

A Success story? Implementation of Drought Relief Programmes in Masvingo District Ward 13 from 2016-2017

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Abstract: *This research paper focused on the implementation of drought relief programmes in Masvingo District's Ward 13. Considering the poor 2016/2017 Agricultural season and the serious drought that ensued after, it is imperative to find out what has been done to address the people's plight and the effectiveness of that programs. The paper goes further by finding out what has been done by the traditional leadership of Ward 13 in mitigating and responding to these cumulative disasters as they are the custodians of development in their respective areas. Purposive sampling was used to select 30 household heads for interviews and 20 village heads for in-depth interviews. 30 people were selected for a focus group discussion. From the research it has been unraveled that important programmes had been implemented only to be shadowed by biased selection methods of beneficiaries where village heads had been allowed to select beneficiaries and used the platform to score victories against perceived rivalries. This had resulted in some vulnerable families being left out of the programmes. Few Non-Governmental Organizations are also present in Ward 13 with the only viable organization being Oxfam which had been involved in cash transfers and the overall implications is that few people will be carted for. Although the government through the Ministry of Public Works and Social Welfare chipped in with food for work program, it has been noticed that it targeted very few people per village which also left the majority not benefiting. The paper noted that traditional practices such as zunde raMambo is not benefiting vulnerable people as revealed by respondents but had been turned into a self-aggrandizement initiative. All these experiences present challenges to the people who in the presence of imminent droughts had some of their long time livelihood strategies thwarted by the local Chief.*

1. Introduction

International trend indicates that disasters are increasing in intensity, complexity and magnitude. By virtue of being in the Sub Saharan Africa,

Zimbabwe had been a victim of the vagaries of severe tremendous droughts that swept across the region a recent vivid example being the 2016/2017 drought which is attributed to the El Niño Southern Oscillation. In the face of these imminent challenges some of which are extricably linked to climate change, the country's coping capacity and response had been found wanting Madzvamuse [2010] correctly pinpoints that Africa is one of the most vulnerable regions in the world due to poverty, limited coping capacity and its highly variable climate. This in turn increased the level of vulnerability to the victims who in most cases fail to cope up with the disasters. Thus the 2016/2017 drought had necessitated aid relief from the Non-Governmental Organizations and the International Community after President Mugabe declared a national disaster with effect from 5 February 2016. Research and literature is very scant on the impacts of drought relief programs yet these programs have been done for a long time and are an integral part of the development of communities. It is therefore paradoxical that this paper seeks to find out some of the programs implemented in Masvingo District Ward 13, the impacts of these programs to the people of that locality and who are addressing the people's plight during droughts. This research paper goes further seeking to establish what is being done by the traditional leadership in Ward 13 so as to mitigate impacts of droughts. This paper has been stimulated by the very fact that a one size fits all approach has been widely used where NGOs have been labeled as commissars of opposition especially in the impoverished and marginalized rural areas, (Herald Zimbabwe [2015] while traditional leaders wholly conceptualized as agents of grass root rural development.

2. BACKGROUND INFORMATION AND LITERATURE REVIEW

Zimbabwe is particularly prone to a number of natural and man-made hazards such as droughts,

floods, veld fires and storms according to [Prevention Web 2012]. These hazards can either be natural or human induced ones and they include cyclones, landslides, road accidents, mine collapses and earth quakes. The impact of these hazards and disasters is seen through destruction of property, loss of life, loss of livestock and livelihood strategies of the majority of people, yet their impact can be reduced through putting in place resilience system and sound prevention efforts which will also allow concerned people to cope up and deal with disasters. [Feyissa 2007] notes that about 200 million people in Sub-Saharan Africa lack adequate food for a healthy and active life. This is worsened by frequent occurrence of droughts which poses a major threat to rain fed agriculture which is dominant in Zimbabwe.

In the words of [Manyeruke et al 2013] Zimbabwe had witnessed more people being pushed into poverty and hunger as a result of high food prices and droughts. Observation by [Gukurume 2014] notes that in Bikita District droughts tends to occur at a ten year interval with the notably serious droughts being experienced from 1982, 1992 and 2002. These droughts were not limited to Bikita District alone but were felt countrywide and in 2008 and 2016 serious drought has been witnessed in several parts of the country with greatest impact in Masvingo Province. These droughts had been more often than not linked to climate change which had resulted in extreme weather conditions which affected crop germination due to below minimum rainfall received in several areas and precipitation from moisture stressed crops ultimately leading to crop failure through wilting. This corresponds with Inter Governmental Panel on Climate Change [IPCC, 2001] which stresses that increasing evidence has been produced which shows that climate is changing towards high frequency of weather extremes. As noted by [Chigodora 1997] in [Chikoto] the drought occurrences of 1946-47, 1960, 1972-73, and the early 1980s led to unintended consequences such as the sale of cattle which consequently reduced production of maize which is a staple food in Zimbabwe.

