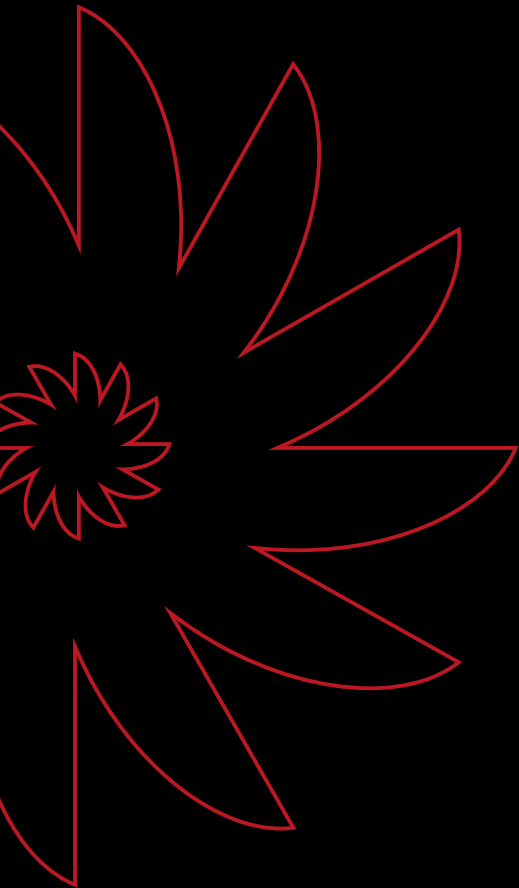**Flames and Lilies Climate Intiative**

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EVALUATION OF DISASTER RISK REDUCTION PROGRAMS IN HARARE.

Authors

Talent Makanaka Murawo
Chikomborero Marimo
Amanda Karabo Ncube
Vimbainashe Faith Mafuse
Ruvarashe Pheobe Njanji
Fadzai Valerie Mukove
Taropafadzwa Nyerenyere

Editors

Chido Nyaruwata
Lovejoy Masango

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Letter from the Founder

> *"When we create spaces where girls can speak out and take action, we hear their dreams and give them the tools to shape their future."*

Chido Nyaruwata

Founder and Director

Flames and Lilies Climate Initiative, a Zimbabwean ecofeminist youth organization, bridges climate justice and gender equality. From July to October 2024, we conducted climate and disaster risk education workshops with adolescent girls and young women from Harare, Epworth, and Bindura. Three cohorts learned feminist participatory action research methods to identify gender-specific climate challenges in their communities.

Seven youth researchers evaluate Harare's disaster risk reduction programs in this report, which highlights the urgent need to increase young women's participation in climate decision-making, enhance disaster preparedness education, and boost funding for resilient infrastructure.

This work wouldn't have been possible without a microgrant from the Urban Movement Innovation Fund.

Introdction

Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) has emerged as a critical field of study and practice, particularly in regions like Zimbabwe, which faces significant challenges from natural hazards such as droughts, floods, and cyclones. These disasters, exacerbated by climate change and socio-economic vulnerabilities, not only threaten livelihoods but disproportionately affect vulnerable populations, especially children and women.

Within this context, the girl child stands out as a demographic requiring special attention due to the unique challenges they face during crises. This paper assesses the existing DRR frameworks in Zimbabwe and their impact on girls during times of crisis.

Examining current policies, practices, and community responses, the paper aims to identify how these frameworks either support or hinder the well-being and empowerment of girls when disasters strike. Key dimensions include access to education, health services, and protection from violence, which are critical for ensuring that girls can survive and thrive in the aftermath of disasters.

Research
Question

As youth researchers aged between 18-24 , we aim to address this question:

• To what level and with what success are the existing Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) programs accounting for the needs of girls and other physically strained individuals?

Literature Review

Disaster risk management (DRM) is a global priority, with frameworks such as the Hyogo Framework for Action (2005-2015) and the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction (2015-2030) providing guidelines to mitigate risks and enhance resilience (United Nations, 2015). However, gaps in implementation and structural inequalities hinder the effectiveness of these policies, particularly in low-income countries like Zimbabwe, where socio-economic vulnerabilities are deeply gendered (Hewitt, 1997).

Challenges in Disaster Risk Management

1. Insufficient implementation and Public Awareness

The legislative framework, primarily established by the Civil Protection Act, provides the country's legal foundation for disaster management. This act establishes the Civil Protection Directorate, coordinating national efforts and integrating DRR into local development planning. The framework emphasises community involvement and aims to empower local populations to manage their risks effectively. Community engagement is central to Zimbabwe's DRR strategies.

