

THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC IMPACTS OF CYCLONE IDAI ON THE LIVELIHOODS OF WOMEN: A CASE OF CHIMANIMANI, MANICALAND PROVINCE, ZIMBABWE

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ABSTRACT

This study sought to assess the socio-economic impacts of cyclone Idai on the livelihoods of women in Chimanimani. The overall study aim was to examine effects of climate change induced disasters on women's lives, exploring their experiences and coping strategies that they have employed in dealing with the aftermath of disasters. There was also examination on how governmental and non-governmental organizations help people in the aftermath of disasters. The research was qualitative in nature and in-depth interviews were carried out to elicit information from the participants and also made use of key informant interviews. The study employed the Sustainable Livelihoods Framework to help explore the adaptation strategies employed by women in the event of cyclones. The study established that cyclone Idai led to the problem of increasing vulnerability for women. Women are subject to gender-based violence, dependency and hunger. Findings show how women became homeless, jobless while food insecurity and health security, even individual safety loomed in their midst. Strategies employed included gardening, sewing, piece jobs while some sell and consume alcohol and others have resorted to former businesses. They have been receiving food aid and housing assistance from governmental and non-governmental organizations. The recommendations of the study are that the government and other responsible stakeholders should seriously consider devolution and proper planning before the advent of disasters. Moreover, they should consider the weather forecasts seriously to avert causalities

Keywords: socio-economic, cyclone, livelihoods

Introduction

Cyclone Idai which hit Chimanimani the hardest in the province of Manicaland, Zimbabwe in March 2019 had devastating impacts on vulnerable peoples such as females compared to their male counterparts, as women constitute most of the people living in rural areas. Cyclone Idai has been an economic, social, and political blow to women. A UNFPA report (2019) noted that there was an estimated number of over 75,000 pregnant women were affected by the cyclone; also, over 45,000 live births were expected six months after the cyclone while 7,000 were expected to experience life-threatening conditions. Relief Web reported that many of the young women who lived through the cyclone faced danger of involuntarily getting into early marriage by families fighting to conquer poverty (Boden et al., 2017; Halton, 2018; Madanhire, 2019). The study sought to dig deep into how the livelihoods of women were significantly affected by the peril. To get to the core of the matter, there was an in-depth research on the livelihoods of women prior to the cyclone. The study also explored how they have reorganized their livelihoods in coping with disaster. This study qualitatively explored the effects of cyclone Idai in women's lives in the Chimanimani region.

OBJECTIVES

- (1) To explore socio-economic effects experienced due to cyclone Idai on the livelihoods of women.
- (2) To examine the strategies adopted to deal with the effects of cyclone Idai.
- (3) To highlight the response measures proffered by governmental and non-governmental organizations' in addressing cyclone Idai.

METHODOLOGY

A qualitative research approach was employed for this study. Under the qualitative paradigm, the researcher was focusing on constructivism, as there was more concern with social aspects to do with experiences. The research made use of a case study design, which is defined by Miles and Huberman (1994) as the investigation of a phenomenon occurring within a specific context and it is convenient when a researcher wants to describe and explain. The researcher undertook the study in the rural area of Chimanimani in Biriiri village amongst the most severely affected communities by cyclone Idai. The location was the place where the victims had been relocated overlooking the veldt of landslides. Majority

of the people under study had been placed in tents closer to road networks for easy distribution of services. There was a particular focus on women who had been victims of cyclone Idai and were still feeling the harsh brunt of the disaster. The study targeted key informants who were knowledgeable people in the area under study such as nurses. The women under study were family heads and survivor. Purposive sampling technique was used also to identify the key informants from the target population. A total of 15 women were interviewed and the researcher made sure that they were from different social classes that were determined by income levels formerly before the Cyclone Idai and are currently still living in tents. The target population among the victims were women between the ages of 16 and 70 consisting of three were left widowed, four single mothers, two were married, two unmarried women and four young women ranging from 16 years. The research was carried through with primary sources of data. In-depth interviews and key informant interviews were used and qualitative analysis was used to analyse the data.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter focused on how data was presented and analyzed. The research findings were obtained with the methodology aforementioned in the chapter above. The presentation of data was done in line with themes that were derived from the research objectives. The data presented was shaped from the relevant literature and theoretical framework.

Demographic data

The researcher managed to engage fifteen participants during the data collection process. The women ranged from ages 16-70. A nurse from Biriiri hospital was the key informant. Researcher selected women living in the camp shelters. The group had more middle-aged women as they were more family heads. The women between the ages of 16 and 70 consisting of three were left widowed, four single mothers, two were married, two unmarried women and four young women ranging from 16 years of age. The results are in line with the findings of Thakor and Joshi (2024), Rajput et al. (2023) and Jegoda et al. (2022).

Loss of shelter

Most of the survivors of the cyclone Idai faced a torrid time due to the loss of shelter. The mother's shelter at Biriiri was too small to accommodate all the expectant mothers as other shelters were destroyed in the storm and some are being accommodated in sheds and tents. Regrettably, two years down the line survivors are still living in dilapidated tents, which were initially meant to be temporary shelters. A middle-aged mother revealed how the life in the tents has been like.

