

Child-Sensitivity Mechanisms in Disaster Risk Management Interventions in Zimbabwe's Cyclone Idai Prone Areas

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to examine child-sensitivity mechanisms in disaster risk management interventions in Zimbabwe's Cyclone Idai prone areas. The researchers adopted a qualitative study and employed a case study research design to answer the research question. The target population were the 2019 Cyclone Idai survivors, and a sample of 20 participants was used to examine child-sensitivity mechanisms during the disaster. The researchers used in-depth interviews, observations and documentary analysis as research instruments. This study revealed the vulnerability of children and strategies deployed to curb disaster risk problems in relation to disasters in general context. Results showed that there are social dimensions meant to help children in relation to disasters, and that participation of locals in Chimanimani District by deploying social networks speeded up response and minimized problems on children as they came up with strategies to deal with child sensitive issues. Although the community response system also facilitated the operation of external disaster management agencies, their premature withdrawal exposed children and weakened the trust and values existing in the area, and created tensions amongst affected children and other villages. Given the delays in formal responses by the government and other external relief agencies, the practices of local actors, although spontaneous and largely uncoordinated, offered rich insights into the design and development of disaster management regimes.

Keywords: Child-Sensitivity Mechanisms, Disaster Risk Management Interventions, Children, Cyclone Idai

INTRODUCTION

In Zimbabwe, the past two decades have been affected by a series of cyclones, which left a trail of serious destruction in the entire socio-economic system and geographical space of Chimanimani District. Having a flash back, from 2000 till 2019, Zimbabwe has been hit by series of cyclones, with cyclone Eline caused 91 deaths, 357 injuries, destroyed 59,187 houses, and resulted in about 2.7 million people being affected (Oxfam, 2019). In 2003, Cyclone Japhet affected some parts of Zimbabwe, Dineo in 2017, and Cyclone Idai on the 15th of March, 2019, resulting in displacements, loss of lives, livestock and destruction of infrastructure and the entire Chimanimani District. It is estimated that more than 500 children were reportedly dead, with more than 8000 left in need of aid and assistance. Coppa is one of the most low-lying areas which Cyclone Idai left traumatic experiences. The local inhabitants needed to utilize their local skills to respond to the

disaster. Sustainable livelihoods in Chimanimani District require the whole community's effort to build capacity in order to maintain and improve the socio-political, cultural and economic opportunities in their lives taking cognisance of children's opportunities are not jeopardized. This enables development interventions to last longer and yield sustainable impacts. After the devastating effects of Cyclone Idai, it is this developmental process which takes on board resources in a sustainable manner where change becomes key and imperative:

Sustainable development is a process of change in which the exploitation of resources, the direction of investments, the orientation of technological development, and institutional change are all in harmony and enhance both current and future potential to meet human needs and aspirations (Eade & Williams, 1995:20).

All human beings encounter physical and emotional changes as they grow up. The broad dimensions of people's needs and perspectives are often differentiated by age. The "current and future potential to meet human needs and aspirations" (Eade & Williams *ibid*, 20) require children in the process of change. In any disaster or emergency, it is the children who are the most vulnerable to the climate change consequences, out of all groups of people. Since all development and relief interventions positively impact on children, this research therefore chose this vulnerable group. The Chimanimani District's children were left without food, shelter and health care. Some needed emotional dependence for they were now separated from their families. It would therefore be essential to be aware of how these children are cared for and recommend practical approaches that would be beneficial to them. Most parts of Chimanimani district were completely cut off from the rest of the country for several days, with telecommunication system disrupted. Helicopters could not have access to the area because of poor visibility and greater high risk of crashing in the terrains of Chimanimani District deep valleys. External players, donor community, special support services were only limited to Rusitu area. The torrid five day period was a dark period of five days, of which no one had access to the most seriously affected parts of Chimanimani district, and this made it difficult for documentation and other significant studies. The disaster management officials had limited access to Chimanimani district. It is from this background that this study collected local narratives of participants who experienced the Cyclone Idai disaster at Coppa Growth Point in Rusitu. The purpose of this information collection effort was to gather evidence on the role of the extent of child-sensitivity in disaster risk management interventions in Chimanimani district, which can help frame the role of local participation in disaster management systems. Within the mitigation strategies of disaster research community, researchers have challenged the conventional belief that the use of external expertise in disaster affected areas offers best solution (Allen, 2006; Kapucu, 2008 & Gwimbi, 2009). Some scholars have demonstrated the utility of the local action through concepts such as social networks (Varda et al, 2009). This study embraces these conceptual strands, but interchanges "local experiences", and local based terminologies to understand how residents

in Chimanimani, Zimbabwe reacted to the Cyclone Idai- induced floods.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK UNDERPINNING CHILDREN'S WELFARE