Despite the existence of DRM policies, weak enforcement and limited public awareness significantly undermine their effectiveness. For instance, during Cyclone Idai in Zimbabwe (2019), early warnings failed to prevent extensive loss of life as many residents were either unaware or reluctant to evacuate (Munsaka et al, 2021). Structural barriers, such as inadequate resources and governance challenges, exacerbate these issues. Hewitt (1997) notes that populations in developing countries often settle in hazardous areas due to economic pressures, increasing their exposure to disasters.

2. Economic Constraints

Poverty plays a critical role in limiting DRM efforts. Resource scarcity often forces governments to rely on donor funding, creating a mismatch between donor priorities and national DRM needs (UNDSIR, 2014). In Zimbabwe, economic hardships have impeded the construction of resilient infrastructure and the provision of basic public services, leaving communities vulnerable to disasters. This challenge mirrors the experience of the Cook Islands, where DRM has not been prioritised due to competing demands like education and sanitation (UNIDSR,2014)

3. Gender Disparities

Disasters disproportionately affect women and girls, amplifying existing inequalities. During Cyclone Idai, girls faced heightened risks of gender-based violence in overcrowded shelters, health issues stemming from inadequate sanitary facilities in temporary shelters and loss of education due to caregiving responsibilities (Chatiza, 2019).

Current climate-related disasters, such as the 2023/2024 El Niño-induced drought, further exacerbate these inequalities. Girls often bear the burden of water collection and other domestic labour, reducing their time for education and exposing them to additional risks (UNICEF, 2023).

4. Human Behaviour and Environmental Degradation

Decisions to settle in disaster-prone areas, often driven by poverty or urbanization, increase vulnerability. For example, communities affected by the Tokwe-Mukosi floods in Zimbabwe resisted relocation due to the fertile soils of their settlement areas (Human Rights Watch, 2014). Urbanization and deforestation further degrade ecosystems, increasing disaster risks. In rural areas, the reliance on firewood as an energy source perpetuates environmental degradation, highlighting the need for sustainable energy solutions (UNEP, 2023).

While Zimbabwe has made strides in adopting global DRM frameworks, socio-economic and gendered disparities remain significant barriers. A feminist analysis highlights how these inequalities intersect with broader DRM challenges, emphasizing the need for inclusive and equitable approaches to disaster management.

Methodology

As youth researchers, we adopted a qualitative approach that included interviews and document reviews. Document review, a method we used to systematically analyse written materials, helped us extract key insights and information.

We examined policies, frameworks, and literature on disaster risk management and children's protection to evaluate their effectiveness and how well they align with gender-responsive approaches.

To amplify youth and women's voices, we also conducted four interviews with one adolescent girl, one with a young woman and two with older women. These conversations provided valuable personal perspectives that enriched our understanding and complemented the findings from the document review.

Findings

Our document analysis of legislation and policy shaping disaster risk reduction and children's protection provided several insights. Firstly, an evaluation of the Civil Protection Act and accompanying disaster risk reduction policies demonstrated the insufficient levels of implementation for each monitored activity.

For example, although disaster risk management plans or risk-sensitive building codes exist, they are not enforced because of a lack of government capacity or failed public awareness.

The risk information acquired through these assessments is not translated into policy because the editors or authors do not know how to manage or use such information.

For instance, during Cyclone IDAI, which took place in Chimanimani, Zimbabwe, in 2019, people got caught up in the disaster not because they had'nt been told but because public awareness campaigns were not effective enough. People also refused to move due to reasons best known to them, and the government did not implement enough effort to ensure people had evacuated before the disaster struck.

Due to economic hardships, the country could not afford to assist the affected communities and relied much upon donor funds to mitigate the effects of the disaster. Therefore, the ineffectiveness of disaster management policies in Zimbabwe can be linked to political and economic factors.

Given that this evaluation seeks to assess if children, particularly girls are protected before, during and after disasters, it reviewed the Children's Act. Our analysis identified that CA partially addresses girls' needs but has significant limitations.

We noted the lack of explicit language addressing girls' unique challenges. As with the Civil Protection Act, there is insufficient participation of girls and women in decision-making processes and overlooks intersectional vulnerabilities. The CPA also has a strong institutional focus rather than community-based solutions whilst also having limited digital protection.

Our interviewees provided rich insights into the gender and disaster risk management nexus as they revealed the gendered vulnerabilities to climate and man-made disasters.

The El Niño-induced drought of 2023-2024 has deeply affected communities across Zimbabwe, leaving many struggling to meet basic needs. This analysis focuses on the lived experiences of Mrs M*, a 71-year-old widow and farmer in Arcadia, Harare, and her 17-year-old granddaughter, R*.

