Social Protection and Climate change in the SADC 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.
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Organisation of Presentation

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A man stands on a bridge on the Umvumvu River that was washed away by Cyclone Idai in Chimanimani, Zimbabwe.

*Image: REUTERS/Philimon Bulawayo*
Introduction

• Natural disasters often violently disrupt people’s lives (They can be in the form of drought, floods, earthquake, cyclones, etc.)

• Cyclone Idai which hit southern African countries of Malawi, Mozambique and Zimbabwe in March 2019, was the worst natural disaster to hit the region for nearly 2 decades (UNICEF, 2019).

• Winds of 200km an hour tore through areas of Chimanimani and Chipinge Districts bringing heavy rains and flooding.

• Rivers bust their banks, landslides washed homes away and there was total chaos (Medecins Sans Frontieres, 2019).
Magnitude of Challenges

• In Zimbabwe alone, over 270,000 people were affected including over 130,000 children, who included those orphaned by the cyclone.

• According to Ganyani (2019) “Children, brothers, sisters, mothers, fathers, neighbours, or whole families have been lost”.

• Many of those who died were either swept away by flood waters or trapped in debris or even crashed to death by huge boulders. Many bodies were swept through Mozambique into the Indian ocean.

• As of late April, 2019, some 70,000 internally displaced persons were still living in host communities or in collective shelters such as churches, hotels, schools, and other locations (USAID, 2019).
{Magnitude Continued}

• Floods disrupted lives, with many men, women and children crammed in temporary shelters. (Plan International, 2019).

• Apart from fearing for their lives, many people fled their homes in search of food, water, medicines, sanitation.

• Many stranded people hung on trees and hill tops for long hours, waiting to be rescued. Some were eventually rescued, others failed.

• Those that fled sought help at informal camps or were being hosted by neighbours and relatives. Hundreds more were reported missing.
IMPACT: Socio-economic Issues

• Hunger became an issue of particular concern because the cyclone damaged crops just before harvest time.

• Hundreds of children were either orphaned by the cyclone or separated from parents and guardians, and needed support (USAID, 2019).

• Some of the children cramped in informal camps were actually in heightened risk of violence and abuse.
Socio-economic Issues (continued)

• People walked long distances to fetch water as traditional sources were either contaminated or damaged.

• Many survivors spent their time anxiously awaiting news of missing relatives and friends.

• Water-borne diseases, particularly cholera, became an issue of particular concern in the aftermath of the cyclone.
Some people were crushed to death by huge boulders like these ones. (Picture, courtesy of Pindula news – March, 2019)
Why Impact Was Heavy

• Forecasts were issued that a category 4 Tropical Cyclone was developing off the Mozambican coast (IFRC, 2019), but apparently no meaningful immediate action happened.

• Zimbabwe’s Meteorological Service Department (MSD) raised the alarm 2 weeks before the tropical cyclone Idai but the authorities did not respond as they should have.

• There was lack of meaningful mitigation strategy in place to reduce impact of risks of hazards through proactive measures (Thompson, 2019). (e.g. no action taken to close schools or evacuate people).
Why Impact Was Heavy

- What was experienced in Zimbabwe was a mix: crippling economic crisis, drought, underlying HIV epidemic, growing rates of diabetes, hypertension and other non-communicable diseases, and the devastation by the cyclone (Frieden, 2019), hence confusion.

- The ZNA engineers corps that were leading rescue efforts, were forced to wait for water levels to subside and visibility to improve due to quality of their equipment (Thompson, 2019).

- The Civil Protection Unit (CPU) should have been capacitated to evacuate people into temporary transit camps, hotels or ferry them to relatives before the catastrophe, but this did not happen.
When Cyclone Idai hit the country, the Government of Zimbabwe declared a state of disaster in the affected areas.

Initially the government allocated $RTGS 50 million for emergency response and infrastructure rehabilitation. By some accounts $179 million has been channeled towards infrastructure rehabilitation (NewZimbabwe, 2019).

The Zimbabwe National Army was roped in to clear roads and establish emergency crossing points for relief vehicles (IFRC, 2019), and by end of April many areas had become accessible.
• Countries like South Africa, Botswana, Tanzania, China, America, Britain and United Arab Emirates responded positively with donations (Anti-Corruption Trust, 2019).

• Other donations came from such entities as a bottling company (bottled water); a fuel company (road works equipment); life insurance company (beds), while another entity donated mobile toilets. A water tank was also donated (Frieden, 2019).