The inherent knowledge that people have about hazards has tremendously advanced and progressed through the passage of time in history from an unsophisticated acceptance of the spiritually unknown reality to a complex paradigmatic methodology (Smith, 2013). The genesis of it all started with recognising the forces of nature as the real embodiments of spiritual beings. The acknowledgement of these multifaceted interconnections, the *complexity paradigm* proposes a theory which recognizes the interactive conversations within and between different components of a system (Smith, 2013). This theoretical construct views disasters "at the interface between natural, or quasi-natural, systems and human systems where the interactions are characterized by complexity" (Smith, 2013: 47). Smith (2013) uses the DNA model to illustrate the "coupled human-environment system (CHES)" in order to explain the "complexity in disaster causation" (Smith, *ibid*: 47)

The disaster hypothesis that is best suited to interpret the complex interconnected nature of devastating hazards as a function of physical, technological, social as well as institutional variables will be complimented by the Systems theory. *Systems theory*, which is also known as the *social systems theory*, in the fields of social sciences is the study of society as a complex prearrangement of elements, which include individuals and their beliefs, as they relate to the whole nation. A closer look at Chimanimani District would be the main focus of attention of this study of society as a social system. This has a long history in the social sciences. The theoretical roots of this approach stretch back to the 19th century, propounded by the English sociologist and philosopher Herbert Spencer and the French social scientist Emile Durkheim. The idea firmed and started to take shape when individual experiences within families and societies were continually being shaped and influenced by the evolving interaction patterns of communication. Individuals were not therefore determined by early traumatic experiences or distorted developmental transitions, such as the devastating effects of Cyclone Idai, as the predominant therapeutic conventions maintained (Freud, 1973). Systemic

reasoning postulated that individual personality traits and identity could be altered along with changes in family and societal dynamic forces. Families in societies should be viewed as living systems with all the dynamics that underpin it during difficult times such as famines and cyclones. Cyclone Idai challenged the prevailing customs which perceived emotional and psychological problems experienced by the Chimanimani people:

Family therapy... looks at problems within the systems of relationships in which they occur, and aims to promote change by intervening in the broader system rather than in the individual alone (Burnham, 1984: 2)

Professionals are empowered and necessitated to think about how social dynamics are constantly changing as each family member is seized with life both inside and outside the family circles. This also introduced the ideas of family boundaries and the permeability of such boundaries. It moved thinking away from linear causality and introduced the idea of circular causality except where direct child abuse is being perpetrated by a powerful individual exercising bullying, intimidating and financial and psychological power.

It is the British naturalist Charles Darwin's theory of evolution that greatly influenced Spencer. This idea came to be known as the Darwinism theory, which argued for a unitary form of the social system. In his approach, the system of society was constantly evolving into an even-more-complex state of perfection. However, alternative forms of social systems theory argued for a very different view of social evolution. In those perspectives, society does not evolve towards some perfection but rather, it reaches a level of growing complexity. This was called structural differentiation, which refers to how society adapts to its surroundings through modifications of its internal challenges.

A very good example of the notion of social differentiation is the way how these adaptations happen and how the changes in the structure of the core system relate to the whole processes of the social system. In this case, societies are viewed as complete organisms that are maintained by various processes that make them vibrant. These are done through supporting the irkey functions and means of survival. Some varied viewpoints interpret stabilisations in social structures as occurring not because of any

sensible and discernible plan of overall survival but simply because they are workable.

Systems theory is also involved in analysing how society adapts to its environment through adjustments in its structure, with essential and pertinent issues for the conceptualisation of social order. The theory lays bare the intricacies involved in the social evolution and, therefore emphasises the limited probabilities of having a functional society. Alternatively, because of the vast complexity of any society, the cultural experts and social anthropologists can nevertheless have an obligation to select from the huge, varied range of adaptive prospects for social cohesion.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The study will focus on the importance of local action in disaster mitigation strategies to get traction in the local studies, in comparison with the global context. Locally based action is disaster strategies is largely influenced by the form and strengths of social networks (Lundi, 2011), and the culture of the affected children and social patterns in the community. It is believed the social networking is critical in strengthening community resilience and recovery from disasters (Allen, 2007). The strengths and weaknesses in dealing with disaster strategies and interventions on child social rights and protection deserve research attention as communities rely on them for mitigation and strategic interventions. Manyena (2013) points out that local strategies are more important, than to involve external players, because of the damage when it comes to disasters. Local action should be more than ready to provide strategic interventions. Local actors' responses on disaster interventions, deserve further examination. Allen (2006) stresses the integration of various players is largely depended on external agencies, without putting or empowering the local action, or putting it into practicality dealing with child sensitive social dimensions. International studies have indicated due to Chimanimani disaster impact on children and the entire community, disaster affected people are often keen to unite to confront the loss that they have suffered (Becker, 2010). Social cohesion during disasters is more significant among rural communities than urban areas. Inhabitants from villagers contract the representatives of local authorities much more often than cities, which is attributed to the close cooperation in everyday

management of livelihood that characterize social dimensions' impacts (Smith and Handmer, 1984). Local citizens can readily provide strategic interventions and can address the inevitable delay in formal disaster management assistance, since the first response always comes from local actors (Kapucu, 2008).

