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## **An Assessment of the Effectiveness of Non Governmental Organisations (NGO) Approaches in Reducing Vulnerability of Rural Female Headed Households (FHH) to Disasters in Chimanimani District in Zimbabwe**

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### **Abstract:**

*This study sought to assess the effectiveness of Non Governmental Organisations(NGO) approaches in reducing vulnerability of rural female headed households (FHH) to disasters in Chimanimani District in Zimbabwe. Its main objectives were to find out the different approaches used by NGOs in Chimanimani and to evaluate their effectiveness in reducing the vulnerability of female headed households to disasters. The study also sought to establish the challenges faced by NGOs in their community disaster risk reduction efforts in wards 9 and 17 and to collect and collate the most common types of hazards and disasters in the wards. The study used both qualitative and quantitative research designs (Mixed methodology) to discuss responses from respondents. The study found out that there are a number of NGOs who have been working in the same wards for periods longer than five (5) years implementing similar interventions designed to assist female headed households cope with the effects of climate related hazards such as drought, extreme temperatures and land degradation; and also assisting communities to mitigate the effects of HIV and AIDS. The study also found that there was no meaningful participation of women beneficiaries particularly at the higher levels of the participation ladder such as decision making and initiating action which are considered as the highest form of empowerment. Another finding was that many NGOs operating in the two wards did not have disaster risk reduction (DRR) policies, strategies and frameworks to inform their programmes hence they were not well placed to guide communities into effective DRR planning, implementing, monitoring and evaluation. The study recommended that the overall framework for the promotion, coordination and execution of disaster management in Zimbabwe be made available to all NGOs working the relief and development sector and that there is need for effective and meaningful community participation so as to ensure community empowerment which is essential to build and sustain disaster resilience.*

**Keywords:** Capacities; Disaster; Disaster risk management; Disaster risk reduction (DRR); Female headed households; Hazard; Livelihood; Resilience; Risk; Vulnerability

### **1. Introduction**

In the last three decades, there has been an alarming frequency of disasters with increased severity creating humanitarian and development challenges especially among the rural poor communities. Paradoxically, the number of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) responding to disasters in the world has also grown exponentially. While there is consensus among development practitioners, politicians, scholars and business people on the critical role the NGOs have played and continue to play in saving lives, property and environment during and in the aftermath of a disaster, there is still debate on the effectiveness of certain NGO approaches to reducing the vulnerability of poor populations from future impacts of disasters. There is growing evidence that the number of people being impacted by disasters is also on the rise within the same areas where NGO relief and development programmes have been implemented for several years. The main research question of the study sought to assess the effectiveness of NGO livelihood approaches in reducing the vulnerability of rural female headed households to disasters in semi arid areas of Chimanimani. Community vulnerability reduction interventions carried out by NGOs seem to end as relief rather than developmental as originally designed. The study also sought to assess women's perspectives on how much NGO have contributed towards vulnerability reduction of rural female headed households in Chimanimani.

### **2. Background**

In the words of Didier Cherpitel, Secretary General of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC): "Disasters are first and foremost a major threat to development, and specifically to the development of the poorest and most marginalised people in the world. Disasters seek out the poor and ensure they stay poor" (Twigg, 2004:09).

Natural and man-made disasters are a reality fact of life for every country, but they are especially dangerous for people in countries where many struggle to survive. It is in these poorer, third-world countries that a major natural disaster can kill thousands and threaten the livelihoods of those who survive the disaster. Between 1992 and 2001, 96% of deaths from natural disasters were in countries classified by the UN Development Programme (UNDP) as of medium and low human development. Over the same period, 98% of those directly affected lived in these countries (Twig, 2004).

Thus vulnerabilities to disasters however are not equally distributed. Individuals and social groups carry different and disproportionate burden of vulnerability. Households and communities vary significantly in terms of disaster impacts and available private and public resources for responding to and recovering from them. Poor families, especially those headed by women tend to suffer the greatest losses when disastrous events such as cyclones and droughts unfold. At the same time, the incidence of female headship is believed to have increased worldwide and, in both developed and developing countries. A high proportion of these households are found to suffer poverty (Fuwa, 1997). Thus female-headed households have become an easily identifiable group on which to target poverty alleviation measures.

In Zimbabwe, female headship is commonplace. Around two thirds of the population live on and work the rural communal lands (Chipika et al, 1998). Possibly some 40% of the households located there are headed by women (Agritex, 2002). This partly arises from labour migration. Typically men migrate to work in towns, mines or commercial farms while their wives farm the household's plots. But female headship is also becoming more frequent as the incidence of terminal diseases such as HIV/AIDS increases. Zimbabwe has an estimated 33% of 15-49 year olds infected by the disease leaving grandmothers heading households for their grandchildren (ZNVAC, 2002). At national level around one third of households are thought to be female headed (Chant, 1997).