She stated that;

"Not talking about hunger, just sitting is not even productive. We are just stationary because we do not have anywhere to go. What is the government thinking about us?"

The temporary shelters have rotten and one woman complained that they are now living like crazy people. Their sanity is threatened because of the way they are living. The shelters remind them of the ordeal they went through two years ago. They are still traumatized from losing loved ones and living in the shelters is a constant reminder of the past. They now want to be moved and relocated to a better and permanent place. Two women narrate their ordeals respectively:

'There is nothing to fix. It has been long. We want to move and be able to restart our lives'

'We thought that we were going to be in the camps for only three months but now it has almost been three years. We were given stands on paper but not on the grounds.'



These sentiments reveal how unhappy the women are about their lives. They also illustrate how unpleasant it is to live for a long period in shelters that were initially meant to be temporary. Loss of shelter has been a destabilizing phenomenon for the women.

Insufficient aid

The researcher noted from the media and participants that food worth thousands that was donated but rot due to poor distribution methods. Items including flour, sugar beans and corn were donated. However, most of the donated food was never given to the victims of the disaster and has since expired in storage. The ones in charge of food distribution to disaster stricken families have shown to be very inefficient. Middle-aged Sekai narrated that;

"Aid came in blows and was short-lived. The only place where aid was talked about is the radio but majority of the

stuffs mentioned never got to us. We are still in need of basic amenities.”

Although different stakeholders pledged many help in the immediate aftermath of the disaster, the survivors of the Cyclone have now been largely ignored. The mothers narrate how help came in blows. It was pledged just after the Cyclone Idai Disaster but to date nothing has ever been that fruitful.

Health and sanitation problems

The researcher also observed that woman in the temporary shelters have been facing health and sanitation problems. Water problems have been one of the most pressing problems in the area.

Their health is compromised as the fencing used to demarcate the camp from the residents of the surrounding areas has been destroyed due to weather and other factors. The security of the toilets is compromised as anyone can enter the toilets and yet the residents of the camp clean them. Since the camp is now open to everyone, anyone can touch anything and then this increases the chances of contracting the covid-19 virus. Health is now greatly compromised.

There is fear of covid-19 because of using the same water points and bathrooms whilst there are hordes of people in one place. They also complained that they were not given enough information (ruzivo/chenjedzo) about Covid-19. They base on rumors and gossip about the virus. The government seems like it is not making an effort to make true information spread. They first came but now as the world plunges deep into the pandemic they have not been information about the virus relayed. One woman said that, *“We are just wearing masks and have not really seen anyone in the camp die from the virus but the fear relayed on the radio is just enough to make everyone take caution.”*

“The older ones are hard to convince to put a mask but the health centers in the district have tried to put out information but there is need for more to be done lest we perish again”

This illustrates the need to for more information to be shared with those in remote areas so that they do not fall victim. The women in Chimanimani are still trying to recover from cyclone Idai.

Nurse at Biriiri hospital in Ngangu village explains that there is need for an emergency center to avoid to wait for help from faraway places. Scores of trees, mud, have cut off communication and this has hindered access to get supplies. Boreholes, which had been recently installed, were destroyed in the storm and thus there is no water at the hospital. Water also remains a problem. The nurse aids on site were subject

to walking about 1.8km whilst carrying a 20litre bucket on the head. *‘Water is of paramount importance’ the nurse elaborated.* As an essential resource, its scarcity may cause the outbreaks of diseases such cholera and typhoid.

Compromised safety

There are also safety risks as thieves and robbers are rampant in the camp as there is no security. Food security is at risk and housing. Most single mothers cannot look for work as their children are still very young and they cannot afford child minders. Safety of the few belongings they have is also at risk.

Mothers are now stranded, fending for themselves as their husbands died in the storm. The children complain of hunger when the mothers have absolutely nothing to do.

“There is nothing left. The family will just be looking up to you yet there is nothing to give them.”

Married women must ensure that their conjugal rights are fulfilled even in cramped camp conditions with no privacy, holding back their grief for the sake of their children. All the participants refused to talk about it as they deemed it to be embarrassing. They are also subject to violence by their husbands emanating from the stress caused by the destruction of livelihoods by the cyclone.

Young girls have since been reported to be under abuse in bids to receive food aid. They do sexual favors for those responsible for the distribution of the food. Most atrocities are swept under the rug because it is usually uniformed forces or other important people. Most women have reported to be sexually assaulted in the camp.

Education and early marriages

Mothers are in jeopardy as their children who are now young and have not been at school in two years.

“I have no hope that they will actually go back to school as I have no money or any source to get it, especially the older one who is over 18, they now just to look for work,” A mother said with tears in her eyes.

Young women ages 16-22 are being married off for food security. Some are eloping on their own when they think they have a better chance of a good livelihood with older men. 18 year-old Joanna stated and the researcher could well see the pregnant belly bulging under her t-shirt.

“I do not think I will ever go back to school. Now I am just going to focus on being a good wife to my husband. He

feeds me and aids my family back at the camp here and there so I have nothing to worry about."