Whilst droughts are not a new phenomenon in Zimbabwe as the literature seem to suggest, what remains important is what is done after droughts had been witnessed so as to assist affected communities and an evaluation of programs implemented there after so as to see how are they helping concerned people. Climate change is defined here as the significant variation of the mean state of climate relevant variables such as temperature, precipitation and wind in a certain period of time usually over 30 years [IPCC 2007:96]

According to [Neville 2006] extreme droughts can lead to famine that is if dwindling food supplies are

not replaced, and rising food prices follow taking for instance the 1877/88 drought in which 9.5 million people starved to death in China and 8 million starved in India. In support of this Mushore et al (2013) states that due to climate change, the impacts of droughts are expected to deepen where the capacity to adapt is low. However in Zimbabwe cases of famine had not yet been recorded. Projections even suggests that by the end of 21st century climate change will substantially impact on agricultural production and hence a scope of poverty [Brown, Slater, Peskett, Lundi 2007]. Droughts are usually associated with suffering of people, loss of crops, wildlife and livestock which forms the basis of livelihood strategies of most rural dwellers. In support of this, Civil Protection Organization Zimbabwe [2009] recognizes that the 1991/1992 drought that ravages most of Southern African countries killed more than 1 million cattle in Zimbabwe. It furthers that the national security was also threatened by the 1991/1992 drought which resulted in virtually no harvest in any part of the country and the Grain Marketing Board [GMB] domestic maize during the year was about 13000 tonnes which was enough for 2 day consumption, [CPO Zimbabwe [2009].

Literature has shown that the Southern part of Zimbabwe especially in Masvingo is one of the areas which had a risk of droughts, CPO Zimbabwe [2009]. According to the Chronicle Zimbabwe [2016] in Masvingo an estimated 5000 cattle have died due to droughts amid reports that Mwenezi, Chivi, Bikita, Somerton and Nyikavanhu areas have been losing five cattle each week since November 2016. It is important to stress that during drought, overgrazing often leads to degradation of pastures and arable areas and which is more low rainfall received and high extreme temperatures will eventually lead to drying of water sources such as wells and boreholes. This huge loss of cattle comes amid indications that Masvingo Province has an estimated herd of 1, 2 million cattle while the national herd stands at about 5 million cattle. It is the severity of the drought which resulted in drastic decline of cattle price from a whooping minimum price of \$USD 400.00 per heifer to a paltry \$USD 100.00 in areas such as Chivi in Masvingo province. Besides their valuable as a source of meat, cattle are a yardstick of wealth and a key source of income for rural dwellers through selling milk and meat. The above findings goes hand in glove with Zimbabwe Vulnerability Assessment Report [ZimVAC, 2016] which states that in Chivi and Mwenezi the average cattle price was \$USD80 while in some districts such as Midlands and Matebeleland cattle prices ranged between \$284 and \$361. To address food insecurity in Zimbabwe, [Chigodora 1997] recommends that

the Government of Zimbabwe [GoZ] put in place poverty alleviation and drought preparedness programs, while the GoZ has implemented programs such as food for work and Public Works, these should be expanded [IFPRI 2002].

Table 1. Shows droughts which occurred in Zimbabwe since 1980 and number of people affected.

| YEAR OF OCCURENCE | NUMBER OF PEOPLE AFFECTED |
|-------------------|---------------------------|
| 1980 | 700,000 |
| 1991/92 | 5,000,000 |
| 1998 | 55,000 |
| 2001 | 6,000,000 |
| 2007 | 2,100,000 |
| 2010 | 1,680,000 |

Table 1. Source: Chikoto G, Zimbabwe's Emergency Management System: A Promising Development

Little or below minimum rainfall was received during the 2016/2017 agricultural season and this compromised food security of most rural dwellers. [ZimVAC 2016] reports that areas such as Masvingo, Midlands and Matebeleland received less than 200mm of accumulated rainfall between October 2015 and January 2016 which resulted in permanent wilting of crops. [Mutekwa 2009] postulates that the unpredictability of precipitation presented more challenges to the farmers than any other climate change elements. It was as a result of this poor agricultural season that the Government of Zimbabwe introduced programs such as food for work through the Ministry of Public Works and Social Welfare so as to avert hunger especially in rural areas, but the extent to which these programs had benefited the rural majority is quite unknown and this justifies the present research.

