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Disaster preparedness and Response in Zimbabwe: The case of Cyclone Idai of March 2019 in Chipinge and Chimanimani

Edmond Z Samutereko

Africa University of Zimbabwe

samuterekoe@africa.edu

Abstract. It is the responsibility of the government of Zimbabwe and probably all nations to provide adequate protection for its citizens. It is actually a governance issue that needs serious attention. Despite the fact that the government is responsible, human suffering has been on the rise in most African countries including Zimbabwe as a result of the frequency and intensity of natural disasters. Disasters that have devastated most African countries have been drought, diseases, floods and tropical cyclones. Human risk to natural disasters cannot be completely eliminated but the effects can be minimised when there are early warning signs, preventative measures and if the emergency preparedness and response are in place and are fully funded. The natural disasters are not only caused by nature but human factor may be in play especially climate change that causes changes in the weather patterns. This has resulted in increased frequency and magnitude. This paper focuses on the Emergency preparedness and response in case of the natural disasters occurring. It looks into the case of Cyclone Idai that recently left more than 300 dead in Chimanimani and Chipinge in Zimbabwe. The figures of the casualties is very alarming and caused the international community to react. The Government through the responsible ministries could have done something to reduce its impact. The Hygo Framework for Action is used to assess the preparedness in Zimbabwe situation. It recommends community participation, funding and devolution as measures that enhances EPR plans to work.

Keywords. Disaster, Governance, cyclones, Emergency, Hygo Framework for Action

Methodology

The paper is a desk review which looks at existing literature and compare it to what happened in Chimanimani and Chipinge before, during and after cyclone idai. The Hygo Framework for Action (HFA) is a tool that is used for the assessment. This is used for the analysis because it is an internationally agreed tool for implementing Disaster Risk Reduction for building resilience for nations and communities to disasters. The Zimbabwe's legislation is also used to critically analyse the level of preparedness to disasters in Zimbabwe for the application of the Hygo Framework for Action. Some recommendations are given at the end of the paper for considerations in the area of disaster preparedness and response.

Definitions of key terms

According to the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction UNDRR disaster can be defined as a serious disruption of the functioning of community or society causing widespread human, material, economic or environmental losses that exceed the ability of the

affected community or society to cope using its own resources (UNDRR). According to this definition, disasters are not something to take for granted but should always be part of human planning so that the devastating effects are minimised. Countries should anticipate occurrence of disasters and put aside resources for the mishaps because they happen without notice and if not planned they can cause huge economic decline.

Emergency- is a serious disruption of a community or society causing rapid response and end to be smaller in scale and community can cope using its own resources. (Wisner et al .2004) Emergency and disaster are intertwined because disasters happens in the form of an emergency hence they cause loss of property and lives. It is termed an emergency because if it is not dealt with in the shortest space of time many lives will be lost. Usually livelihoods are disturbed and people are left stranded without food so emergency relief fund from the government is used to rescue citizens from the catastrophe and the President in the case of Zimbabwe declares a state of emergency which then allows other players like Non-Governmental Organisations to also intervene.

According to the United Nations International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (ISDR) preparedness are activities and measures taken in advance to ensure effective response to the impacts of hazards including issuance of timely effective warnings and the temporally evacuations of people and property from the threatened areas and locations. In accordance to that, if the measures are not taken the effects or the impact of a disaster are high as compared to when there is a clear strategy on Disaster Reduction. It does not mean that when there is a strategy for Disaster risk reduction disasters do not occur but the impact may not be as serious as without. It is important for the country to have a clear disaster risk reduction plan in place.

Introduction

It is so apparent in Zimbabwe that people die due to natural disasters which can be prevented if measures are put in place to deal with the disasters. Disaster preparedness is an important component in the governance of any nation without which many lives are lost. In Zimbabwe thousands of people lost their lives in 2008 due to cholera outbreak because there were no plans and measures to deal with the outbreak. If there plans in the ministry of Health and Child Care, the environment was not allowing for the fight against Cholera. There was no adequate supply of clean and portable water in Harare that time and even now. This year hundreds of people died due the devastating effects of cyclone Idai. The poor economic environment has lead Zimbabwe to be in poor state of preparedness. Climate has been changing over the years from warm to cold and from dry to wet. Tarburk and Lutgens (2010). These variations are a cause for concern and are associated with natural hazards such as tropical cyclones and droughts. These put people at risk and increase vulnerability. Vulnerability in this case refers to the propensity of exposed elements such as human beings, their livelihoods and assets to suffer adverse effects when impacted by hazard events. Thywissen (2006).

