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ABSTRACT:

The paper explores the impact of floods on women with disabilities in the Tokwe-Mukosi basin, Zimbabwe. It discusses the impact of flooding on the livelihoods of women with disabilities as well as the challenges they are facing in the course of their relocation. The research employed purposive sampling. Data was gathered through key informant interviews and observation in the Tokwe-Mukosi basin, transit camps and the Nuanetsi relocation site. Research revealed that women with disabilities were adversely impacted by the floods. Their livelihood assets were destroyed and environmental and access barriers became more pronounced. The research also revealed that the relocation exercise was not all-encompassing thus, further compounded the situation for women with disabilities. The paper concludes that there is a need for the government of Zimbabwe to improve disaster management by taking on board representatives of people with disabilities.

Keywords: women with disabilities, floods, livelihoods, Tokwe-Mukosi basin, Zimbabwe

1.0 INTRODUCTION

This study analysed the impact of flooding on women with disabilities in the Tokwe-Mukosi basin. Tarisayi (2014:02) states, “The heavy rains and subsequent floods adversely affected twelve villages, explicitly Chekai, Jahwa, Zifunzi, Mharadzano, Chikandigwa and Vhomo in Nemauzhe communal lands; and Tagwirei, Ndove, Matandizvo, Chikosi, Mashenjere and Nongera in Neruvanga communal lands”[1]. Various studies have been carried out on the impacts of floods on livelihoods around the world, in Ghana (Fredrick et al, 2010) [2], in India (Afro, 2009) [3] and in Zimbabwe (Tarisayi, 2014) [1], however there is an apparent paucity of research on the impact of flooding on women with disabilities. Grech (2009) argues, “Disability still remains overwhelming marginalised at mainstream developmental research, institutional, policy and programme levels” [4]. Ramifications of flooding on women with disabilities remains a terra incognita for researchers especially in developing countries. Hence, this study interrogated the impact of floods on women with disabilities referred to as the “forgotten tribe” by Choruma (2007) [5]. There is an apparent dearth of literature on issues pertaining to women with disabilities. Charowa (2005) [6] states that the disabled people are so excluded as not to be considered even worthy of research as they are among the most severely marginalised people in the world.
1.1 The Tokwe-Mukosi Basin

Tokwe-Mukosi dam is located in the semi-arid district of Chivi, Masvingo province in Zimbabwe. The area in January/February 2014 received 850 mm of rainfall which is double its usual rainfall. Thus, these heavy rains and the subsequent partial collapse of the Tokwe-Mukosi wall resulted in flooding. The floods affected twelve villages within the Tokwe-Mukosi basin and the President of Zimbabwe declared a state of disaster in the Tokwe-Mukosi area.

2.0 Review of related literature

2.1 Defining disability

Disability has been variously defined by scholars, development agencies, governments and activists around the world. The World Health Organisation utilizes the definition that, “any restriction or lack of ability to perform an activity in a manner or within a range considered normal for a human being” (WHO, 1996) [7]. In addition, a disability maybe physical, cognitive, sensory, emotional, developmental, or some combination of these (Schechter and Feldman, 2010) [8]. A more comprehensive definition is proffered by Hardman, Egen and Wolf (1993:484) [9] as, “Condition characterised by loss of physical functioning or difficulty in learning and social adjustment that significantly interferes with normal growth and development, for example loss of sight”. The authors further highlight that disability is a bit different from handicap and impairment. Thus, their explanation denotes that handicap is a limitation imposed on the individual by environmental demands for example a wheel chair user faces a handicap in buildings without ramps. The Disabled Persons Act of Zimbabwe defines a disabled person as, a person with a physical, mental or sensory disability, including a visual, hearing or speech functional disability, which gives rise to physical, cultural or social barriers inhibiting him from participating at an equal level with other members of society in activities, undertakings or fields of employment that are open to other members of society (Government of Zimbabwe, 1996) [10].