The correlation between female headship and poverty seem to be a common phenomenon in Zimbabwe, especially within the rural areas. Notably, 65% of the rural people in Zimbabwe are women. According to a study carried out by Central Statistics Office (CSO) in 2008, feminisation of poverty is evident among female headed households whereby 68% were below the Total Poverty Consumption Line (TPCL) in 2003 (CSO 2008). The main drivers of rural poverty include drought (1991 - 1992; 2002-2004) that decimated livestock in semi-arid and arid areas (region 4 and 5) and led to disposal of capital assets, outbreak of anthrax that restricted movement of stock hence depressing prices, loss of livestock during periods of political turmoil, lack of land holding rights for women, infertile land due to poor farming methods and lack of livelihood diversity (Chiripanura, 2010). Evidently thus, rural women are the most vulnerable and poor.

A number of local and international NGOs have been in the forefront in responding to disasters in many developing countries owing to their perceived opportunity and the capacity to reach the 'grass roots'. Till a few decades ago, disasters were viewed as one-off events and responded to by governments and relief agencies without taking into account the social and economic implications and causes of these events. These approaches looked at disasters as exceptional events, not related to the ongoing social and developmental processes. Gradually this attitude changed to an emphasis on preparedness measures, such as stockpiling of relief goods, preparedness plans and a growing role for relief agencies such as the Red Cross.

This "contingency planning" approach certainly improved the efficiency of relief agencies but left a lot to be desired in terms of appropriateness. Ensuring effectiveness of relief aid has largely remained elusive. Where they have been noted they are ephemeral. Community vulnerability reduction interventions carried out by NGOs seem to end as relief rather than developmental as originally designed.

Of late, there has been an increasing number of NGOs responding to social, cultural, economic and political development needs of communities experiencing the multi-effects of hazards and disasters. This has raised high expectations of aid and of NGOs among vulnerable communities.

### 3. Theoretical Framework

This study was premised on social creation and societal injustice theoretical framework propounded by (Cannon 1994). The theory states that disasters are avoidable human creation and prism highlighting societal injustice and growing vulnerability. Cannon asserts that the explanation of disaster causality is only possible by understanding the ways in which social systems themselves generate unequal exposure to risk by making some groups of people, some individuals, and some societies more prone to hazards than others. Thus behavioural aspects of disasters can only be understood by looking at them subjectively, particularly from the viewpoint of victims hence the adoption of this theory as it supports the views of this study.

### 4. Methodology

The study is a descriptive cross sectional study aimed to give out a clear picture of NGO approaches to vulnerability reduction in Chimanimani. A descriptive/evaluative study design allows for accurate description, examines correlation, emphasises on representativeness and is not much particular about the control of intervening variables. It involves collection of data at a given point in time and ensures that the research goal is accomplished using available limited resources and provides a rapid way of collecting data. This is also an appropriate type for this study as its strength is at assessing whether interventions have been well conceptualised and properly implemented. This study made use of the mixed non-probability sampling methods. A purposive sampling technique was used with a specific purpose in mind of doing the research in wards that had enjoyed NGO support for at least five year or more. The study purposively identified two wards in the district that have enjoyed NGOs support in the form of training and establishment of sustainable livelihoods projects, training in community empowerment, project management, project start up grants, entrepreneurial skills, and community sustainability. Three NGOs that have been implementing development interventions in the two Wards were selected. The study recognised the possibilities of bias associated with sampling. Due care was taken to purposively identify Wards with villages that have gone through more than five years of continuous NGO

community development support. From these villages, a total of 28 households were randomly selected to respond to the household questionnaires. A face to face interview was conducted with identified female heads of households. The purpose of this questionnaire was to examine demographic characteristics, knowledge on hazards and disasters, types of hazards and disasters in the area, the effects of hazards and disasters on their livelihoods, what the community and NGOs are doing about hazards and disasters, and achievements and constraints on their disaster risk reduction programmes.