3.0 METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research design

The research design for this study is a descriptive and interpretive case study that is analyzed through qualitative methods. In this essence a research is defined as a systematic process of collecting, analyzing and interpreting information [data] to increase our understanding of a phenomenon about which we are interested or concerned according to [Bouma and Ling 2004]. In the words of [Burne and Groove 2003] a qualitative approach is a systematic subjective approach which is used to describe life experiences and situations so as to give meaning.

[Gillham 2000] defines a case study as an investigation to answer specific research questions which seek a range of different evidences from the case settings and case studies does not claim to be representative [Polit and Hungler 1997] but the emphasis is on what can be learned from a single case.

3.2 Research Setting

This research was carried out in Masvingo District's Ward 13 from March 2016 to February 2017. The area is under the jurisdiction of Chief Mugabe. The area encompasses the famous Great Zimbabwe ruins and is found approximately 35 kilometers from the nearest town which is Masvingo. The ward had a total of 121 village heads according to Mugabe (2017). In 2016 one Non-Governmental Organization was operating in the Ward which is Oxfam.

3.3 Data collection

Purposive sampling was used to select key informants. 30 people were selected for 2 focus group discussions each discussion consisting of 15 people from household heads. 30 people (household heads) were interviewed on the beneficial and importance of the programs implemented in the area which includes food for work, cash transfers and school feeding program. In-depth interviews were also carried out with 20 village heads on the role being played by traditional leaders in mitigating the impact of drought related disasters in the area. The rationale for key informants is justified by the need to hear from the recipients of the programs so as to appreciate what is on the ground. The researcher also managed to observe the existence of drought through wilting of crops in fields. This research also benefited from the consultation of academic journals, newspapers and articles which reflect the topic under study.

3.4 Data Analysis

In-depth interviews and responses from focus group discussions were recorded, translated into English and typed in Microsoft word. Content analysis was used to analyze these interviews. Interviews audios were also played several times and recurrent themes were identified.

3.5 Conceptual Framework

A number of Conventions on climate change had been penned as the reality of climate change and occurrences of droughts become much more pronounced. The United Nations Framework on

Climate Change [UNFCCC] was presented for signature at the Earth Summit in 1992 and the main goal was to stabilize greenhouse gas concentrations in the atmosphere at a level that would prevent dangerous anthropogenic interferences with the climate system according to [UNFCCC 1992]. The Kyoto Protocol was also adopted in 1997 and added to the climate change Convention.

The Government of Zimbabwe after realizing the threat imposed by climate change had put in place structures and ratified several legislations meant to curtail the negatives of climate change. The Ministry of Mines, Environment and Tourism [2003] reports that there is weight of scientific evidence regarding climate change which indicates that the threat from global warming due to build up of greenhouse gases [GHGs] is real. To this end Zimbabwe then signed the [UNFCCC] in 1992 at the Earth Summit and ratified it in November 1992.

3.6 Zimbabwe's legislation

The Minister of Local Government, Urban and Rural Development [MLGURD] is charged with the coordinating role as empowered by the Civil Protection Act Number 5 of 1989 [CPO 2009]. The Act provides for establishment of the Civil Protection Directorate whose responsibilities amongst others are to consult the Minister who in turn shall also consult the President to declare and gazette a state of emergency. This is done in situations when the level of the disaster is beyond the national resources put together therefore necessitating external assistance.

3.7 National Civil Protection Plan

A National Civil Protection Coordination Committee [NCPCC] derives its mandate from Section [14] [2] of the Civil Protection Act Number 5 of 1989 and is responsible for the execution of Civil Protection functions and the permanent members are senior officers selected from government Ministries, department parastatals and NGOs.