According to Smolka 2006 the frequency of major natural disasters and the catastrophes is increasing over the years. Zimbabwe has never in its History experienced the devastating effects of the cyclone Idai. This means that there is a shift in the way the natural disasters are occurring and in that manner in which people really do not understand and started to theorise on the occurrence of cyclone idai. It may have been difficult for the Zimbabwean Civil Protection Unit to be prepared and react to the natural disaster. Human activities have speeded up the climate change such that it is very difficult for vulnerable groups to cope with the change. In the case of Cyclone Idai, the vulnerability of the people is increased by the fact that people occupy areas that are prone to floods. This is mainly because of the economic activities found in the areas concerned. It is difficult to relocate people from the areas they think they are

surviving on. Cyclone Idai left many people homeless and hundreds of people dead and hundreds missing. The impact may be blamed on the poor legislative framework in assigning clear mandates and responsibilities to different actors or institutions in those countries and areas affected. Manyena et al (2013) The state of preparedness is assessed through the reaction time and the intensity of the damage done to the people and buildings. This paper will look at the ways in which a nation should prepare for any disaster and how loss of life can be prevented in case other disasters may strike again.

Theoretical underpinnings

Disasters occur when communities' capacities to manage the effects of the natural disasters are overwhelmed, UN/ISDR, (2008). It is not only the communities but the state failure to manage the effects may lead to disasters causing deaths. According to Kusenbuk et al (2010), the impact of the disaster is depended on the intensity of the magnitude of the hazard event and also the degree to which the community is exposed to the hazard or is ill prepared to cope with it. The natural hazards, for example the cyclones cannot be controlled or prevented from happening but the vulnerability and risk can be reduced substantially to minimise loss of lives, property and livelihoods. Effective legislation by the by the government can help to reduce the impact of natural disasters. Birkmann and Teichmann, (2010) Disaster Risk Reduction is a component that needs special attention when dealing with Disaster Preparedness. It refers to the practice of reducing disaster risks through the systematic efforts to analyse and manage the causal factors of disasters including reducing the exposure time to disasters, evacuations of people and improved preparedness for adverse events. UNISDR, (2009).

Disaster preparedness faces two major challenges, Firstly, the major hazards such as devastating cyclones are usually rare for any particular community and in such situations, the local citizens are much worried to ask or to invest their resources on disaster mitigation because they do not occur regularly and are not experienced. (Koten and Heislout, (2014). The cyclone Idai disaster was never experienced before so it came as a surprise like any other emergency but the magnitude of the problem was never anticipated. If ever Zimbabwe was affected by a cyclone this had more devastating effects to human life and livelihoods. In Countries like Zimbabwe where the economy is not performing very well the effects of cyclone Idai are more felt by the poor communities who are displaced as a result. Secondly, most of the burden for disaster recovery assistance is shouldered by central government which have weak legislation. These challenges have adversely affected the effectiveness of the Emergency preparedness and response activities including the Disaster Risk reduction. Cyclone Idai which affected Mozambique, Malawi and Zimbabwe had adverse effects and the following paragraphs will deal with the issues surrounding the preparedness to deal with the disaster in Zimbabwe.

The natural hazards in Zimbabwe are classified into hydro- metrological, geographical, biological and technological. Zimbabwe has a complex climatic and geographical conditions which result in different natural disasters occurring. Many of these natural disasters that happen in Zimbabwe have been seasonal and regional. This means that we anticipate to have cyclones during the rainy season and probably other disease conditions during the rainy season such cholera and others during winter. In the case of Cyclone Idai, it affected mainly parts of Manicaland, in the areas that borders Mozambique and Zimbabwe. Cyclone Idai also caused the mud slides which destroyed properties and left hundreds of people dead and some homeless. Mud slides and landslides usually occur where people are situated on sloppy grounds and at the bottom side of mountains. People always occupy these places for the search of fertile soils for agricultural purposes without necessarily looking at the negative impact it has. People are most worried about livelihoods than the hazards associated. In some cases people in these areas have

never experienced any disasters after having occupied those areas for so many years. It is then difficult for the law enforcement agencies to remove the people from these areas as they will face resistance due to the economic benefits they get from the occupation of hazard prone areas. The occurrence of these disasters calls for the emergency preparedness and response that is fully funded by the government to reduce the impact on the human subjects like it did in Chimanimani and Chipinge. The government should always be alert and make sure that legislation and the statutory instruments are followed before people settle in areas that are prone to disasters to avoid loss of lives.