The strengths and weaknesses of these local social networks, child line strategies, deserve research attention as communities rely on them to respond to emergencies. Kapucu (2008) points out that the local action is more than the immediate community as it also involves external players when it comes to disasters. How different actors blend in disaster action, deserve further scrutiny and examination. There is need for further interrogative investigation on how local actors deploy their intervention strategies to deal with emergencies arising from disasters. Gwimbi (2009) stresses the need for integration of various players including external factors, to consolidate on effective disaster strategies to curb future challenges. If suggestions and recommendations are put into good use, there will be proper coordination, and these variables can actually enhance public response to disaster. Comparative studies highlight how, due to a catastrophic disaster impact on the community and individuals, children in particular affected, they are often keen to unite to confront the loss that they have suffered. Following floods in Australia, Smith and Handmer (1984) emphasized the need to unite collectively for interventions and solutions. In Mozambique, Pakins (2016) states that social cohesion during disasters was more significant among children mostly, rural communities, than in urban areas, and negative impacts on minors and children, and challenges are easily undetected. Inhabitants from villages contact the representatives of social workers, traditional leaders and local authorities, more than in cities which is attributed to coordination of local leadership. Alexander (2010) shares a similar view that local authorities are expected to react to disaster first before they consider in for external factors. Gwimbi (2009) argues an important component of community engagement is the availability of local resources. Varda et al., (2009) emphasizes that resources must be readily available, timeously information since children will find it difficult to respond disasters, and citizens can address the inevitable delay in formal disaster management assistance (Kapucu, 2008). There is enough evidence that

embraces the importance of children in disasters risk management, whilst locals and other Samaritans play a critical role, we must consider gender and age discrepancies, particularly children, and minors who cannot rescue themselves from disaster problems. Smith (2013) believes political dynamics and variances play a key role on the disintegration, making less effective during disasters. Since local experiences are context specific, the study articulates the inadequacy of local action of child sensitivity on disaster preparedness, in setting where there are existing gaps in the national disaster management systems (Manyena, 2013). A substantive report tabled by Oxfam revealed that although districts had plans put in place, resource limitations played a key role in ensuring the success of the Cyclone Idai strategic disaster interventions (Oxfam, 2019).

CHIMANIMANI DISTRICT AS THE STUDY AREA

Chimanimani district lies in agro-ecological region, based on a scheme used to demarcate regional boundaries (FAO, 2006). The region is called region 1, the criterion used is of ecological potential centered largely on climatic and edaphic factors, where productivity diminishes as one moves from region 1 to region 5. Annual precipitation ranges from 1000-2000mm, which means rainfall is not usually a limiting factor on agricultural activity. Temperature range from 15 to 18oc, with possibilities of frost during the winter season. Attitude ranges from 142m on valley floors to 2,377m at mountain peaks (Gwimbi, 2013). Long years of exposure to denudation have led to deep and steep valley slopes that explain the velocity of rivers from flowing throughout the year. Most rivers become vicious with high erosive powers during the rainy season. The area of interest, Kopa, is a flood plain situated at the confluence of major rivers of Rusitu, Nyehonde and Chipita in the Rusitu valley (Manyena, 2008). Farming is highly specialized and diversified, characterized by an assortment of horticulture produce mainly potatoes, bananas, mangoes, sugarcane, among others, and the area has maize production for subsistence farming. In Chimanimani district, the main form of livelihood of the peasantry community or population in the study area is small holder banana farming. Chimanimani area mainly survive on peasant farming, and produces are sold on the markets on cheap

affordable prices because they rot before they get to the market. Chimanimani district has a population of 134 940 people, who are largely rural (95%), with a 95% literacy rate (Zimstats, 2013). About 1.600 households, containing about 9.600 people were directly affected by Cyclone Idai floods, in Rusite valley. The Kopa settlement, which was completely destroyed by floods, had about 200 families. Although the district is run by the Chimanimani Rural District Council Act (RDC) as governed by the Rural District Council Act, there is a defactocustomery leadership arrangement in terms of the day to day affairs of the community. In the current structure of local governance, a headman (Sabhuku), reports to a ward chief (Sadunhu), who then reports to a district chief (Ishe), and this hierarchy observes the culture, values and norms. Basically the Rural District Council is responsible for local planning, and establishing developmental plans in the area. The language which is dominant in Chimanimani is Nda, in Shona language in Zimbabwe. There were several displacements from good arable land to give room from white settle plantation estates during the colonial era. This background clearly shows that the community is highly vulnerable to weather related hazards such as landslides and hazards.