4.0 Results and Analysis

4.1 Food for work program benefited few people

The government of Zimbabwe undertook several measures in ensuring that the victims of the 2016/2017 agricultural season drought are responded to. As a result the Government through the Ministry of Public Service sourced maize which was distributed to districts through the District

Administrator's office for food for work programs. This came in as observations in Ward 13 of Masvingo District showed that crops in most fields wilted at maturity stage due to below minimum rainfall received coupled with excessive heat. The situation had been worsened because agriculture in Ward 13, just like in many parts of Masvingo District is rain fed agriculture. Through food for work as the name implies individuals from selected households work as a village group and are paid a 50kg of maize per month. The beneficiaries are selected by the village head who will then submit the list to the chief. Some respondents had this to say:

"In our village we are 30 families but only 5 families are benefiting from food for work. The program should have benefited more people since almost everyone had been affected by erratic low rainfall"

Other people criticized the method of selecting beneficiaries as more people were being left out depending on their relationship with the village head. This means that some vulnerable families had been left to wallow in abject poverty unless they dance according to the tune dictated by the village head. This is supported by other participants who echoed that;

I am a widow and unemployed but was left out of the food for work program just because we had unresolved issues with our (sabhuku). The system of allowing village heads to nominate beneficiaries is a very flawed one (vanhu vazhinji vanotya kuroiwa so vanonyarara) most people fear to be bewitched so they remain silent.

From these views aired by the residents it means that people prefer a situation whereby officials from the Ministry of Public Service and Social Welfare come and conduct interviews to determine the suitable beneficiaries to a situation where village heads nominate the beneficiaries.

The above views tallies with sentiments by another respondent who revealed that CARE International during the drought of 2008 resorted to interview people after noticing the anomalies associated with village heads selecting people. Although it is village heads who knows their subordinates as well as those in needs, this researcher asserts that some had used the platform to fix those who are not in good books with them therefore programs like food for work becomes a platform to score their victory.

4.2 School feeding program should be inclusive

ACAP's briefing note of [2006] recognizes that food shortages affect children's school activities because when they are hungry they cannot go to school or if

they go they lack concentration. A school feeding program has been initiated by the government of Zimbabwe since January 2017 so as to avert hunger and malnutrition associated with it. The program allows learners from ECD A up to grade 3 to eat sadza or rice cooked at the school during school days using maize from the Ministry of Public Service and Social Welfare. Schools Heads had made an arrangement and engaged responsible parents to step in through buying vegetables and meat for the meals. Considering the implications of hunger the whole program is a noble idea but it had discriminated other learners especially from grade 3 to grade 7. One participant stressed the following;

'We really appreciate the government for this timeous program because hunger seriously affects children most. However the program should have carted for all primary school learners because some just come to school with empty stomachs'.

The above argument has been premised on the fact that at the altar of hunger children will less likely perform during lessons that is if they manage to come to school in the first instance. The end result is that learners' performance will be greatly affected.

4.3 Limited space for NGO operations

Few Non-Governmental Organizations are operating in Masvingo District especially in Ward 13 as compared to previous years which saw CARE International also bringing its services in the area. Currently OXFAM is the only NGO in the area which had been receptive to the needs of the people through cash transfers. It should be noted that the traditional leadership of Ward 13 is responsible for few development partners as it tend to politicize everything associated with NGOs. This is in spite of the fact that NGOs both local and International are widely regarded as veritable vehicles of rural development through grassroots approach. Oxfam is involved in giving vulnerable people including orphans and widows money through Ecocash. [Marongwe 2014] as cited in Chikumbu [2017] defines Ecocash as Econet Wireless Zimbabwe short message service [SMS] - based financial transaction utility that allowed mobile banking and the transfer of cash between parties who possessed Econet sim packs. Provisions were made where sim packs were brought to the convenience of people to those who were selected but without sim packs. Each person in a family was given \$USD7 which means that a family of five people would get \$USD35. Some of the recipients of OXFAM's cash transfers had this to say;

'Being given money for free is like mana from heaven, especially at the moment where our country is facing deep financial challenges. At least we can now buy food to eat whilst looking for piece jobs'

Although giving people money for free creates dependency syndrome and people should be taught how to fish rather than giving them fish, it is important to note that during a period of crisis, these assistance acts as short term measures temporarily meant to assist disadvantaged people from biting hunger and absolute poverty. However due to shortage of hard cash in Zimbabwe the consumer's choice became limited because instead of cashing out their money from mobile phones people had been forced to transfer cash the cash to shop owners registered for Ecocash in order to be given goods. Taking for instance if one had \$USD10 in his or her phone and want to make cash-out and be given cash, because of shortage of hard cash one had to transfer that money to a shop owner and be given goods equivalent to \$USD10. This reinforces the argument by [Chikumbu 2017] who notes that mobile banking services through banking platforms such as Ecocash which had served the populace was also not spared by shortages of hard cash as people failed to get cash from Ecocash agents dotted around the whole town of Masvingo.

Other people heaped praises on the roles which NGOs play in improving their lives citing for instance a program which was launched by CARE International in which people have been taught on new farming methods such as zero-tillage or [dhiga udy] but be- moaned Chiefs who put barricades to interested NGOs who might be willing to work in the area.