A self administered questionnaire was used for the NGO focal persons. The objective of the questionnaire was seven fold. First, the purpose of the questionnaire was to assess how much the identified organisations have been able to make disaster risk reduction (DRR) an internal priority. Second, the questionnaire sought to assess how effectively the identified organisations were raising awareness and sharing information on disaster risk reduction among staff members. Third, assess how effectively the organisations shared knowledge and education with key stakeholders to build their capacity to respond to hazards. Fourth, assessed how effectively the identified organisations encouraged awareness of, and adaptation to, changing environmental conditions. Fifth, assessed how well prepared local communities were, especially women, to respond and take action in case of disaster. Sixth, assessed how effectively the identified organisations had included cross-cutting issues (such as gender and culture) which may impact on overall disaster risk reduction strategies. Lastly the sought to find out the challenges and/or constraints in the organisations' overall approaches to disaster risk reduction and their recommendations as to how the challenges could be overcome in the future.

## 5. Findings

### 5.1. Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

A total of 28 female household heads (FHH) were interviewed from the two wards. The two wards have a combined household population of 1654, of which 322 households were headed by females and eligible for study. The characteristics of the female heads of households (FHH) interviewed are shown in Table 1. Approximately 9/28 (32.14%) of all the female heads of households' respondents were aged between 46 - 55 years at the time of interview, 6/28(21.43%) were aged between 35 – 46 years, while the age ranges 56 – 65 and 65 plus years had 5/28(17.86%) each. There were no respondents aged between 18 – 25 years. The majority of the respondents had attained primary education. Sixteen respondents had (57.14%) had primary education, while 8/28 (28.57%) had secondary education. Only one respond (3.57%) had attained college/university education while 3/28(10.71%) indicated that they never attended school. Three quarters of the respondents were widowed, 21/28(75%), while 3/28(10.71%) were divorced. Two respondents (7.14%) had never been married, while a similar number married but husbands were away for a period exceeding six months. All respondents 28(100%) have been residing in their respective wards for periods of years and more.

Variable	Frequency FHH	N (%)
Type of respondents		
- Female households heads	28	100
Age		
18 – 25 years	0	0
26 – 35 years	3	10.71
36 – 45 years	6	21.43
46 – 55 years	9	32.14
56 – 65 years	5	17.86
66+	6	17.86
Marital status		
Married – but husband staying away in the last 6 months	2	7.14
Separated	0	0
Widowed	21	75
Divorced	3	10.71
Never married	2	7.14
Level of education		
Never been to school	3	10.71
Primary education	16	57.14
Secondary education	8	28.57
College/University	1	3.57
Household size		
1	0	0
2	8	28.57
3	7	25
4	7	25
5	2	7.14

6 +	4	14.29
Median	4 members	
<b>Period of residency in the ward</b>		
>1 year	0	0
1 - 3 years:	0	0
4 - 5 years:	0	0
6 yrs+	28	100

Table 1: Demographic characteristics of respondents N=28

### 5.2. Type of Shelter

From table 2 below, a combined total of 71.17% had safe structures of brick under asbestos/iron sheets, while just 10.71% had pole and dagger structures under thatch.

Shelter type	Frequency	Percentage
Brick under asbestos	9	32.14
Brick under iron sheets	11	39.3
Brick under thatch	2	7.14
Brick under tiles	0	0
Pole and dagger under asbestos	3	10.71
Pole and dagger under iron sheets	0	0
Pole and dagger under thatch	3	10.71
Total	28	100

Table 2: Type of shelter N=28

### 5.3. Main Source of Income by Season

Remittances are a major source of income for 7(25%) during the dry season while an equal number of respondents derive their income from crop farming and micro business during the dry season 6(21.43%) in each case. The majority of respondents 15(53.57%) derive their income from crop sales during the rainy season, while 5 (17.86%) and 4(14.29%) cited remittances and casual labour respectively as their sources of income during the rainy season. Table 3 below shows the distribution of the main sources of income by season.

Source of income	Dry season		Rainy season	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Crop farming	6	21.43	15	53.57
Livestock farming	3	10.71	1	3.57
Micro business	6	21.43	1	3.57
Casual labour	4	14.29	4	14.29
Artisan	0	0	0	0
Salaried/fixed employment	0	0	0	0
Remittances	7	25	5	17.86
Other – NSSA	2	7.14	2	7.14
Total	28	100	28	100

Table 3: Main sources of income by season N=28

From the above analysis, it could mean that knowledge about causes and effects of weather related hazards and their mitigation strategies become critical to most female headed families as their main sources of income are derived from sale of farm produce.

### 5.4. Monthly income

A total of 7(25%) of respondents earn US\$30 a month, while a combined total of 21(75%) of respondents earn between US\$30 – 100. None of the respondents earn more than US\$100 a month. Table 4 below shows the average monthly incomes.

