

THE INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF HUMANITIES & SOCIAL STUDIES

Ramifications of Flooding on Livelihoods: A Case of Two Communal Areas in Chivi District in Zimbabwe

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Abstract:

The study interrogated the effects of heavy rains and subsequent flooding on rural livelihoods of people in two communal areas of Nemauzhe and Neruvanga in Chivi district, Zimbabwe. There is an apparent dearth of literature on the livelihood impact of flooding in Zimbabwe as the area is not usually prone to floods. The study avails an initial assessment of the impact of the disaster on livelihoods at a local level. Ramifications of the floods are brought to the fore utilizing empirical evidence as well as documentary analysis from government department and contribution by various scholars from other parts of the worlds. Six villages were purposively selected from the two communal areas affected by flooding in January/February 2014.

Key words: floods, livelihoods, livelihood asset, agriculture, Tokwe-Mukosi dam, Nemauzhe, Neruvanga and Zimbabwe

1. Introduction

This study analysed the effects of flooding on rural livelihood systems in the two communal areas of Nemauzhe and Neruvanga in Chivi district, Zimbabwe. It examined the damage caused and their effects on livelihoods and food security of the villagers on their livelihoods. In addition, this paper avails an initial assessment of the impact of the disaster on livelihoods at a local level. Ramifications of the floods will be brought to the fore utilizing empirical evidence as well as documentary analysis from government departments and contribution by various scholars from other parts of the worlds.

2. The Communal Areas

The focus of the research was on villages along the Tokwe-Mukosi basin in the Chivi district, Masvingo province. The area under study received excessive rainfall, which was coupled by a spillage of water from the partial collapse of the dam wall of Tokwe-Mukosi.

The area is semi-arid and falls in Zimbabwe's agricultural regions 4 and 5. Owing to this semi-aridness the district is prone to drought. The two communal areas of Neruvanga and Nemauzhe are located within this semi-arid district of Chivi. These communal areas are located within the dam basin of the Tokwe-Mukosi dam, which is under construction in Masvingo province. Tokwe-Mukosi dam is being constructed to boost the drought-resistance in the region, which normal receives insufficient rainfall (www.newzimbabwe.com). The dam will be the biggest in Zimbabwe with a dam-wall of 90 meters and a back throw of over 35 km on inhabited land (The Tokwe-Mukosi Dam Construction Trust, 2013).

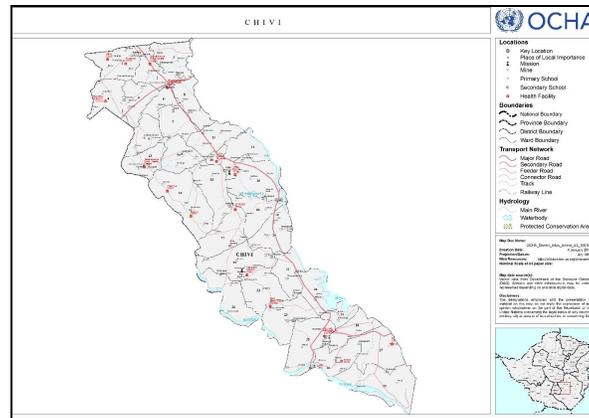


Figure 1
Source: OCHA

Chivi district usual receives poor rains but in early 2014 the area received torrential rains. According to the Chairperson of the Chivi Civil Protection Department, “The rains were just too much and for the past three years this area received less than 400 mm of rain per season, but this season things changed” (The Herald, 15 February 2014). The heavy rains and subsequent floods adversely affected twelve villages, explicitly Chekai, Jahwa, Zifunzi, Mharadzano, Chkandigwa and Vhomo in Nemauzhe communal lands; and Tagwirei, Ndove, Matandizvo, Chikosi, Mashenjere and Nongera in Neruvanga communal lands (The Herald, 15 February 2014). Agriculture is the main occupation of the villagers in the two communal areas of Nemauzhe and Neruvanga. Hence, it can also be argued that its their major source of livelihood.

3. Livelihoods

It is necessary to begin with an attempt to debunk the meaning and application of the concept livelihood. The usage of the concept has gained pre-dominance in recent years in the Social Sciences as well as among development practitioners. The veiled convolution behind the concept livelihood becomes apparent when governments, civil society, and external organizations endeavour to assist people whose means of making a living is threatened, damaged, or destroyed. A popular and comprehensive definition of livelihood is that provided by Chambers and Conway (1991:7) wherein

A livelihood comprises the capabilities, assets (including both material and social resources) and activities required for a means of living. A livelihood is sustainable when it can cope with and recover from stress and shocks and maintain or enhance its capabilities and assets both now and in the future, while not undermining the natural resource base.