4.4 Traditional leadership and rural development

As community leaders who live with people and oversee the development of areas under their jurisdiction, traditional leaders had an important role to play. This paper defines traditional leaders as chiefs, head men and village heads who are the custodians of communities and derive their power from local government through the constitution of Zimbabwe amendment Act number 20 of 2013. This section tries to explore the role which is being played by the traditional leadership of Masvingo District's Wad 13 in mitigating or responding to droughts which had become recurring not only in this area but in most parts of the country at large.

4.5 Zunde raMambo (chief's granary)

Traditionally chiefs and village heads used to have granaries for the storage of food which will be used to victims of poor harvests during times of drought as well as vulnerable families, however the viability of this practice in this ever changing and never static world is less known. In support of the above [Mararike 2000] states that the primary aim of the

zunde was to ensure that a community had reserves which could be used in times of food shortage. The zunde ramambo played an important role as it is a traditionally built-in mechanism of adapting to livelihood shocks. [Shoko 2014] reinforces the above echoing that traditional leaders provided for orphans within their communities through such initiatives like Zunde raMambo or Isiphala seNkosi in Zimbabwe. Interestingly it seems to be a different story as to what is happening in Ward 13 of Masvingo District. There has been a consensus among respondents that although they are called to plant, cultivate, weed and harvest crops under the chief's granary programme it is not clear who really benefit from the proceeds. Some of the respondents echoed that they feel being used by the chief to labour in his field in the name of Zunde raMambo with the proceeds feeding his family and relatives.

As a village head I just refer vulnerable widows and orphans to the Chief for assistance during poor harvests because as village heads we are no longer having munda we zunde (granary field). Our role is to mobilize people to work in the chief's granary but we cannot question how the outputs are or should be allocated to potential people.

The above are sentiments by one village head and are like a tip of the ice-berg which helps to expose the very fact that in the absence of transparency in the chief's granary programme communities will suffer most during seasons of poor rains. However it is worthwhile to note that even in pre-colonial times not all traditional leaders were benevolent, generous or even caring towards their people because some were more autocratic and very oppressive.

4.6 Livelihood strategies under threat

Ward 13 is blessed with forests of wild fruits such as loquat fruits which have been observed by this researcher and according to experts these fruits used to allow people to earn a living after selling (mazhanje) loquat fruits. The fruits normally will be ripe from early September to December. It is said that people from as far as other wards and districts used to travel and engage in a brisk business where by buyers used to bring clothes, soaps and sugar in exchange for the loquat fruits, apart from the majority who brought cash. This had placed people in a diplomatic quandary as they safety nets have been blocked. It is said that if one is now caught selling the mazhanje fruits he or she will be fined with a goat or an amount of money equivalent to a price of a goat. This had presented more challenge to the people as they struggle to put food on the table and fend for their families.

Conclusion

This paper has shown that droughts and climate change had now become a fabric of our lives whose results threatens rain fed agriculture and food security in most rural areas of Masvingo District. Livelihood strategies of the majority of rural folks had also not been spared as evidenced by the death of cattle which forms the basis of income generation especially in rural areas. This has been caused by drying of reliable water sources as a result of excessive heat and drying of pastures due to below minimum rainfall received, a scenario which triggered wilting of moisture stressed crops in most fields. The seriousness of the drought had necessitated implementation of drought relief programs as a way of reducing hunger and malnutrition. However this paper had noted that few Non-Governmental Organizations are at play in Masvingo District Ward 13 and as a result few people had benefited. Apart from this government initiated food for work program targeted very few people per village living behind the majority to swallow in hunger and face the full wrath of food shortages. The selection method for beneficiaries of OXFAM's cash transfers and food for work program are marred with irregularities. This is because selective methods have been sorely place on village heads who in turn manipulated the platform to include their darlings while scratching their perceived enemies. This is despite the fact that these programmes are supposed to be inclusive and knows no enemies or friends.

Recommendations

- Based on the research findings, this paper calls for the Ministry of Public Service and Social Welfare to monitor selection of people to benefit from its programs such as food for work such that intended beneficiaries will benefit.
- The paper further recommends that traditional leaders mainly (Chiefs) should ensure that vulnerable families and orphans benefit from the Zunde raMambo initiative.
- Furthermore Chiefs as custodians of communities should lure Non Governmental Organizations to chip in and assist their subordinates during droughts such that cases of casualties and hunger can be minimized.

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