The study considered the impact of flooding and the subsequent evacuations on women with all types of disabilities regardless of severity.

2.2 Incidence of disability

People with disabilities comprise approximately 10% of the world’s population, 75% of whom live in developing countries and constitute one of the most poor, marginalised and socially excluded groups in society (DFID, 2005)[11]. However, Choruma (2007) [5] argues that there disparities on the statistics on the prevalence of disabilities in Zimbabwe. Thus, there are few sources of reliable statistics regarding prevalence of disabilities and these can also be argued to be inconsistent. Choruma (2007)[5] states that Zimbabwe’s Housing and Population Census, conducted in 2002, estimated a prevalence rate of 2.9%, with 45% being male and 55% being female. Hence, this study focuses its attention on the “forgotten tribe” which constitutes 55% of the total population of people with disabilities.

2.3 Human Rights and Disabilities

The legal enactments on the rights of people with disabilities emanate from the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) [12]. The UDHR entails that all human beings are born free and equal in
dignity and rights. Everyone, including women with disabilities are entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in this declaration without distinction of any kind. In addition, The United Nations General Objectives declared the recognition of people with disabilities in the Decade of Disabled People 1983-1992.

In Zimbabwe, rights of women with disabilities are supported by the Disabled Persons Act of Zimbabwe which calls for non-discrimination on the basis of disability. However, Manombe-Ncube (2001) [13] argues that there are no specific policies in place to ensure the implementation of the Act or the need to intensify programmes that uplift the status of women with disabilities in particular. Thus, women with disabilities are assumed to be participating without having strategies in place to remove barriers that hinder full participation. Choruma (2007) [5] argues that legislation makes no provision for affirmative action or positive discrimination and policies remain vague or unenforced, professionals in health and education, employers and disabled people themselves remain largely unaware of what those are.

2.4 Women with disabilities

Charowa (2005) [6] posits that despite their significant numbers, women with disabilities especially in developing nations remain hidden and silent, their concerns and rights overlooked. A study conducted by the National Societies for the Care of the Handicapped Association (2005) found out that women with disabilities are more likely than others to be extremely poor or destitute, illiterate, without employment and often undeserved due to lack of access to public services. Furthermore, (Choruma 2007:14)[5] states that disabled women are disempowered by both their gender and their disability in terms of their ability to influence decisions that affect them. Thus, this entails that women with disabilities are faced with double barrelled challenges in life as a result of their gender and disabilities. Therefore, it can be argued that gender discrimination compounds the discernment of women with disabilities as they are already discriminated on the basis of their disability. In addition, Rust and Matts (2007) [14] argue that social and economic discrimination, architectural, transportation, institutional and policy barriers continue to prevent disabled people from accessing any opportunities. Furthermore, Lang and Charova (2007:01) [15] state that disabled people encounter multiple attitudinal, environmental and institutional barriers that militate against their effective inclusion within Zimbabwe society.

2.5 Floods

Floods are phenomena that has been widely researched and covered by the media. Floods by nature are complex events caused by a range of human vulnerabilities, inappropriate development planning and climate variability (ADPC, 2005) [16]. While, The Fourth Assessment Report (2007) [16] of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) predicts that heavy precipitation events, which are very likely to increase in frequency, will augment flood risk.Flooding at an unexpected scale (damaging flood) and with excessive frequency causes damage to life, livelihoods and the environment.

3.0 Purpose and Significance of the study

It is a paradox that whilst there has been a growing body pertaining to gender, certainly not enough has been reported on women with disabilities. Moreover, there is an apparent paucity of research pertaining to ramification of disasters such as floods.
and displacements on women with disabilities.

The purpose of the study was to determine the impact of flooding on the livelihoods of women with disabilities in the Tokwe-Mukosi basin. In addition, it sought to reveal that people with disabilities in general and women with disabilities in particular are adversely affected by floods. It also lays down the foundation from which to develop suggestions to promote positive discrimination of women with disabilities during rescue and relocations after flooding. Besides, the study would add value to international debate on the implications of flooding on the livelihoods of women with disabilities.

