Topical Issues On

DISASTER RISK MANAGEMENT

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Disaster Risk Management Begins With Information

INTERNATIONAL DAY FOR DISASTER REDUCTION

The International Day for Disaster Reduction (IDDR) 13th October every year was approved by the United Nations General Assembly in 1989, resolution 64/ 200 as a way to promote a culture of disaster reduction inclusive of disaster prevention, mitigation and preparedness. It is a day to celebrate how people and communities are reducing their risk to disasters and raising awareness about the importance of disaster risk reduction

This year's celebration continues to pursue The Step Up Initiative which started in 2011 and focuses on a different group every year leading up to the Third UN World Conference for Disaster Reduction held in March this year. In 2011 the focus was on children and young people, in 2012, women and girls and people living with disabilities in 2013and 2014 the focus was on the ageing population. For 2015 the theme is 'Knowledge for Life'

Knowledge is not only derived from modern science but also encompasses indigenous knowledge systems. Indigenous knowledge (IK) is commonly defined as the knowledge that an indigenous (local) community accumulates over time from living in a particular environment. IK encompasses all forms of knowledge, techniques, know-how, skills, practices and beliefs that enable a people to live and overcome adversities in the environment. Other terms used interchangeably to refer to the concept of IK are traditional knowledge and local knowledge among others. IK is perhaps not fully utilized to benefit development endeavours. Conventional approaches to development tend to overlook the value that IK presents and instead advocate more for technology transfers from locations that are perceived as more advanced. This undermines the potential in local experiences and practices.

Thus the goal of IDDR 2015 seeks to raise awareness on the use of traditional, indigenous, local knowledge and practices to complement modern scientific knowledge in disaster risk management. Traditional knowledge can prove useful in all aspects of managing disaster risk that is in prevention, mitigation, preparedness and early warring, response as well as recovery.

The use of traditional early warning on the prospects of an oncoming rainfall season is perhaps one of the most well understood or used IK by communities in Zimbabwe and elsewhere. While the Meteorological Services Department (MSD) does not use local traditional seasonal climate indicators in generating seasonal climate outlooks, it acknowledges the existence of such practices in most parts of country. At times a lack of convergence in the outlooks from the climate experts and that of traditional sources may reportedly inhibit uptake of scientific forecasts. It is worth noting that a number of commonly used traditional weather indicators can be explained meteorologically. Behaviour of certain ants, for instance, commonly used as a traditional indicator of good rains is

reportedly related to humidity levels. Early flowering of the *Chikuhunga* and *Barati* trees used as an indicator of a good rainfall season by some communities in Manicaland can be explained scientifically as response to heat built up which enhances rainfall

Interestingly a survey by MSD found a variety of traditional early warning indicators used by communities throughout the country. Heavy fruiting of *Mugangatsh*a in parts of Matabeleland North, *Muchakata* in some parts of the Midlands and Mashonaland West and *Muzhanje* in some parts of Mashonaland East are all associated with a good rainfall season.

Wind direction which is a key indicator for climate experts is also widely used as a traditional indicator. Easterly winds in parts of Manicaland, frequent whirlwinds in parts of Masvingo, northerly winds in Mashonaland West are all associated with a good rainfall season

Some traditional practices contribute to minimise environmental degradation with synergic benefits to livelihoods. A notable example is the renowned preservation of the environment by the Nerunedzo community in Bikita District where a forest thrives in an otherwise parched environ. The forest also provides an ideal habitat for *harurwa* insects to thrive. *Harurwa* are a good source of livelihoods and nutrition. Traditional leadership in some areas have stringent practices to curtail cutting of trees and have robust measures to prevent veld fires. Planting of small grains and practises such as zero tillage apparently are rooted in traditional practices.

There are also reportedly good traditional practices to respond to emergencies. Communities in Binga reportedly have a long history of managing snake bites. Livestock farmers apparently have a traditional body of knowledge to manage certain livestock ailments.

Generally it would appear there is considerable traditional knowledge in this country and elsewhere that can be utilised to manage certain disaster risks. It is therefore opportune to join the rest of the world to commemorate IDDR 2015 on 13th October 2015. A national event has been organised to recognise communities that champion disaster risk management through IK. Efforts are also underway to disseminate information on IK and encourage research in this area as IK is **Knowledge for Life.**

According to MSD the month of October is very hot. Maximum temperature averages 30°C and the night time temperature is usually about 15.7°C.

Remember be a good citizen, reduce the risk to disaster. Let's celebrate IDDR 2015!
