



## **Topical Issues On**

### **DISASTER RISK MANAGEMENT**

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#### ***Disaster Risk Management Begins With Information***

##### **ABOUT ZIMBABWE'S DISASTER RISK PROFILE**

Zimbabwe rarely suffers cataclysmic events. However the country is prone to a plethora of disaster risks of both natural and human induced origin. Hydro metrological hazards that affect this country include drought, flooding, tropical cyclones, thunderstorms and lightning. These phenomena are further compounded by the impact of climate change. Other notable hazards are veldt fires, pest infestations, environmental degradation, disease outbreaks, road/rail traffic, landmines, industrial processes, landslides and earthquakes.

Earth movement or seismic activity is monitored at the Goetz observatory and other monitoring sites. Vulnerable parts of the country include the west, north west, the south and south east parts of the country. Of the seventeen earthquakes felt in some parts of the country since 1969, only one incident of 22<sup>nd</sup> February 2006 measuring 7.5 on the Richter scale was felt countrywide. There has been no widespread damage as a result of earthquakes to date.

On the other hand, too little water, drought and mid season dry spells are currently the most serious hazard. Droughts have occurred in cyclic patterns over the years and are particularly more severe in semi arid agro ecological regions 4 and 5. According to the Zimbabwe Meteorological Services' records, the worst drought episodes of the century include 1991/92, 1946/47 and 1972/73 rainfall seasons. Among these is the worst drought in living memory, 1991/92. Its impact necessitated importation of several inputs with grain alone costing over Z\$3billion then. Over 20% of the national cattle herd was lost to that drought.

Too much water giving rise to floods is usually as a result of heavy rains and or the effects of tropical cyclones. Heavy rains have given rise to landslides. Hilly areas such as eastern parts of the country are susceptible to landslides. Low lying areas particularly in the Middle Sabi, Malipati, Chikwalakwala, Tsholotsho, parts of Gokwe and the Zambezi valley are highly at risk to flooding. Cyclone Eline induced flooding on 22<sup>nd</sup> February 2000 is the worst flooding to date. It was characterised by strong winds and heavy rains with a trail of destruction affecting directly and or indirectly 2.7 million people in the eastern and south-eastern parts of the country.

Flooding has also occurred due to dam wall failure or dam basins rapidly filling while still under construction like the Negomo Dam Wall failure in August 1997 and the Tokwe Mukorsi Dam Flood Disaster of 2014. Twenty thousand people had to be evacuated when the dam basin of the incomplete Tokwe Mukorsi rapidly filled up due to heavy rains.

Related to drought, flooding and human activity such as illegal gold panning among other adverse activities is the worrisome environmental degradation. Siltation of rivers is common. This affects natural drainage systems and increases the risk to flooding. Other environmental concerns include air pollution from industrial processes and water pollution largely from sewage effluent.

Generally mining and industrial operations carry considerable risk. The Hwange Mine Accident of 1972 is the most horrendous accident in the history of the country.

Road traffic accidents involving public transportation are high. The notable include, the Nyanga Bus Disaster where 89 school

children perished, the Chivake Bridge Bus Disaster where 87 farmers perished, the Dande Bridge Disaster where again 62 farmers perished and several other major incidents where scores lost life and limb.

Haulage trucks and tankers that ply the road network across the country are an added hazard as they carry various cargo including hazardous chemicals. The Liquid Petroleum Gas Leak in October 1997 at Bietbridge is an example of the risk posed that may be posed by tankers. The tendency for crowds to gather at accident scenes and even attempts to loot accident scenes poses grave danger like in the case of the Petrol Tanker Explosion at Sunningdale in Harare in June 2011.

Veldt fires are notoriously common with thousands of hectares and scores of lives being lost to fires annually. The Environmental Management Agency has a satellite based real time fire monitoring system and produces a fire risk prediction model annually. The prediction for 2015 for example, identifies areas of the country at extreme risk as Nyanga, Chimanimani, Mutare, Hwange, Umguza, Hurungwe, Makonde, Kwekwe, Bindura, Chegutu and Kadoma.

Epidemics or disease outbreaks are among the serious hazards in the country. Outbreaks of concern include cholera, typhoid, measles and malaria. The worst cholera experience was witnessed in 2008/ 2009 in which recorded cases were in the region of 90 000 with about 4 000 deaths. The outbreak affected all the 10 provinces of the country. Efforts are still underway to address the underlying factors of vulnerability.

Outbreaks that may affect both humans and animals include rabies and anthrax. Livestock and poultry are particularly vulnerable to outbreaks of economic significance such as foot and mouth and Newcastle disease respectively. Pest infestations such as army worm, quelia birds, larger grain borer adversely impact crops and subsequently food security and livelihoods.

Dangerous and problem wildlife, stampedes as well as landmines pose considerable risk to vulnerable communities. Demining of affected border areas of the country which were land

mined during the war of liberation is work in progress. Wildlife has proved to be a menace to communities living in close proximity to wildlife areas. However programs such as CAMPFIRE assist in reducing vulnerability. Public events such as sports, and music festivals held at large stadia have resulted in stampedes due to crowd control problems.

In general, apart from natural events, the country's disaster risk profile is a reflection of its socio economic activities. Respective sectors employ relevant regulations and programs to reduce risk.

Remember our war cry, be a good citizen, reduce the risk to disaster! The Meteorological Services describe the month of July as the end of the cool season. Occurrences of ground frost (0.0°C) are high. Maximum temperatures average 22.1°C and about 7.6°C at night time.

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