METHODOLOGY

This study uses a case study qualitative examination of experiences and roles of child relative social cases in the Cyclone Idai disaster. The study was chosen because it was one of the hot spots of the Cyclone Idai disaster in Zimbabwe. The case analysis was complemented by a phenomenological approach in which the lived experiences of the participants could be best understood. Field work was done between October, 2019 and June, 2021. The study intended to understand the child sensitivity social approach, the role of children in disaster preparedness, and the nature of interventions made, it was necessary to interview both children survivors and community members who offered various forms of assistance to the survivors of children. Accordingly, participants were categorized as survivors and helpers during the flood, and this study refers to the latter group as "heroes", a term used by the local villagers to describe the challenging role played by these people during the Cyclone Idai experience. Well-wishers and others willing offered their services to children, including the homeless by a specific and

category of community members. A total of 21 local citizens participated in the study, inclusive of children, broken down as nine survivors, 4 children and Samaritans from the community. These participants were recruited from chain referrals, where an identified participant would refer to other key people whose narratives would be most critical to the study's objectives. The size of the participants was determined through theoretical sampling until theoretical saturation was attained. There were interview sessions which lasted for almost 30 to 40 minutes, and were conducted mostly at local's residence. Shona and English languages were widely used in the transcripts and notes were later translated into English. In order to show the extent of Cyclone damage, the study also observed how children can play a leading role on interventions during and after disasters. Thematic and content analysis was used to analyses primary data. Given the ethical implications involving children and survivors who were seriously affected, participants consent was first obtained after going through key procedural contacts, explaining the purpose of the study, the main objectives. Confidentiality and anonymity played a leading role throughout the study. The study dealt with mixed group of children under 18 and adults as well, although permission was granted to engage children. From the general study and overall analysis made from this study, a number of key areas and themes emerged, which created a proper structure to quality the results that follow.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

Experiences with Cyclone Idai

The local villagers narrated the events which took place before and after the Cyclone Idai disaster. The revelation by 15 people including children who witnessed the floods, the impact which was employed comprehension. There was severe damage, loss of goods, valuables, destruction of buildings, vehicles and infrastructure and lives. The narrations were horrible to listen. Eventually it started around 10 pm on the night of 15 March, 2019, and most people were asleep, and to some they failed to escape because they had gone to bed. Those interviewed corroborated that the ability to rescue families was compromised by darkness and moreover the work scenario was for children who failed to be evacuated because of the inability to deliver themselves from the jaws of the problem. The elderly who were awake assembled in different places such as police,

churches, open spaces, and majority remained awake as they monitored the situation. All communication systems were cut off, electricity was disconnected. Those who were interviewed witnessed floods of water, heavy winds, darkness, and most children struggled and as a result failed to escape and majority were trapped. One of the surviving children narrated that they only saw water flooding into their houses and it was too late for them to evacuate.

More than 250 people assembled at the local police station, bodies were recovered including of children, and majority went missing, with no proper rescue plan to recover the missing and intervention strategy to deal with the crisis. Up to the time of this publication whereabouts of over 400 people were still unknown (Oxfam, 2019).

Roles of Children during Disaster Interventions

Children are considered to be a very vital resource in any country where their care and well-being is critical for sustainable cultural and socio-economic development. As a result, almost all societies are generally working towards protecting their children and Zimbabwe in general and Chimanimani District in particular, are no exception, in interventions focused exclusively for children in need. This paper reflects on how child care and protection during and after Cyclone Idai has progressed in Zimbabwe since its occurrence. Children were mostly affected during this most sensitive occurrence. Numerous permanent disabilities in developing countries are caused by childhood diseases and malnutrition as a result of displacements by the cyclone. The causes of cyclones are not preventable, hence the need to have significant strategies to reduce child deaths. The delay in accessing the rescue places and teams made serious complications for children, mostly minors who could not help themselves. The delay by external disaster management authorities gave them an opportunity to deploy various locally-based response practices. The engagement of survivors of children and other local actors in activities to save lives by offering trainings was commendable, such as how to search missing persons, or to attend to the welfare of those in need happened at different stages of the disaster. Interventions also occurred at individual, family and village levels. Individuals who actively participated in rescue operations were clearly evident at the beginning of the impending

disaster. The effort was collective to deal with the disaster. One of the children narrated:

after making serious observations that the settlement was now an island cut off by the bursting Nyahonde river, with people trapped, and failing to have access to safe places, I felt it was not safe for me to get there alone, but had to seek the company of others who were witnessing the horrible event."