Monthly income	Frequency	Percentage
less than 30	7	25
30 – 50	9	32.14
51 – 100	12	42.86
101 – 200	0	0
201 – 400	0	0

401 plus	0	0
Total	28	100

Table 4: Average monthly incomes

N=28

5.5. Main Expenditure Line Items

When respondents were asked about their main expenditure line items, the majority 17(60.71%) spent their income on food, with just 1(3.57%) investing their income into livestock.

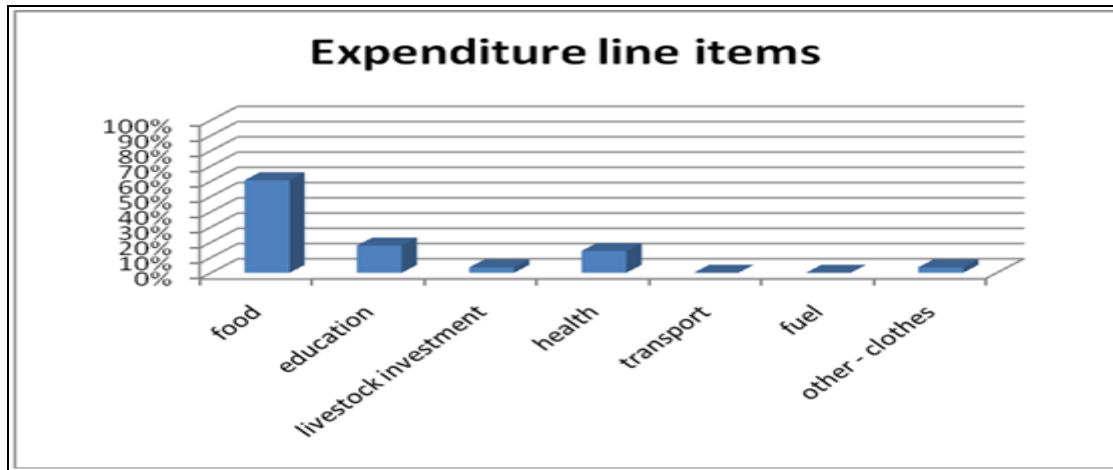


Figure 1: Main expenditure line items N=28

5.6. Main Source of Food by Season

While 13(46.43%) of respondents cited own crop production as their main source of food in the dry season, and an equally significant 11(39.29%) of the respondents rely of food assistance from NGOs during the dry season as well. In the rainy season, 20(71.43%) of respondents entirely rely on own production of food crops as their main source of food. Thus combined seventy five of respondents, 21(75%) actually rely on own production of food crops in both seasons. Table 5 below shows main sources of food by season.

Source of food	Dry season		Rainy season	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Own production – food crops	13	46.43	20	71.43
Own production – livestock	0	0	0	0
Own purchase – food crops	1	3.57	1	3.57
Own purchase – livestock	0	0	0	0
Relief assistance from NGOs	11	39.29	5	17.86
Gifts from family/friends	3	10.71	2	7.14
Total	28	100	28	100

Table 5: Main sources of food by season

N=28

Again, from the above analysis, it could mean that knowledge about causes and effects of weather related hazards and their mitigation strategies become critical to most female headed families as their main sources of food are derived from own production of food crops.

5.7. Types of Hazards in the Wards

Different types of hazards were identified in the two wards. A significant number of the respondents 15(53.57%) felt that erratic rainfall was a major hazard in their ward affecting their crop and animal production, while fifty percent 14(50%) identified drought as a second major hazard affecting their livelihoods in the two wards. An equal number of respondents 11(39.29%) rated land degradation and HIV and AIDS as joint third hazards in the area while 8(28.57%) felt extreme temperatures were a threat in the wards particularly to crops, animals and human life. Fig 4below shows the hazards common in the wards.