• The people of Mozambique helped by burying some bodies washed away into their country. They took photos of bodies before burying them to facilitate future identification if need be. Govt is now conducting DNA tests involving 147 bodies from the said graves.
Responses – food

- Initially helicopters were used to transport food, while by end of April roads had been opened and nearly 200 000 people were receiving emergency food assistance by road (UN, in USAID, 2019).
- The World Food Programme (WFP) and nutrition actors embarked on a screening exercise, and they had assisted 8700 children by end of April (USAID, 2019).
- Apart from NGOs, FBOs and CBOs efforts, ordinary people chipped in to assist, not only with food but many other necessities such as blankets, clothing, food, mattresses, and medicines.
- Private institutions mobilised resources and transported these to the affected areas. (e.g. Solusi University organised a bus for staff and students to travel to the affected area – a round trip of over 1200km)
Responses – Education (schools).

- There was significant impact on education infrastructure with some 60 schools in the affected areas, badly damaged. (USAID, 2019).

- The damaged infrastructure included classroom blocks, desks for students, and of course text books and exercise books.

- The Government of Zimbabwe and UNICEF chipped in with material assistance once the danger was over and schools prepared to reopen.
Responses – Health Issues

• Since many health posts were damaged the MoH and relief actors had to set up make-shift facilities for the purpose. Resources were also mobilised to ferry some patients to the nearest hospital.

• A team of highly specialised Zimbabwean volunteer doctors joined in the relief work around 19 March – 4 days after the disaster. (Frieden, 2019).

• The Ministry of Health and relief actors vaccinated over 385 000 people against cholera in Chimanimani and Chipinge areas.

• A supplementary feeding scheme for under 5s, pregnant and lactating women, HIV and TB patients, older people was launched.
• Various emergency aid organisations went to the scene, and these included MSF team. (Frieden, 2019).

• According to USAID (2019), humanitarian agencies had provided WASH (water, sanitation and hygiene) assistance to about 91000 people in cyclone hit areas by end of April.

• To enhance access to water, 20 new boreholes were sank while another 110 boreholes were repaired around the time of the emergency phase.
Challenges

- Evidently limited resources on the part of the Zimbabwe government meant responses were not as effective as could have been the case.
- Weak coordination of efforts between government institutions and the humanitarian agencies that responded to the emergency.
- Aid poured into the affected areas but some of the resources mobilised for the purpose were not reaching the intended beneficiaries mostly due to corruption (Bhengu, 2019).
- A top government and a policeman were arrested for stealing food aid meant for cyclone victims (Pindula News 2019).
- Top ruling party officials were accused of taking over distribution of food and doing the distribution on partisan basis (Pindula News 2019) to the chagrin of the donors and potential donors.
Way forward

1. There is need for the Government of Zimbabwe to invest in more effective early warning systems, to ensure timeous detection of potential disasters to enhance preparedness.

2. NewZimbabwe (2019) reported that Government had since received US$10 million from WFP to “solidify the country’s capacity to reduce, anticipate and timely respond to the effects of climate shocks.................”. Unfortunately this targeted Manicaland and Rushinga areas; clearly a question of “too little, too late”.

3. There is need to better capacitate key “stakeholders” such as the army, by acquiring equipment that is more efficient (e.g. helicopters that can operate under harsher conditions).
Way forward

4. The Civil Protection Unit (CPU) should capacitate relevant communities, especially those in disaster-prone areas like Chipinge, Chimanimani, and Muzarabani to ensure efficient evacuation strategies.

5. There is need to encourage communities to build structures (especially houses) that can withstand the vagaries of the weather, including cyclones and flooding, and also to build on higher ground.

6. The Civil Protection Unit (CPU) has to ensure that communities in disaster prone areas are introduced to routines that facilitate timely evacuation in times of emergency.

7. The Government should endeavour to put in place measures that will help reduce looting of aid resources, given that, left unchecked this cancer has enormous potential to demotivate stakeholders (Anti-Corruption Trust, 2019).
Conclusion

• The impact of tropical cyclone Idai in Zimbabwe was massive: scores of lives lost, hundreds reported missing, and thousands displaced.
• In terms of infrastructure several bridges and whole roads were washed away or blocked, many schools and clinics destroyed or damaged, homes destroyed, livestock and livelihoods destroyed, safe drinking water sources damaged.
• There are important lessons for various stakeholders to draw from this experience.
• One major lesson is the need for an efficient early warning system coupled with a civil protection unit that is better resourced, vibrant.
• This, coupled with a huge investment into disaster preparedness, would go a long way in alleviating the challenges associated with natural disasters.
References

References (Continued)


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