Closely related to this, another young lady narrated that they had to motivate each other, and assuring one another that it was possible to rescue the people who were trapped despite the high risk. The desire to save lives, was high, and after realizing the urgent need to intervene to save lives, they felt that their joint ideas would offer the best form of assistance under such an emergency situation. According to those who narrated events leading to the surviving formula, there were also individuals who demonstrated care by offering to assist children whose mothers went missing, and were lacking parental care. Help was offered and at the same time, there were mothers who were finding it difficult to escape with children. Women were reported to have helped in taking some of the children to ease the burden on the mothers who were struggling with more than two children. Studies revealed that some of these children actually survived while their parents perished. From the quotations given by survivors, participation of families was largely noticeable at the level of meeting the welfare of survivors, particularly during the emergency phase. According to the narration report, because the external safety net took a long time to be clearly established, the role of some families was still predominant beyond the emergency period. Collective role of children, their mothers, was an evidence of the experienced disaster all the way to the recovery phase. Respondents expressed that there was a recovery team which was set up by the community as a matter of urgency to address the issue of missing persons, collectively with a disaster management task force with external participants and other local stakeholders. After a team was set up, more than ten bodies were recovered, either in the sand or those that were thrown out of the river. Most parts of Chimanimani district which were affected are Ngangu, Nhedziwe, Coppa, Ndiyedzo, Chimanimani town, and mothers, children and other local people teamed up to address the needs of the disaster management team, and expectations of the local leadership.

Table1: *Mixed reactions over Cyclone Idai disaster*

Reason	Explanation
Disasters are common	- Majority of people thought disasters are always common and they underestimated the gravity or impact
Experience with previous Cyclones	- There were mixed reactions, with others were of the opinion that floods will quickly recede, while the voices of those would soon crest and recede
People attached to their valuables	- Despite the threats of floods, no one was willing to leave their valuables, as a result some were wiped by the floods because they were not prepared to leave their valuables
Traditional beliefs	- Most villagers had the opinion that the cultures of gods communicating to their people, so it was a way of experiencing anger to the people, with some giving scripture citations about God destroying the whole world with fire not water
Dismissed with contempt it deserves	- Nothing will happen and majority dismissed emphasizing that it was a sign of frustration of spirit mediums created by people around the community to induce fear

Response to Early Warnings

There were mixed reactions in the way people perceived early warnings and this affected their actions. Despite early warnings from the Government, Civic Protection Unit (CPU), and other relevant stakeholders, there was resistance from local villagers. Mainstream media, local authorities played a key role to send early warnings, and projections were made on how it was going to affect the area, and to some extent, it did not filter the community properly. There were captured comments from local participants, and some narrated in this way,

“We heard about this Cyclone Idai, but we never took it seriously, and we thought it was the same cyclone which we experienced in previous years”.

Another captured comment,

“we simply thought it was social media awash with fake news, and we ignored, and we never took heed to any instructions and early warnings given to us”.

There were other mixed reactions, with other participants claiming that Government had done enough to advise people to take precautionary measures. Some people took it lightly despite the warnings and education given, arguing that the previous did not seriously affect the community, but simply came and pass. Mostly, people were more concerned about the assets they had accumulated and were not willing to just leave their valuables. The early warnings

were paraded much on social media, of which most parts in Chimanimani district people are off social media, and the news did not filter much on the ground. The generality of the community ignored the call to floods, and they were directed to camp at the local police, which they defied, and some dismissed it, claiming that it was just wind passing, it won't affect anyone. Most people who survived after this, took heed of the call, to go and camp at the local police, and some other designated places.

Searching and Recovery Process

When Cyclone Idai took place, many residents and villagers went missing, property was destroyed, together with infrastructure, and teams were established on the ground, comprising of social workers, volunteers, local authorities, external factors, civic protection unit, and local traditional leadership, to begin the process of searching and recovering dead bodies. The

people who were worried about the safety of the residents trapped by floods in the Ngangu and Coppa area did not become complacent. According to the interviewees, the team had to establish sub-division groups, and some inter special committees, to deal with the taskforce, they quickly mobilized each other to form a group of five brave men who devised modest but critical rescue operations. Given the risk of the activity they embarked on and their level of dedication to save lives, the villagers describe these rescuers as heroes in their own belief. To

some who were trapped, some were still alive, and some were already dead bodies, and some spend the whole night trapped either in buildings, trees, river shores and some on top of roofs. This group of heroes evolved a specific procedure by which they launched their rescue effort. They conceived the idea of using a rope after realizing that the lives of people who were crying out for help were in their hands. Rescue team used either ropes, man-made branches to rescue people who were scattered in many places. The trio was unanimous about the idea of using a rope to rescue the trapped people. They were also joined by two young men who had their families trapped by the floods. They rushed to a business person's hardware store where they knew they could secure a rope. The instruction to the shop attendant was short and clear, "Bring out a rope, people are dying mumadhomeni." There was no time for discussion. They also took with them torches [flashlights] to illuminate the area. The ropes were tied on one end around a mango tree on the roadside stretching to a distance of about 80 m to the other end, where it was tied around an anti-burglary iron rod protecting a window. The ropes were firmly fastened using wire that was obtained from the shops. The idea was to make sure that more people could, as quickly as possible, use the rope for stability at the same time they crossed the flowing stream. The heroes positioned themselves at different points along the rope to coordinate the operation and to assist those who had difficulties in crossing on their own. After noticing that the pressure of the water was increasing and they could risk their own lives, one of them gave a wild cry instructing that they should immediately abandon the activity and move out of the water. Suddenly, there was a huge wave of water, reported to be the height of a building, that covered the whole place and this ended the operation. The evacuation took only about 20 min and they had managed to evacuate between 25 and 30 people. The other group of survivors was saved on the following day. It is critical to note that the rescue operation, although it happened for less than half an hour, was the only method that saved people. The heroes were quite skilful in tying the rope in order to ensure its firmness so that it would be safe for anyone using it. The idea of the rope was to enable an easier and faster way of evacuating the people particularly those who could not cross the floods on their own. The main challenge that the heroes faced was to handle mixed reactions from the