Thus, “Livelihoods” means activities, entitlements and assets by which people make a living. In other words a “livelihood” is a source of revenue or income or a source of living. A “livelihood” constitutes assets, activities and capabilities (Krantz, 2001). The “livelihoods pentagon” (Scoones, 1998, Hall, 2007) depicts the dimensions of livelihoods and the interdependent relationship between five dimensions of livelihood assets, or capitals: human capital (education and skills), social capital (relations and networks), natural capital (land and water), financial capital (money and loans), physical capital (infrastructure and assets).

In the Social Sciences, the concept livelihood extends to include social and cultural means, that is, “the command, an individual, family, or other social group has over an income and or bundles of resources that can be used or exchanged to satisfy its needs”

(Blaikie et al, 2004). This may entail information, indigenous knowledge systems, social connections and legal rights as well as tools, land and other physical resources. Thus, the meaning of the concept livelihood is widen in its spectrum in its application and usage in recent years.

4. Research Methodology

The study covered six villages, three from each communal area which were purposively selected and descriptive statistics were used in the analysis using SPSS version 19. In order to obtain accurate data on the effects of flooding on the two communal areas the researcher used face to face interviews with key informants such as kraal heads and members of the Chivi Civil Protection department. The researcher also conducted face to face interviews with the affected residents who were at Kushinga Transit Camp. The research was carried within the timeframe of the Initial Livelihood Impact Appraisal as advocated by FOA and ILO (2009) as it sought to provide immediate first hand information on the impact of the disaster on the communal areas of Neruvanga and Nemauzhe.

5. Effects of the Floods on Livelihoods

The ramifications of floods on the livelihoods of the affected villages in the two communal areas were colossal. In January/February 2014 alone, 400 families were affected in the two communal areas under study according to the chairperson of the Chivi Civil Protection department. According to responses from the key informants and residents damage and destruction of crops, livestock, household assets and houses was widespread. The floods had adverse impact on the crops, livestock, houses and social networks.

6. Crops

There was consensus among the respondents on the issue of the destruction of crops across all villages under study. The six villages all lost their crops as they were completely submerged by the floods. This was aptly captured by one key informant, a Kraal Head who said, “*Mwanangu, takamuka minda yedu yose yave dziva.*” (My son, we woke up to find our fields under water). The affected villages were completely submerged and hence, all their crops were destroyed by the floods. This was echoed by a resident who said, “We were anticipating a bumper harvest from our almost ripe sorghum crop, but as you can see, it is under water”. It can be argued that the people in the area under study lost all their crops due to flooding, hence their main source of livelihood.

7. Livestock

The villagers revealed that they also lost most of their livestock ranging from goats, sheep and cattle due to the floods. 52 % of the respondents stated that they were separated from their livestock by the flooded river, while 20 % in the subsequent rescue and relocation to the transit camp. They stated that after a week they have lost any hope of recovering their livestock. The villages revealed that they had invested all their life earnings in the livestock and everything had been lost in the floods. The study also revealed that 60 % of the households owned livestock prior to the floods.

8. Social Networks

The floods have forced the entire villages to be relocated from their ancestral homeland to neighbouring district of Mwenzi as the floods have rendered their homes uninhabitable. Reports from the Ministry of Local Government estimate that 400 families were evacuated due to the floods in the area under study. Thus, these evacuations adversely impacted on the social capital of the people of Nemaushu and Neruvanga communal areas. Social capital entailed the for the respondents the connections that came with being Kraal Heads, renowned farmers among other positions in the communal areas. Hence, it can be argued that all was lost during the floods and this adversely impacts on the livelihoods.

9. Other Non-agriculture livelihoods

Traders within the area under study were also affected by the floods. From the respondents it was revealed that each village had at least two traders and all their stock was lost in floods. At the transit camp the villagers revealed that the traders sourced their supplies from neighbouring South Africa as the communal areas are located along the Beitbridge road to South Africa. The traders dealt in goods ranging from foodstuffs, farm supplies, clothing and electronics such as small radios, batteries among others.

10. Conclusion

From the analysis of the results it can be concluded that the floods that resulted from the excessive rains in the communal areas of Neruvanga and Nemaushu adversely affected the rural livelihoods of the people. The floods affected their livelihood assets, such as crops and livestock, social networks and other non-agricultural livelihoods. Thus, also curtailing their food reserves. These findings concur with findings from other parts of the world, in Ghana (Fredrick et al, 2010) and in India (Afro, 2009).

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