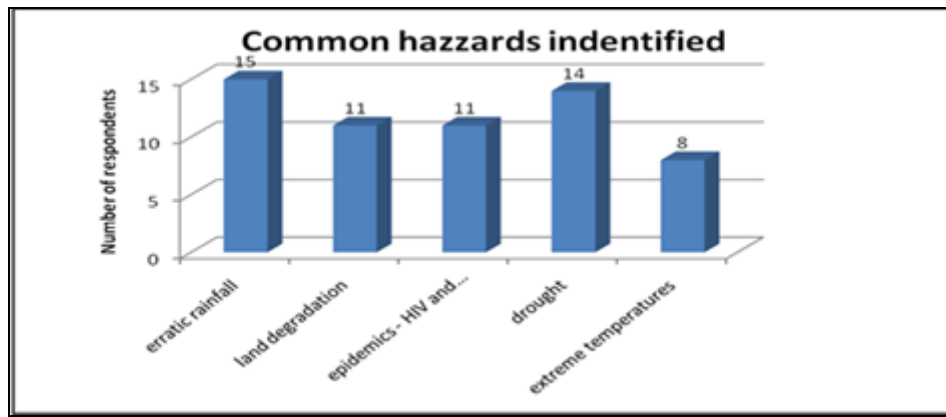


Figure 2: Types of hazards common in the wards

NB: Figures do not add up because it was possible to have more than one response

The fact that all respondents decided to express their opinions on this particular question could mean that there are high levels of confidence amongst community members regarding the issue of hazards.

5.8. Major Causes of Hazards

When respondents were asked about the causes of erratic rainfall, 14(50%) attributed this to general natural changes in weather patterns, while 1 (3.57%) respondent specifically cited global warming. The same response pattern was repeated when respondents were asked about the causes of drought and extreme temperatures, 8(28.58%) and 7(25%) respectively attributed these phenomena to natural weather changes while in each case 1(3.57%) specifically cited global warming. Deforestation was reported by 5(17.86%) and poor farming methods by 3(10.71%) as major contributors to land degradation within the wards, (see Table 6 below).

Hazard	Causes	Frequency	Percentage
Erratic rainfall	Natural Changes in weather	14	50
	Global warming	1	3.57
Land degradation	Deforestation	5	17.86
	Poor farming methods	3	10.71
	River bank cultivation	2	7.14
	Veld fires	2	7.14
	Settlements at watersheds	1	3.37
	Floods	1	3.57
Epidemics - HIV and Cholera Epidemics	HIV - multiple concurrent partners	4	14.29
	Cholera - Poor health practices	2	7.14
	- Poor health facilities	2	7.14
	- Lack of medicine	1	3.57
Drought	Natural weather changes	8	28.58
	Deforestation	3	10.71
Extreme Temperatures	Natural weather changes	7	25
	Global warming	1	3.57

Table 6: Major Causes of hazards

NB: Figures do not add up because it was possible to have more than one response

There was convergence of responses from both the household questionnaires and the FGD and this could reveal high levels of awareness and understanding from all community members as to the nature of hazards which affected their living areas. Promotion of knowledge about hazards is one of the main objectives of any country’s community level disaster risk reduction programmes. Knowledge about hazards has been promoted in several ways as the country responded to disasters such as information, education and communication (IEC) materials, community based training by NGOs, role plays, drama, radio and television programmes and peer education programmes in the case of HIV and AIDS response programmes.

5.9. Effects of Hazards on Household and Community

All twenty eight respondents reported that that they had been affected by at least one of the hazards in the previous two to three years. Twenty three (82.14%), reported experiencing poor yields, 17 (60.71%) reported increasing loss of arable land through land degradation and gully formation while 12 (42.86%) felt that the increasing number of orphans and orphan headed households was a worrying phenomenon in the wards. (See figure. 3).

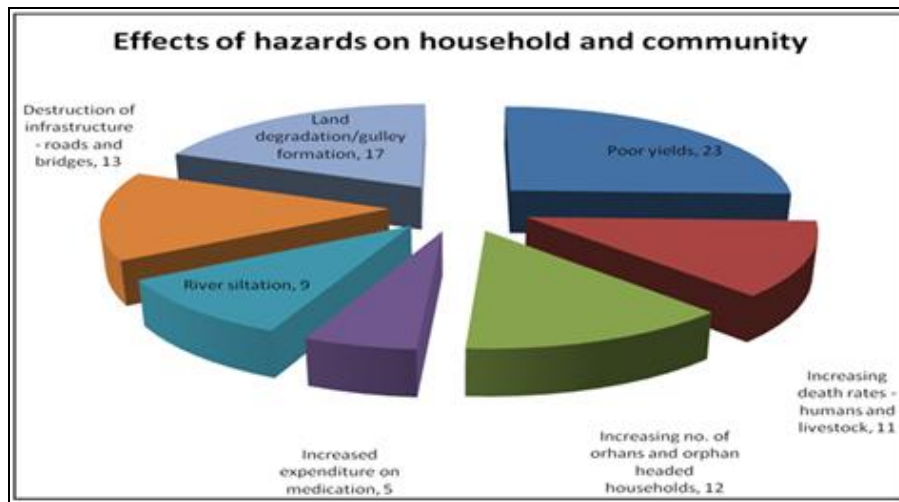


Figure 3: effects of hazards on household and community N=28

It is important to note that all the respondents surveyed expressed their opinions on this particular question and their opinions could have been influenced by repeated exposure and experiences with disasters in the area over long period of time.