crowd. There were those who doubted the safety of the rope as indicated in also some influential people misled the group into believing that the situation was still manageable. The rescuers stated that there was little time to listen to people's arguments, but the instruction was: "We have erected a rope. Everyone rush to the rope for your safety" It is believed that if people had taken the instruction more seriously, more people could have survived. The rescue operation continued on the following day when more people joined to search for missing persons and to identify and rescue other survivors. A few of these survivors were found hanging on trees or on some small islands. One of the rescuers said;

We extended the rope that was tied with a rock at its end so that it could reach the target. We then asked the people to tie themselves around the waist, then we pull the person. For those who could not make it on their own, one brave person would swim to rescue the person by the waist and those outside the water to pull out.

About 15 people were reported to have been rescued using this technique. The local searchers managed to identify five bodies before they received support from external based searches. However, the latter's intervention did not yield any results.

Meeting the Needs of Children's Welfare

The care that children are given both in the home and beyond is entirely dependent on, and predominantly on the work of women. Commenting on the Bangladesh cyclone, an Oxyfam Women's Project Officer's observation is quite pertinent to the Cyclone Idai's experiences about Zimbabwean women in Chimanimani District:

Though disaster is a general concern which affects both men and women it concerns women more because they take responsibility for ensuring the welfare of the children. It is a women's issue that relief aid is obtained in the name of women, but is not fairly distributed between men and women, and women's real needs are not addressed (Eade & Williams, 1995:186).

Women are expected to bear the brand of considerable emotional sacrifices in performing their motherly duties and other assigned roles in the domestic sphere. Yet the highest percentage of about 80 percent of the people displaced by disaster or armed conflict is constituted by

women and children where the majority are women and girls. The vulnerability of women and female children is widely exploited through heinous acts in the form of rape and sexual abuse during disaster periods. The mere fact that women are paid less than men while they have more restricted access than men to paid work, having credit facilities, land ownership, women, women-maintained households are generally the poorest of all households. Due to this disadvantaged position, childcare responsibilities, support of elderly relatives and those not feeling well or disabled, women often struggle against all odds and impossible workloads in fending for the household members' survival. The enhanced quality of life for women and mothers is essential for the restoration of sustainable improvement in child welfare as a long lasting solution for the unborn tomorrows.

Looking at the crisis which had befallen Chimanimani community as a whole, it was very difficult to mobilise resources depending from which angle, and mostly those who were affected were children who had lost their parents, and guardians, and they had no one to look after, and the only option which was available, was to offer assistance, which was immediate and gradual. Depending on the circumstances of those affected by the cyclone, the needs of survivors were both immediate and gradual. Properties and infrastructures was destroyed, leaving out people homeless, and most children were separated from their parents, because of the on-going searches, it was difficult to locate some of the parents, and the survivors spent the night in shops or verandas of business people until the following morning when prompt arrangements were then made for their welfare as a family:

The family has enormous creative potential, including that of life itself, and it is not surprising that, when it becomes disordered, it possesses an equal potential for terrible destruction (Skynner cited in Dallos & Draper, 2010:260).

Children were left vulnerable with no food, clothing and other necessities, forcing external factors to play a leading role to ensure their welfare is guaranteed. Limited resources were another factor, lack of coordination on resource mobilization delayed the process to secure welfare material for them, and mostly they had to rely on handouts, and well-wishers who were

amongst survivors. However, the immediate needs were not properly coordinated, but spontaneous. Some minors were picked from the ground, after a successful search operation by the team and locals. They were urgent needs such as clothes, food, shelter, and nursing the wounded. As one participant puts it,

“I was awakened by loud cries of children who had stormed my house, fleeing the floods at Kopa. I had to quickly organize some clothes from my family members as these children were almost naked”

Donations towards the needs of the survivors were overwhelming. One survivor reported that,

“People moved in with various items to ease the problem. You could not even remember who had given you what exactly, but assistance came from various sources”

Children were scattered all-over, and did not know where to flee, and it took rescue team to assemble all children to one point, and covering them with few blankets which were still available. The caring for the survivors could not be endured alone by those who volunteered to keep the homeless at their houses, but it was a collective responsibility. The demonstration of oneness during critical times of need can be best understood in a statement by one of the surviving child saying,

“During those days when villagers teamed up to search for missing persons, no one could afford to sleep. It was a joint effort by both women and men, the young and the old.”