4.0 Research Objectives

(i) To investigate the impact of flooding on women with disabilities.
(ii) To analyse gender-specific challenges of women with disabilities during relocations.
(iii) To recommend strategies of positively discriminating women with disabilities during relocation.

5.0 Research Methodology

The researcher utilized mainly face-to-face interviews with key informants and observations of the relocation of the flood victims. The literature review shaped the questions in the data collection instruments. The researcher purposively selected two temporary holding camps (transit camps) Gunikuni and Zifunzi in Masvingo and Chivi district respectively as interview and observation sites. The temporary sites were selected from the five temporary camps utilized during the relocation of flood victims. In addition, face-to-face interviews were also carried out at Chingwizi, one of the three relocation sites, which is located in Nuanetsi ranch in Mwenezi district.

5.0 Impact of the floods and relocation on women with disabilities

The impact of the floods on the Tokwe-Mukosi basin was overwhelming and wide-ranging in general and catastrophic on women with disabilities in particular.

5.1 Livelihoods

There was overwhelming consensus among the respondents at both the transit camps and relocation site that their livelihoods were adversely affected by the flooding. It was also observed that their livelihood assets were completely destroyed as homestead were completely submerged by the floods. Thus, the study revealed that most dimensions of livelihoods assets or capitals as espoused in the “livelihoods pentagon” (Scoones, 1999) [17], were affected by the floods. Women with disabilities interviewed revealed that their infrastructure, that is houses as well as assets such as hens, goats and cattle were either killed or lost during the floods and subsequent relocation.

In addition, the respondents exposed that their social capital was negatively impacted by the floods. One respondent elaborated that it had been difficult for her so much to gain acceptance and gain the social networks she had prior to the floods. Now the respondents have to start over again at the relocation sites to nurture the social networks in a new environment with its challenges.

Furthermore, it was revealed by the women with disabilities that they had lost their
land. Loss of land they argued was especially hard on them as compared to their colleagues as they had adapted their fields to suit their disabilities. It was revealed that their livelihood had necessitated their fashioning of their land to assist them gain subsistence from the land.

5.2 Environmental and access barriers

The study revealed that environmental and access barriers were made more pronounced during the flooding and the subsequent relocations for women with disabilities. When their homesteads were submerged by the floods they failed to save their household assets among others due to their disabilities. This was further compounded by the relocation process which they expressed was not structured in a way to take cognisance of people with disabilities. The researcher also observed that the trucks mobilised for the relocation of the affected people in the Tokwe-Mukosi basin did not consider people with disabilities. There was a perception that the teams that reacted to the disaster appeared to have only realised that they were people with disabilities and let alone women with disabilities when they got on the ground.

5.3 Relocation Sites

Affected families in the Tokwe-Mukosi have been relocated to three sites, of which two are at Nuanesti ranch in Mwenezi district and Chisase in Chiredzi district. The government of Zimbabwe and the donor community have assisted the families with foodstuffs and tents. While the respondents expressed appreciation for the help they felt that the tents did not consider their disabilities. The recipients of the tents were supposed to erect them and this was revealed to be problematic for women with disabilities.

6.0 Recommendations

From this study the researcher makes the following recommendation for disaster management:-

i) The Disaster Management/ response coordination should be representatives from organisations for women with disabilities. All emergency exercises should be inclusive so as to ensure inclusivity in the programme.

ii) The Civil Protection Unit should be proactive and not reactive. There is need to put in place an early flooding warning system.

iii) The government should arrange to compensate for all those affected by the floods in the Tokwe-Mukosi basin. There should be positive discrimination for women with disabilities.

iv) In addition, the government and donor community should strive to restore people’s sources of livelihoods. Provision of shelter and monthly food rations is not enough but efforts to restore people’s livelihoods is sustainable.

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