5.10. Sources of Information

Respondents were also asked about their sources of information with regards to the knowledge about causes and effects of hazards. Twenty five (89.29%) of respondents reported have got information on hazards and disasters from general community meetings facilitated by NGO and government extension staff, while 3 (10.71%) cited the traditional leadership as their source of information.

5.11. NGO Disaster Risk Reduction Interventions

Three organisations listed in Table 4 below, namely Family Aids Caring Trust (FACT), Christian Care and Towards Sustainable Use of Resources Organisation (TSURO) Trust were identified by 28 (100%) of respondents as having operated in the two wards for over five years and therefore relevant to this study. FACT and TSURO Trust are local NGO's while Christian Care assumes an international outlook.

Organisation	Type of NGO	Nature of work
FACT	• local	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Community care of HIV and AIDS,</li> <li>• Food, income and livelihoods improvement</li> </ul>
Christian Care	• International outlook	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Vulnerable group feeding – Food Aid</li> <li>• Conservation farming</li> </ul>
Tsuro Trust	• Local	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sustainable Agriculture and Resource Management</li> <li>• Community Based Agro Processing and Marketing</li> <li>• Community Health and Nutrition</li> </ul>

Table 7: Types of NGO and intervention focus

All three organisations have a component of improving household food security in their interventions through strategies such as vulnerable group feeding (food aid), conservation agriculture/farming, crop and small livestock production, and agro processing and marketing, while two organisations, FACT and TSURO have a component on community health focusing on nutrition aspects and community care of HIV. Only one organisation, TSURO, focuses on environmental issues through its resource management component, see table 7 above. Lack of diversity of approaches and strategies among NGOs operating in the same wards could mean that there is duplication of efforts and competition among NGOs. One criticism leveled against the NGO approaches by respondents was the apparent lack of synergy between most of approaches and programmes even though they have similar objectives.

### 5.12. NGO Internal Policy on Disaster Risk Reduction

All the 3 organisations surveyed indicated that while DRR was a priority in their work, they did not have a specific policy on disaster risk reduction. Two out of the three organisations however indicated that they include some aspects of DRR in their development and relief policy and planning. Lack of policies and strategies among NGOs to inform their approaches and programmes could mean that NGOs are not well placed to guide communities into effective action when it comes to DRR activities.

### 5.13. Cross Cutting Issues

All three NGO focal persons indicated targeting the vulnerable groups of the community in their interventions. Two organisations indicated that they are specifically working with women and orphans heading households, while one organisation works with the poor in general irrespective of gender.

### 5.14. Contribution of NGO Interventions to Development Outcomes

#### 5.14.1. Status of Assets

When respondents were asked whether their assets had improved as a result of the NGO interventions in the previous 2 – 3 years, 25(89.29%) did not think so while 3(10.71%) indicated that their assets had indeed increased. Of the 3 (10.71%) respondents who indicated that their assets had increased, 1(33.33%) cited the skills they had gained from the trainings conducted by the organisations in conservation farming and were now producing a lot of vegetables and were able to invest some of the money to buy a heifer. The other 2(66.67%) respondents reported that they had benefitted directly from goat pass-on scheme. This could be a reflection that NGO intervention programmes are not having the desired effect in reducing the vulnerability of the community to future hazards as a household's assets continue to be eroded as they dispose of them to meet other basic needs such as food, health and education.