In some cases, the homes were used as meeting places by relatives and some church members who would have come from other areas to console those whose relatives had gone missing. This took up to 2 weeks until all the hopes of finding the missing persons were lost. Clearly, there were high levels of accepting the problem, since some places resembled funeral scenes as more and more relatives of survivors came from different places. The survivors reported that they spent up to a month being accommodated in homes of relatives, friends, and other villagers as government arrangements took so long to be put in place. It is also important to note the spirit of selflessness exhibited by some of the caregivers who accommodated the survivors. One of them was able to accommodate as many as 18 people at a time when food was running out. Since not everyone was able to accommodate the survivors, some villagers

followed up with those families that had volunteered to keep the survivors. One of the participants indicated,

“My wife also went to one of the places where most survivors were accommodated. She assisted with preparing food and bathing and clothing kids”.

Although these community helpers were not trained as social workers, this study established that they also developed the necessary knowledge and skills of addressing the psychosocial needs of the survivors. The challenge was now on feeding vulnerable children, as adults, they would know how to manage the situation, and children were now scrambling for the remaining left overs. One of the participants reported that,

“We also educated the community and other children against use of such discriminatory terms as “victims” and “orphans” of Cyclone Idai.”

Instead, the use of terms such as “missing persons” gave hope to those who had lost their loved ones’ the team had a hard time, to explain to children whose parents were missing, and the team preferred it to be handled by a selected counselling team to deal with that, and they assured the children that their parents will be back.

The Aftermath Experience & External Factor

It was the duty of external factors, local authorities, Non-Governmental Organisations(NGOs), child line organizations, traditional leaders and Government led special team, to formulate a team to deal with the crisis before them. There was a hard time to explain to children who lost their parents, children who were homeless, and searching for solutions which were temporal and kept them going for a selective period. The external factor played their key role, in responding to the disaster effect, but they also raised concerns over the lack of preparedness by the Government, especially after knowing this incident for a long time. There were supposed to be presumptive measures in place to deal with the crisis at hand. Local actors were available, with limited resources. There were several factors to be dealt with, rehabilitation process, dealing with vulnerability, and this was a gradual process which requires a lot of mental health teachings. The aftermath of the cyclone required the

community residents to be innovative and to rely on local resources in confronting the changing situations. When floods destroyed bridges, Kopa Growth Point became inaccessible. This hampered effort to support survivors, conduct search and rescue operations, and assess the impact of the damage. By deploying their local ingenuity, the villagers managed to establish a temporary footbridge that enabled access to Kopa. In addition, the first access road was the initiative of local citizens who, with support from a local business person, removed all the barricades that prevented access to Kopa from Chipinge Town. There were no linkages, even after several warnings, there were supposed to be established links, for emergency purposes, which did not happen. The Cyclone Idai disaster created opportunities to develop different forms of linkages, that is, within villages, between villages, and with external disaster response agencies. The disaster unlocked external development assistance and managed to draw the attention of both government agencies and nongovernmental organizations. Development agencies’ commitment to children’s primary health care was linked to the need to offer priority to the elimination of poverty related diseases. The resultant loss of life in children and destruction of physical infrastructure in cyclone related disasters was traumatic and mindboggling. Children deserved real affection, care, love as they were related to their peers and were expected to be playful, imaginative, keen to learn and reproduce culturally sanctioned stereotypical values from their parents. Whilst we may focus on negatives, the disaster also has its own positive connotations, several child line organizations have established themselves in Chimanimani district and the surrounding area. Today there is a feeling that Cyclone Idai has opened up avenues for the participation of development partners in development projects, particularly the upgrading of road infrastructure. The participation of government and donor agencies was facilitated by the local individuals. One of the study participants reported that he was tasked by the Civil Protection Department to generate a database of missing people, people who had died, the homeless, and those displaced from all the affected villages. Commenting about the entry of external players, another survivor expressed dissatisfaction about the treatment native villagers sometimes got: *“Soldiers whipped us while we were waiting in queues to get relief items. Their arrangement*

should have separated the disaster-affected people from the rest of the villagers.'