For Mrs M, farming was a reliable source of income, sustaining her family and enabling her to send her three grandchildren to school.

However, the drought has devastated her crops, leaving her without income and unable to provide necessities. The water scarcity has exacerbated her struggles, forcing her family to ration water for hygiene and daily use.

R, has faced unique challenges. As the one responsible for fetching water, she must endure long and tiring journeys. This burden is further magnified during her menstrual cycle, where the need for extra water becomes an emotional and physical strain. She shared, *"It's always hardest during my menstruation dates. I have to look for extra water so I can be able to clean up after myself."*

The names of interviewees have been altered to protect their anonymity.*

Observations of their home garden revealed the harsh reality of the drought's impact. The vegetables that once supported the family financially now lie barren. Mrs M shared her despair, saying, *"I have no options left for me to consider. If it had been me alone, I would have died a long time ago."*

This narrative underscores the compounded vulnerabilities brought about by the drought. The economic, social, and gendered vulnerabilities highlight the urgent need for targeted interventions to support affected families.

Building on these findings, we hold that DRR programs in Harare often fail to prioritise the unique needs and experiences of the girl child. These programs tend to perpetuate patriarchal norms and power dynamics, marginalising girls' voices and agency.

Girls and women report feeling excluded from decision-making processes and lacking access to relevant information. This opinion was expressed by Mrs C*, a resident of a well-known place in Harare called Mbare, after her experiences of severe loss following the destruction of the Mbare Musika Retail, which was her marketplace.

She explained:

"*This incident is really a thorn in the flesh as it is a disaster not only for me but for everyone who survived on this market because it's a great loss we've fallen into. I'm a widow, and to provide for my family, I had to get up to this place, and now everything is destroyed. There's really no one to give a hand, even after I ran away from the dry, hot areas I lived in, which suffer from great crop failure...*"

The names of interviewees have been altered to protect their anonymity.*

An interview with V*, who was then a high school student in Chimanimani district during the great Cyclone Idai disaster, revealed how much she felt neglected during her experience.

She said:

"*My house and family perished during the unforgettable Cyclone Idai of 2019 as I suffered from great trauma and even a lack of sanitary supplies, which left me with the conclusion that girls' needs are not given much attention.*"

The names of interviewees have been altered to protect their anonymity.*

Recommendations

Disaster risk management is an essential component of sustainable development, particularly in a world increasingly affected by climate change and environmental degradation. Effective DRR necessitates the integration of innovative strategies aimed at fostering social change and resilience within communities.

Firstly, it is imperative to engage local communities in the decision-making processes related to disaster risk management. Community participation fosters a sense of ownership and responsibility, ensuring that DRR strategies resonate with the actual needs and values of those affected.

According to the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNDRR, 2015), inclusive participation empowers marginalized groups, enabling them to contribute unique insights and experiences that can inform more effective DRR policies.

Secondly, education and awareness-raising are fundamental to creating a culture of preparedness. Implementing educational programs that emphasize risk awareness, preparedness, and response can significantly reduce vulnerability to disasters. Research indicates that communities with higher levels of risk literacy are better equipped to respond to emergencies (Aldunce et al., 2015).

Educational initiatives should target various demographic groups, using tailored communication strategies to ensure broad accessibility and comprehensibility.

Implement targeted educational programs focused on empowering girls with knowledge about disaster preparedness and response is essential.

This should include training on leadership roles within their communities during crises (Davis et al., 2011). Additionally, investing in resilient infrastructure that considers the needs of girls and women such as safe sanitation facilities in schools and shelters during disasters is crucial.

Furthermore, integrating technology into disaster risk management practices can lead to substantial improvements in preparedness and response efforts. The use of geographic information systems (GIS), remote sensing, and mobile applications can enhance data collection and dissemination processes (Zhou et al., 2017). These technological tools can improve early warning systems and enable real-time communication during disasters, thereby reducing the impact on affected populations.

In conclusion, fostering social change in disaster risk management is vital for building resilient communities. Engaging local populations, enhancing education and awareness, promoting multi-sectoral partnerships, and leveraging technology are pivotal actions that can generate meaningful change.

By implementing these recommendations, stakeholders can contribute to a more sustainable, gender responsive and effective approach to disaster risk management.

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Contact Us

Flames and Lilies Climate Initiative

flamesandlilies@gmail.com

Email

https://flamesandliliesclimatei
nitative.wordpress.com/

Website

Flames and Lilies Climate Initiative

LinkedIn