#### 5.14.2. Levels of Participation

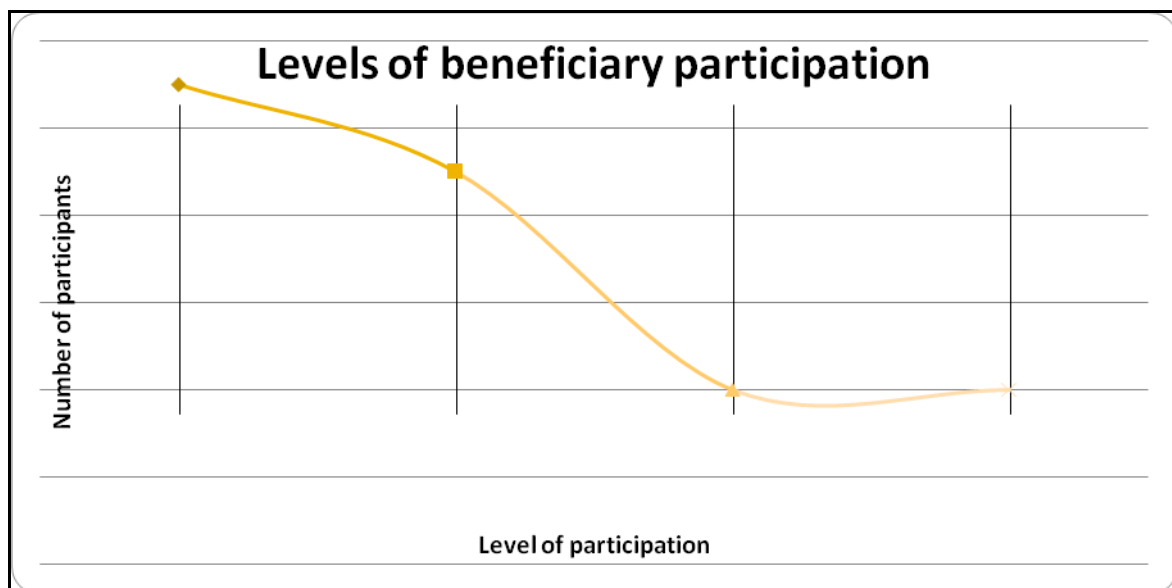


Figure 4: Levels of participation

When asked in which areas respondents mostly participate in, it was noted that they were mainly very active in the project implementation. 11(39.29%) and 9(32.14%) were mainly involved at information sharing and consultation levels of the participation ladder. Figure 4 presents respondents' levels of participation within the participation ladder. This could mean that decision making and initiation within community projects lies solely with community leadership and influential community members. This could also be attributed to the fact that the marginalised groups that include the women, elderly, orphans and other vulnerable children and the sick who are often targeted to benefit from community development do not normally attend meetings therefore will remain recipients of projects. In essence they are the most marginalised and less vocal of all vulnerable groups in any community.

Although in real terms participatory approaches being implemented by NGOs leaves a lot to be desired, the researcher observed some satisfaction being expressed by respondents with their level of participation in the different projects. This is because they view NGOs as donors who are acting on their behalf to provide them with a better life. The FGDs revealed that local people are willing to accept any donor with whatever they have to offer because of their desperate situation. For them to even participate in any project is a privilege as not many donors implement projects in the two Wards and especially those donors focusing on livelihoods. Therefore, those who have received inputs and start up grants for example for small livestock production indicated satisfaction at their level of participation as recipients of the project. On the other hand those who are not benefitting from projects



saw participating in projects as a waste of time as they spend time working for other people and not for themselves. People were looking for tangible outputs that included benefitting in projects or even getting incentives for their role in the projects.

#### 5.14.3. Preparedness and Response

Table 8 below provides reasons for lack of disaster preparedness. When the household respondents were asked whether they were now better prepared to deal with hazards and disasters when supporting NGO's eventually pull out, the majority of respondents 27(96.43%) indicated no. Of the 27 respondents who indicated lack of preparedness for future hazards and disasters, 8(29.63%) cited lack of funding for major disasters in the wards, 6(22.22%) indicated lack of structures within the wards to deal with hazards and disasters. This was confirmed by the district administrator who indicated that DRR activities had not yet been fully devolved to community levels for lack of funding.

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
Lack of funding for major disasters	8	29.63
No community level structures manage hazards and disasters	6	22.22
Lack of continuity of NGOs programmes	6	22.22
Little knowledge and skills to manage disasters	3	11.11
Lack of cohesion and unity among community members	4	14.81

Table 8: Reasons cited for lack of preparedness

#### 5.15. Challenges and Gaps in NGO Risk Reduction Interventions

All three organisations indicated that they did not have a DRR policy in place to guide the formulation and implementation of their DRR activities. This could have affected their ability to raise funds and develop their human skills base to fully role out and support DRR activities. Only 1 NGO focal person indicated that he had seen and read the Government's Civil Protection act developed in 1989 to guide disaster response in Zimbabwe. Another challenge was that the absence of community level structures for disaster risk management. The reason for their non availability was due to prohibitive costs in setting up and sustaining community level DRR activities. For the 2 organisations that are including some aspects of DRR in their development and relief programmes, they cited prohibitive costs in rolling out an all hazards approach to disaster risk management. This was also corroborated by 8(29.63%) of household respondents who cited lack of funding for major hazards and disasters affecting the wards. This could mean that donors were looking for quick impact projects and avoiding long term commitments to building the resilience of poor communities to respond to future hazards. This could be another factor hindering the effective implementation of DRR in communities. This was confirmed by the district administrator who indicated that DRR activities had not yet been fully devolved to community levels for lack of funding.