Another participant named, also reported that the influx of the donors initially created chaotic scenes that only ended after clear aid distribution structures were established with the help of representatives of the local community. However, from the perspective of the villagers, the influx of the external agencies has actually done more harm than good. They argued that their untimely withdrawal, after feeling that the external agencies and institutions had done enough, actually created divisions between the survivors and the rest of the villagers. There was a strong feeling in the community that the survivors' welfare was going to be wholly met by external agencies, yet the support simply ended prematurely.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Chimanimani District's children who are coping not only with trauma from the cyclone and bereavement of family members but also with a newer and possibly hostile environment, require special support. Discussions derived from the backdrop of a weaker disaster management plan and response systems in Zimbabwe, play a pivotal role in determining the effectiveness of mechanisms that ought to be put in place. This study therefore, gives several insights into the roles of local actors and the challenges they face when experiencing disasters. When confronted with an emergency, local communities do not remain complacent or wait for directions from national disaster management professionals. Instead, local actors use their personal networks to give warnings, engage in search and rescue operations, assist survivors in critical need, and organize structures that are later used by exogenous agencies. Initiatives to assist the affected children should be aimed at strengthening whatever capacity to the already existing ones. This study has shown that although such local interventions are largely based on modest means of communication, local knowledge and ingenuity, collective resources, and local networks, but the cumulative action these interventions initiate can significantly help in minimizing disaster impact. Given the lengthy lag time of over 100 h before the appearance of external disaster management authorities, the impact could have been more severe as more lives would have been lost. One area where local action can feed into our understanding about disasters is the detailed

accounts given by the people who directly experienced the events. In the case of Cyclone Idai in Chimanimani, the rich accounts about how the disaster occurred by those observing, witnessing, experiencing, and participating in the flood have been useful in informing subsequent interventions by the disaster management community. Our study has shown that the impact of the cyclone disaster cannot be fully documented without capturing the lived experiences of survivors and other community members who witnessed the disaster. It is from such experiences that the narratives of local informants can give pointers to the need to strengthen response systems, in conjunction with external disaster management authorities (Allen 2006; Kapucu 2008; Zubir and Amirrol 2011). From the perspectives of the local people themselves, such experiences have given them the opportunity to test their community-based interventions against a background of the weak disaster response culture cited by Bongo and Manyena (2015). In a similar observation, Allen (2006) and Troy et al. (2008) noted that local engagement can provide a database of information useful for disaster responses. Corroborating Kelman's (2019) observations that actions to prevent disasters can be voluntary, this study indicated that people do not remain passive when they face an impending disaster, but rather take actions to minimize impacts. Within this collection of local-based interventions, gender differentiation was very evident. Youth, women, and men were actively involved, although playing different roles at different stages of the disaster. The role of men tended to be prevalent during evacuation and rescue procedures, while women were largely active in saving children during and after the disaster. However, Bene et al. (2012) were worried about the strong bias of women as mothers that, they argued, gives them an extra burden of care. The World Conference on Human Rights which was held in Vienna in June 1993 strongly endorsed women's campaign for their rights to be fully enshrined into the work of the United Nations. Children's rights are inherently captured therein paragraph 9 of the Conference Declaration which stipulates that:

The human rights of women and the girl-child are an inalienable, integral and indivisible part of human rights. The full and equal participation of women in political, civil, economic, social and cultural life, at the national, regional and international levels, and

the eradication of all forms of discrimination on grounds of sex are priority objectives of the international community (Eade & Williams, 1995: 178).

Since human rights are a developmental issue, the right to live in peace and create a community awareness where children potential are fully realised. Within the practice of local responses, there are people who go an extra mile in providing care for those affected by disasters. These are men and women whose role can be seen ranging from giving early warnings to taking early action to address the welfare of children, the elderly, and the injured. Such people can be critical pillars in community-based disaster risk reduction (DRR). This observation resonates with the thoughts of Appleby-Arnold et al. (2018) that integrating shared local values and experiences may be particularly effective in strengthening disaster risk reduction (DRR) mechanisms.

Childhood explanations and how adolescence is defined are not necessarily coincidental with the cultural, legal, socio-economic or customary definitions which are context specific. The differences that are created between the definitions are relevant for relief and developmental activities. The ages in-between what is considered childhood and the adolescent youths are often vulnerable to exploitative tendencies at work places more than anywhere else. Supportive networks that provide intervention strategies in the aftermaths of the cyclone, like skills-development would help in strengthening the capacity of the children of Chimanimani District.

CONCLUSIONS

The effects of Cyclone Idai were so devastating and traumatising so much so that in order to rehabilitate children who witnessed and experienced it requires human and material resources to assist with their upkeep. Routine assessments of all proposed project interventions that provide long lasting and sustainable improvements should ultimately benefit the children of Chimanimani area.

Children-focused programmes should support efforts to implement more far-reaching social changes. Chimanimani District children's role in social development needs to be supported by youth clubs that provide a useful service in equipping them recreationally, culturally and in artistic expression. Children's vehicles for

appropriate socialisation require to develop common approaches that deal with drug abuse amongst their peers. The children's rights to be heard and often the need to get together and share their concerns and problems is quite critical.

Generally, interventions require the essential principle of supporting what the local people are already doing and practicing themselves in order to build and improve on the vulnerable children of Chimanimani area before new welfare models are imported. Teachers, church workers, health personnel and other community actors who might have suffered the same devastating effects of the cyclone together with the children would be wellpositioned to assist children by providing counselling and other victim-friendly support services.

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Child-Sensitivity Mechanisms in Disaster Risk Management Interventions in Zimbabwe's Cyclone Idai Prone Areas

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