Building Resilience to Natural Disasters

The Cyclone Idai Preparedness and Response should be assessed with the existing paradigm on building resilience among the communities affected by disasters. It is through the existing paradigm that we can be able to assess whether the Zimbabwean government was responsive or prepared to deal with the cyclone. The resilience paradigm emerged in the 2000s from the lessons from the implementation of the international Decade for National Disaster Risk Reduction (IDNDR) which extended from 1990 to 1999. The United Nations International Strategy for Disaster risk reduction (UNISDR) in 2005 adopted the Hyogo Framework for Action, Building Resilience of natural and community disasters ISDR (2005).

Building the Resilience of Nations and Communities to Disasters (HFA) is the first plan to explain, describe and detail the work that is required from all different sectors and actors to reduce disaster losses. It is through this framework that we can assess whether Zimbabwe was ready to deal with the disaster and were there any early warning signs for communities. It was developed and agreed on with the many partners needed to reduce disaster risk - governments, international agencies, disaster experts and many others - bringing them into a common system of coordination. Though it is not legally binding the framework gives a general guideline as to how nations, organisations and Civil Protection Units can manage and deal with disaster preparedness to reduce loss of human lives because many of the vulnerability can be reduced. The HFA outlines five priorities for action, and offers guiding principles and practical means for achieving disaster resilience. Its goal was to substantially reduce disaster losses by 2015 by building the resilience of nations and communities to disasters. This means reducing loss of lives and social, economic, and environmental assets when hazards strike. UN/ISDR (2008). We are beyond 2015 and nations such as Zimbabwe still experience loss of life through natural disasters and it is a cause for concern and worrisome. The five priority areas that the Hyogo Framework is provides are areas which the Government should seriously consider to avoid continued loss of life in the event of natural disaster happening. I shall bring attention to the five priority areas of the Hyogo framework to inform our nations on the best ways to have proper Disaster Preparedness and Response framework for the country.

The priority areas for Hygo Framework for Action

Priority Action 1: Ensure that disaster risk reduction is a national and a local priority with a strong institutional basis for implementation.- Countries that develop policy, legislative and institutional frameworks for disaster risk reduction and that are able to develop and track progress through specific and measurable indicators have greater capacity to manage risks and to achieve widespread consensus for, engagement in and compliance with disaster risk reduction measures across all sectors of society. It is against this priority area that Zimbabwe scenario is assessed because there should be systems in place that are supported by legislature in order for ease of implementation. Policies and legislative frameworks may be available but implementation of such is usually problematic. In Zimbabwe we have the civil protection unit

that deals with issues of disasters at National, Provincial and District levels but this unit has not been capacitated by the government to deal with disasters of that kind. Civil protection has been having countless meetings in the province but nothing tangible that usually come out of the meetings. It was a noble idea to have those committees in place but if their decisions are not binding and if they only meet to mitigate an already striking disasters the essence of it becomes questionable. After the cyclone Idai in Chimanimani and Chipinge the civil protection unit started to have meetings to mitigate over the challenges but in many cases they became the gate keepers. When in a country we want progress in any of our interventions we may need to put politics aside and deal with our problems together as a nation. Some organisations who came to assist the victims in Chimanimani and Chipinge were denied entry by the army who were now guarding the area because some were alleged to be supporting the opposition. The civil protection Unit and the government departments involved in the area of disaster management should have clearly designed emergency preparedness and response plan. The responsible ministries and department should have clearly specified roles to deal with disasters. In the cyclone Idai disaster there was duplication of roles and at the end of the day service delivery is affected.

Priority Action 2: Identify, assess and monitor disaster risks and enhance early warning. -The starting point for reducing disaster risk and for promoting a culture of disaster resilience lies in the knowledge of the hazards and the physical, social, economic and environmental vulnerabilities to disasters that most societies face, and of the ways in which hazards and vulnerabilities are changing in the short and long term, followed by action taken on the basis of that knowledge. Early warning systems in the country are not very effective because of technology which is still behind. The metrological department in Zimbabwe was able to inform people about the cyclone Idai but they were not sure of the magnitude and intensity. This is very crucial component because for warned is for armed. The Zimbabwean Government as alluded was able to inform the people of the likelihood of the disaster coming but were not sure which parts was is going to cause harm. Our meteorological department is not capacitated to detect the intensity and severity of a disaster and in many cases relies from the weather report from our neighbouring South Africa. Of the people who were interviewed at the Ngangu and Copa the cyclone hit areas more than 60% of them had no knowledge of the early warning of the cyclone. This means that they were caught unaware. Of those people who had knowledge, they had no copying mechanisms as to what they can do in case the disaster strike and therefore many people lost their lives. (Abebe, B. 2009 et al) However, communities within the areas affected were also to blame for the damaging effects because most of them are very ignorant when information is being said on television and radio warning people about the likelihood of the disaster. In the priority number 3 we are found wanting because our early warning system should also be accompanied by measures such as relocating the people to safer places and being on high alert. Even until now the victims are still settled at the area with the trauma associated. The victims continue to see the remains of what used to be a residential place for the Zimbabwe Republic Policy station and the Agritex offices.

