the table reveals that floods occurred in 2000 and 2001 and they affected 266,000 and 30 000 people respectively around Zimbabwe. Flooding in Zimbabwe has be caused by heavy precipitation during the rainy season (November to April) or by tropical cyclones that emanate from the Indian Ocean (Madamombe 2004); however, flooding in Zimbabwe on a comparative scale is not as extreme as it is in South Asia and Latin America (Siamachira 2011). Even so, flooding as revealed by table 1 below and concurred by Madamombe (2004) still leads to losses of life, destroys livestock, crops, and properties, and engenders outbreaks of diseases such as cholera and malaria in Zimbabwe.

Table 1. Peculiar Hazards in Zimbabwe, 1982 – 2010

Type of Disaster	Year of Occurrence	Number of People Affected
Drought	1982	700,000
Drought	1991/2	5,000,000
Epidemic (Cholera)	1996	500,000
Drought	1998	55,000
Flood	2000	266,000
Drought	2001	6,000,000
Flood	2001	30,000
Drought	2007	2,100,000
Epidemic (Cholera)	2008	98,349
Drought	2010	1,680,000

Source: PreventionWeb, 2012

2.3 Outlining disability

Disability has been variously defined by scholars, development agencies, governments and activists around the world. The World Health Organisation utilizes the definition that, “any restriction or lack of ability to perform an activity in a manner or within a range considered normal for a human being” (WHO, 1996). In addition, a disability may be physical, cognitive, sensory, emotional, developmental, or some combination of these (Schechter and Feldman, 2010). A more comprehensive definition is proffered by Hardman, Egen and Wolf (1993:484) as, “Condition characterised by loss of physical functioning or difficulty in learning and social adjustment that significantly interferes with normal growth and development, for example loss of sight”. The authors further highlight that disability is a bit different from handicap and impairment. Thus, their explanation denotes that handicap is a limitation imposed on the individual by environmental demands for example a wheel chair user faces a handicap in buildings without ramps. The Disabled Persons Act of Zimbabwe defines a disabled person as,

a person with a physical, mental or sensory disability, including a visual, hearing or speech functional disability, which gives rise to physical, cultural or social barriers inhibiting him from participating at an equal level with other members of society in activities, undertakings or fields of employment that are open to other members of society (Government of Zimbabwe, 1996)

The study considered the impact of flooding and the subsequent evacuations on people with all types of disabilities regardless of severity.

2.2 Prevalence of disability

People with disabilities comprise approximately 10 % of the world's population, 75 % of whom live in

developing countries and constitute one of the most poor, marginalised and socially excluded groups in society (DFID, 2005). However, Choruma (2007) argues that there are disparities on the statistics on the prevalence of disabilities in Zimbabwe. Thus, there are few sources of reliable statistics regarding prevalence of disabilities and these can also be argued to be inconsistent. Choruma (2007) states that Zimbabwe's Housing and Population Census, conducted in 2002, estimated a prevalence rate of 2,9 %, with 45 % being male and 55 % being female. Hence, this study focuses its attention on the “forgotten tribe” which constitutes 55 % of the total population of people with disabilities.

2.3 Legal Enactments and Disabilities

The legal enactments on the rights of people with disabilities emanate from the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948). The UDHR entails that all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. Everyone, including people with disabilities are entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in this declaration without distinction of any kind. In addition, The United Nations General Assembly declared the recognition of people with disabilities in the Decade of Disabled People 1983-1992.

In Zimbabwe, rights of people with disabilities are supported by the Disabled Persons Act of Zimbabwe which calls for non-discrimination on the basis of disability. However, Manombe-Ncube (2001) argues that there are no specific policies in place to ensure the implementation of the Act or the need to intensify programmes that uplift the status of people with disabilities in particular. Thus, people with disabilities are assumed to be participating without having strategies in place to remove barriers that hinder full participation. Choruma (2007) argues that legislation makes no provision for

affirmative action or positive discrimination and policies remain vague or unenforced, professionals in health and education, employers and disabled people themselves remain largely unaware of what those are.

2.0 Purpose and Significance of the study

It is a paradox that whilst there has been a growing body pertaining to gender, certainly not enough has been reported on people with disabilities. Moreso, there is an apparent paucity of research pertaining to ramification of disasters such as floods and displacements on people with disabilities.