## 6. Discussion and Analysis

This study sought to assess the effectiveness of NGO approaches in reducing vulnerability of rural female headed households to disasters in Chimanimani District in Zimbabwe. Its main objectives were to find out the different approaches used by NGOs in Chimanimani and to evaluate their effectiveness in reducing the vulnerability of female headed households to disasters. The study also sought to establish the challenges faced by NGOs in their community disaster risk reduction efforts in wards 9 and 17 and to collect and collate the most common types of hazards and disasters in the wards. The study used a qualitative research design to discuss responses from respondents. The study found out that there are a number of NGOs who have been working in the same wards for periods longer than 5 years implementing similar interventions designed to assist female headed households cope with the effects of climate related hazards such as drought, extreme temperatures and land degradation; and also assisting communities to mitigate the effects of HIV and AIDS. The study also found that there was no meaningful participation of women beneficiaries particularly at the higher levels of the participation ladder such as decision making and initiating action which are considered as the highest form of empowerment. Another finding was that many NGOs operating in the two wards did not have DRR policies, strategies and frameworks to inform their programmes hence they were not well placed to guide communities into effective DRR planning, implementing, monitoring and evaluation. The study recommended that the overall framework for the promotion, coordination and execution of disaster management in Zimbabwe be made available to all NGOs work in the relief and development sector and that there is need for effective and meaningful community participation so as to ensure community empowerment essential to sustain disaster resilience.

## 7. Conclusions and Recommendations

A good basic know-how on hazards and disasters was demonstrated in the wards where NGOs were implementing DRR activities and credit is given to community level trainings carried out by NGOs in partnership with government extension workers. However this knowledge needed to be strengthened further by developing specific trainings on causes and effects hazards such as weather variability, climate change and drought. The impact of hazards and disasters cut across all sections of the society and leaves a few untouched. Its effects on poor households especially those headed by females include loss of assets, for example land degradation and livestock; crop damage, poor yields, school dropouts, increase in disease outbreaks and increase in cost of medication. With the NGO livelihoods programmes in place in the wards, those who had received agricultural inputs and start up grants for example for small livestock production meant that the effects of hazards become less severe as periods of food deficit become shorter, freeing up resources for other household needs such as school fees and medication. As much as NGOs have made these

achievements, they faced challenges in achieving a satisfactory level of effectiveness due to lack of financial, technical and human capacity; and as well as an enabling policy environment to mainstream DRR into their development and relief programmes.

The following recommendations were therefore respectfully made that the:

- The National Civil Protection officers such as Civil Protection Unit, Provincial and District Civil Protection Officers needed to increase information sharing with civil society organisations, local and international NGOs in order to guide them access the overall framework for the promotion, coordination and execution of disaster management in Zimbabwe.
- The NGO management needed to put in place dedicated programme units headed by programme managers to take overall responsibility for the development, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of disaster management; i.e. development and management of disaster mainstreaming and fundraising policies and strategies in their organisations.
- The local authorities needed to ensure that comprehensive cross sector assessments, planning and implementation were undertaken within their districts before any disaster risk reduction activities could be undertaken. Understanding the diverse underlying causes of vulnerability and disaster and crisis risks required holistic assessments, planning and implementation across various sectors.
- The NGO management needed to maintain focus on disaster education. Sufficient and professionally trained staff in the technical aspects of disaster hazards needed to be put in place so that they could be well placed to guide communities into effective action.
- NGO management needed to identify and create synergies with other interventions elsewhere in their implementation areas and with local authorities so as to create continuity in their programmes. Creating synergies helped both NGOs and communities to respond effectively to the multi-effects of hazards and disasters, avoiding duplication of activities, retaining lessons learnt, and sustaining community structures when an intervention ended and therefore avoiding reinventing the wheel when new programmes came on board.
- NGO management needed to ensure that there was effective community participation in all aspects of programme development. It was therefore recommended that participation be a matter of organisational policy where guidelines to ensure full and meaningful participation within communities were developed and effected. Strategies for implementation needed therefore to be effectively communicated among project staff through trainings and induction programmes. Taking this position ensured the organisations commitment to participation both as a process and an end in itself to programme service delivery.
- NGO management needed to ensure that their technological approaches were appropriate to the gender, biological, social and economic needs of beneficiaries. Most respondents indicated that some approaches used by one of the NGO were labour intensive and therefore not appropriate for old women who then resorted to hiring labour which was becoming expensive to them.

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