Priority Action 3: Use knowledge, innovation and education to build a culture of safety and resilience at all levels-Disasters can be substantially reduced if people are well informed and motivated towards a culture of disaster prevention and resilience, which in turn requires the collection, compilation and dissemination of relevant knowledge and information on hazards, vulnerabilities and capacities. This is a very important component in disaster mitigation because lack of information may be very dangerous. There is always the need to shift from the disaster preparedness alone to a focus on new emerging themes such as climate change, land degradation and urban risk. This will help people to understand that sometimes we are the trouble causers

as we engage in activities that damages the environment and sometimes settle in areas that are not suitable for human settlement. Such information must be integrated into the school curricula from primary, secondary and the tertiary institutions. The subjects taught in Zimbabwean schools include some of the areas of Disaster management. In Universities there are degrees offered in that area but the problem with many of them is that the people who complete these courses lack exposure and many of them end up employed in areas that have nothing to do with their areas of study leaving the area of disaster management without qualified people. Communication should be improved so that people are aware of what to do in case a disaster strikes and must be equally equipped with the basic resources to tackle such emergencies. (Adedoyin & Olanrewaju, 2006)

Priority Action 4: Reduce the underlying risk factors-Disaster risks related to changing social, economic, environmental conditions and land use, and the impact of hazards associated with geological events, weather, water, climate variability and climate change, are addressed in sector development planning and programmes as well as in post-disaster situations. The environment in Zimbabwe puts people who live in the disaster prone areas at risk. The economic, social and political environment in Zimbabwe has been very fragile to the extent that even if the disaster strike there are no ways to assist the victims because of poor economy and the politics. It has come to attention that even the aid that was distributed in the communities has been politicised. Politicians took it as an opportunity to buy votes by trying to distribute aid in partisan manner. The economy has been very poor in Zimbabwe since Independence and continues to deteriorate to levels that are beyond remedy. Usually when disasters strike they leave devastating effects on the environment and to repair such will require a lot of financial resources and with corrupt governments that we have in Africa it will be very difficult to resuscitate the damaged infrastructure. It is evident that many of the works are still on at Ngangu and Copa one year after the disaster which means that Zimbabwe is not ready to deal with the devastating effects. (Goyet, C, Griekspoor, A. (2007). The poor are the mostly affected people and usually their livelihoods are lost due to the effects of the disaster. Coming back to cyclone Idai in Chipinge and Chimanimani some people still lives in the tents and many of them lost their land that they used to use for farming. The hyperinflationary environment in the country is has also a bearing on the effects felt by the residents and survivors of cyclone idai.

Priority Action 5: Strengthen disaster preparedness for effective response at all levels- At times of disaster, impacts and losses can be substantially reduced if authorities, individuals and communities in hazard-prone areas are well prepared and ready to act and are equipped with the knowledge and capacities for effective disaster management. Usually the people who resides in these disaster prone areas are not involved in key decision making processes but they are only informed by others who may not be in a position to articulate issues very well. Ministries involved in disaster mitigation in Zimbabwe have never visited Chimanimani Ngangu and Copa in anticipation of a disaster happening but only visited the area after the cyclone had affected the communities. The authorities are the same people who settle people in these disaster prone areas and they will never predict that something will happen in the near future mainly because people would have settled in these areas for so many years without any problems.

The use of the Hygo Framework for action as a tool of analysis is based on the fact that it is an internationally agreed system for implementing Disaster Risk Reduction with the aim of building resilience of nations and communities to disasters. UNISDR, (2009). The HFA is a relevant instrument to assess the level of preparedness because it is an internationally recognised. Jones et al (2014). The HFA, symbolises a strong commitment of international community to engage in a well -defined results oriented plan of action to reduce risks to hazards.

The expected outcome of the HFA is a substantial reduction in the disaster losses, in terms of human lives and in the social, economic and environmental assets of communities and countries. Jones (2010). If lives are lost in the case of Cyclone Idai it explains the state of preparedness of the government of Zimbabwe. More than 300 people died and hundreds went missing. If the systems were in place there was supposed to be a reduction in the harm on the people and the environment.