The purpose of the study was to determine the impact of flooding on the livelihoods of people living with disabilities in the Tokwe-Mukosi basin. In addition, it sought to reveal that people with disabilities in general are adversely affected by floods. It also lays down the foundation from which to develop suggestions to promote positive discrimination of people with disabilities during rescue and relocations after flooding. Besides, the study would add value to international debate on the implications of flooding on the livelihoods of people with disabilities.

3.0 Research Objectives

- (i) To investigate the impact of flooding on people living with disabilities.
- (ii) To recommend strategies of positively discriminating people living with disabilities during relocation caused by natural disasters.

4.0 Research Methodology

The researcher utilized mainly face-to face interviews with key informants and observations of the relocation of the flood victims. The literature review shaped the questions in the data collection instruments.

The researcher purposively selected two temporary holding camps (transit camps) Gunikuni and Zifunzi in Masvingo and Chivi district respectively as interview and observation sites. The temporary sites were selected from the five temporary camps utilized during the relocation of flood victims. In addition, face-to-face interviews were also carried out at Chingwizi, one of the three relocation sites, which is located in Nuanetsi ranch in Mwenzezi district. The researcher interviewed twenty people living with disabilities at Chingwizi, five at gunikuni as well as another five at Zifunzi. Thus. The researcher made use of thirty respondents in this study.

5.0 Impact of the floods and relocation on people with disabilities

The impact of the floods on the Tokwe-Mukosi basin was overwhelming and wide-ranging in general and catastrophic on people with disabilities in particular.

5.1 Livelihoods

There was overwhelming consensus among the respondents at both the transit camps and relocation site that their livelihoods were adversely affected by the flooding. It was also observed that their livelihood assets were completely destroyed as homestead were completely submerged by the floods. Thus, the study revealed that most dimensions of livelihoods assets or capitals as espoused in the “livelihoods pentagon” (Scoones, 1999) , were affected by the floods. People with disabilities interviewed revealed that their infrastructure, that is houses as well as assets such as hens, goats and cattle were either killed or lost during the floods and subsequent relocation.

In addition, the respondents exposed that their social capital was negatively impacted by the floods. One respondent elaborated

that it had been difficult for her so much to gain acceptance and gain the social networks she had prior to the floods. Now the respondents have to start over again at the relocation sites to nurture the social networks in a new environment with its challenges.

Furthermore, it was revealed by the people with disabilities that they had lost their land. Loss of land they argued was especially hard on them as compared to their colleagues as they had adapted their fields to suit their disabilities. It was revealed that their livelihood had necessitated their fashioning of their land to assist them gain subsistence from the land. The study reveals that the flood victims had been allocated an acre of land per household instead of the initial promised five acres and they bemoaned government's insincerity.

5.2 Environmental and access barriers

The study revealed that environmental and access barriers were made more pronounced during the flooding and the subsequent relocations for people with disabilities. When their homesteads were submerged by the floods they failed to save their household assets among others due to their disabilities. This was further compounded by the relocation process which they expressed was not structured in a way to take cognisance of people with disabilities. The researcher also observed that the trucks mobilised for the relocation of the affected people in the Tokwe-Mukosi basin did not consider people with disabilities. There was a observation by the researcher that the teams that reacted to the disaster appeared to have only realised that they were people with disabilities when they got on the ground.

5.3 Relocation Sites

Affected families in the Tokwe-Mukosi have been relocated to three sites, of which two are at Nuanesti ranch in Mwenezi district and Chisase in Chiredzi district. The government of Zimbabwe and the donor community have assisted the families with foodstuffs and tents. While the respondents expressed appreciation for the help they felt that the tents did not consider their disabilities. The recipients of the tents were supposed to erect them and this was revealed to be problematic for people with disabilities.

6.0 Recommendations

From this study the researcher makes the following recommendations for disaster management:-

- i) The Disaster Management/ response coordination should be representatives from organisations for people with disabilities. All emergency exercises should be inclusive so as to ensure inclusivity in the programme.
- ii) The Civil Protection Unit should be proactive and not reactive. There is need to put in place an early flooding warning system.
- iii) The government should arrange compensate for all those affected by the floods in the Tokwe-Mukosi basin. There should be positive discrimination for people with disabilities.
- iv) In addition, the government and donor community should strive to restore people's sources of livelihoods. Provision of shelter and monthly food rations is not enough but efforts to restore people's livelihoods is sustainable.

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