Uncertainty of hope

Sometimes food security is compromised in the camp as there are a lot of people (Vinaya et al., 2019). Many women are now depending on working for other people deemed to be well off in exchange for food stuffs such as maize meal and cooking oil. One elderly woman who was a household head narrated events of the cyclone and how she could not save her family in the dead of the night as the storm was ravaging through. She is now unsure of living in a closed shelter because of the events of the pandemic. Notably women survivors have also been left vulnerable to abuse as they seek for ways to get something on the table. With the advent of COVID-19, the situation has worsened, as there are movement restrictions in a bid to contain the virus.

Piece work

The study highlighted that some women who were affected by Cyclone Idai survive on piece jobs. The researcher observed that women do provide labour to wealthier members of society for a fee. The researcher particularly discovered that, women mostly do housework such as washing clothes for a fee or in return for food and clothing. One woman mentioned that, *"I usually provide laundry services for my neighbor during the weekend in exchange for food and other basics such as soap"* Another revealed that, *"I survive on providing labour for the watering of vegetables at a garden owned by one of the people in our area, in return I am paid on a weekly basis."* One also remarked, *"I work in one field owned by a shop owner and I get maize meal in return, this is also known as marichiko,"* These findings show that women survive on doing piece jobs in return for a fee or other items that they are in need of. While what they get is not enough to improve the conditions for some, for most, it enables them to earn a basic living.

Sewing

Women who were independent prior to the cyclone have been trying to get back on their feet. School uniform tailors have been experiencing a loss due the closure of schools because of the cyclone and the pandemic. Some were also sewing bed covers as well as chair covers but now the people are not buying anything and business is very low. Priscilla commented

"I got money from a money launderer to get back into business but I have not been able to pay her due to the pandemic which has led to the closure of schools. Also most people lost property which we used to sew covers for and

hence the other reason is because of low customer turn up."

This finding illustrates the challenges that are faced by women in Chimanimani as they attempt to get back into business after the Cyclone Idai disaster.

Gardening

The situation at hand has prompted the women who are still living in tents almost three years after the disaster to make it their permanent residential place. The researcher noted from observations that there were gardens beside some of the tents belonging to female heads. Women have devised plans to have something else to put on their tables in the event of food shortages as they are quite experienced. They already were involved in horticulture as a livelihood strategy prior to the cyclone. They are also making a living from it by selling the vegetables to nearby villages and others in the camp. One woman said that, *"I survive on market gardening. As you can see, I have four vegetable beds on the small piece of land near my tent."* These provide for my basic needs but I feel I should plant more in order to get enough money for my family's upkeep.



This is evidence of women being resourceful even in their demise to be able to make a living.

Vending and consumption of alcohol

Due to the need to find a means of earning a living in the aftermath of cyclone Idai, some women have resorted to the vending of illicit beer. The researcher observed that scarce economic opportunities push women into illegal activities in order to survive. Significantly, the researcher observed that women do not just sell the illicit alcohol but also consume it. One middle-aged woman narrated how she now buys 'kwachas' a home-made beer to get drunk and drown the stress as well as the stagnancy of her life and sleep as they can no longer sleep peacefully during a storm or raining night. Alcohol is said to help them cope with situation. They will not be involved directly and presently in the issues at hand.

Most of the women taking alcohol have lost families and children and feel like they have nothing to live for.

Construction of housing units

There has been the construction of houses to provide accommodation for families displaced by cyclone Idai. Nokuthula Matsikenyere, Minister of State of Manicaland in an interview said that 105 houses have been built and are awaiting the victims to move in. Notably although these houses can go a long way in addressing the plight of the women, they are not enough to suffice to the demands of the displaced populations.

Rehabilitation of infrastructure

Cyclone Idai led to major damage of road networks in Chimanimani. Almost all bridges in Chimanimani district were swept away rendering access to the area but efforts are being made to restore things to normalcy. The government is making concerted efforts to rehabilitate the road infrastructure that was destroyed by the cyclone.

CONCLUSION

This chapter has presented the findings of the study gathered with key informant interviews, in- depth interviews and observations. The study findings show that women experienced many challenges after the Cyclone Idai disaster. These challenges included a lack of appropriate shelter, health and sanitation challenges, loss of incomes and many other things. The noted coping strategies include piecemeal, sewing, gardening and selling as well as consuming illicit alcohol. The chapter also revealed the various mechanisms used by stakeholders such as the government to address the plight of the women. The next chapter presents a discussion of the findings as well as conclusions and recommendations.

RECOMMENDATION

The researcher managed to identify a number of areas that may need some improvement in a bid to reduce women's suffering in light of disasters. The recommendations are aimed at advising authorities when there are disasters.

Devolution and Sustainable Solutions

There is need for decentralization of aid centers to all the cities. In the case of Idai, aid had to come from Harare yet Mutate is the closest city and there were no helicopters. There is need for comprehensive studies by researchers to understand what people in disaster risk areas face and work on the implementation of policies that make other places not suitable for human settlement and other empowerment programs for women. There is need for better management of

aid in terms of warehousing, storage and procurement.

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