The Civil Protection Act of 1989 was created in Zimbabwe to provide for the operation of the Civil Protection services in the times of disasters. It provides for the establishment of a national fund to finance civil protection operations in the country. (Government of Zimbabwe 1989) The study by Mavura E 2015, suggested that, issues such as resilience, vulnerability, mitigation and contingency plans and DRR are not well captured in the civil protection act. These are some of the issues that make our systems not function well in times of disasters because people will be reluctant to practice something that is not captured since it is not legally binding by its absence in the act. These are the most essential elements or components of the Disaster Risk Reduction. If they are missing the focus will neither be reducing vulnerability nor building resilience to disaster. The disaster management cycle should involve the pre Disaster Risk Reduction phase which encompasses; prediction, warning, preparedness, mitigation and prevention. It should also have the post recovery activities that is; relief, rehabilitation, recovery, reconstruction, and development. Coetzee and Van Niekerk (2012). The approach to our Disaster Risk Reduction is expected to entail proactive engagement in all phases of the disaster management cycle with the aim of improving the safety, security and economic stability of a country that is vulnerable to disasters. In Zimbabwe the ministry of local government is responsible for the Civil Protection and controls all the functions essential for the effective disaster prevention, preparedness, response and recovery through a legislative and regulatory arrangements within which communities and various agencies operate. From the look of things and what is supposed to be done it shows that our Civil Protection Unit have some weaknesses that makes it difficult to effectively deal with disasters when they occur and also prepare and issue early warning signs to communities.

The National Framework for the Disaster Risk Reduction in Zimbabwe sets out the operationalisation of the Civil protection issues. It defines disaster as any natural hazard, major accident, destruction, pollution, scarcity of essential supplies, disruption of essential service, diseases epidemics which threatens the life and well-being of people. (Government of Zimbabwe, (1989). The definition shows how hazard paradigm is regarded in Zimbabwe. Despite many advances in preparedness, the Zimbabwe's legislative framework remains skewed towards the hazard paradigm. The country's attention has been on the socio economic collapse which characterised the period from 2000 to 2010. Mushongah and Scoones (2012). Consequently, due to non-prioritisation, the disaster legislative framework has not been revised to consider vulnerability reduction that is reducing the susceptibility of the community to disasters. Plummer et al (2013). Neither has the framework been revised to consider community resilience which is the ability of community to resist, absorb, accommodate and recover from the effects of a disaster. Skerrat (2013). In view of that, Zimbabwe lacks a strong institutional basis for the Disaster Risk Reduction particularly at provincial and District levels. Mamvura E (2016).

Recommendations

1. Community participation is key in the Emergency Preparedness and Response. If the plans are not involving communities, people will not be able to build resilience to disasters and if they are not educated or are not involved in policy formulation

they will always find it hard to cope. The involvement of the people will promote a buy in of the ideas from the government by the communities and it will enable the parties to reach an agreement that will leave everyone satisfied.

2. There is need for the devolution of power competences, responsibilities and resources from central government to local authorities. This is meant to enhance effectiveness and efficiency in dealing with disasters at local level. Cyclone Idai should have been dealt with in the province other than waiting for the national government to come. The constitution of Zimbabwe Amendment (No 20) of 2013 clearly specifies under section 264 that there should be a devolution of governmental powers and responsibilities from the central government to provincial and metropolitan councils and local authorities but since 2013 the implementation has been at a snail's pace. If devolution is implemented and provincial councils are given the mandate to manage their own affairs the disaster and preparedness will be done at local level and the delays in mitigation are minimised.

3. The Government should adequately fund the Disaster Preparedness and Response initiatives like the Civil Protection Units in the Districts and Provinces so that they do not only formulate strategies without funding. Many strategies have been put on paper by the Government but not implemented so it is encouraged that an implantation team be put in place are independent from the government in terms of powers.

4. People living in the floodplains, confluences and riverbanks should be relocated to safe places as a long term measure to avoid loss of life in case of flooding.

Areas for Further Research

1. Cultural beliefs and Natural Disasters. Cause and effect
2. Role of traditional leaders in the Emergency Preparedness and Response

Conclusion

The state of Disaster preparedness and response in Zimbabwe is questionable because they have always caught us by surprise. Informed by the Hygo Framework for Action priority number 1, it shows us that as a nation we still need to go a long way in building resilience among our people by supporting a legislative framework that is fully funded for if it is to be implemented. Many lives have been lost in the natural disasters partly because we are inadequately prepared. The Civil protection Unit needs to be empowered and resourced to deal with disasters and also if devolution of power is implemented it helps to foster a way of accountability by provincial councils.

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