

ENVIRONMENTAL CHANGE AND MASS VIOLENCE: TOKWE MUKORSI AND FOOD SECURITY IN RURAL MWENEZI, ZIMBABWE

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Abstract:

This study seeks to identify features of environmental change in Mwenezi District and explore approaches to food security in the face of natural disasters with the aim of unmasking mass violence that occurred as a result of the flooding of Tokwe Mukorsi Dam. Mwenezi is a multi-cultural district comprising the Nambia, Shona, Ndebele, Venda and Shangani ethnic groups who are intermingled yet each has strong cultural traits. The District, which falls in Zimbabwe's geographical region 5, which receives very little rainfall, has faced numerous environmental challenges. As a result of little food resources and given the recent flooding disaster at Tokwe Mukorsi Dam, the District is prone to mass violence where it comes to resource sharing. Network referencing was used to select 40 respondents among members of Mwenezi District to respond to a self-administered questionnaire interview schedule. Respondents of 40 years and above, and who have stayed in the District for more than 30 years were considered credible and had experienced sufficient environmental changes and episodes of mass violence. Six interviewees (3 males and 3 females) aged 60 and above, among the victims were selected and interviewed. The kraal heads (or chiefs), the district agricultural research and extension (AGRITEX) officer, the District environmental management (EMA) officer, World Vision and CARE non-governmental social welfare organisation officers were interviewed for their expert ground experience on environmental change and food security in the District. Direct observation was used to 'ground truth' evidence of environmental change. Evidence of environmental change include silted rivers, extinct plant, animal and bird species, failure of some traditional crops, shortages of pastures, firewood and water. Observation was that flooding at Tokwe Mukorsi Dam created huge scarcity and human rights problems in the district. It is recommended that the Government of Zimbabwe should demonstrate a will power to help Mwenezi people cope with disaster and get back on their lives managing their food issues.

Keywords: Environmental change, food insecurity, coping strategies, modern approaches, mass violence.

Introduction

Climate change, resulting in food insecurity has affected every sector of the economy and is heavily felt by poor communities such as Mwenezi District in Zimbabwe. Indications of climatic change in form of environmental changes are quite visible in the district and these include reduced grazing lands, droughts, drying out of wetlands, silted rivers, failure of some crops and excessive heat. The district has been experiencing perennial droughts and this has negatively impacted on the livelihood of the people as well as reduced production levels of livestock and productivity at large. According to Zimbabwe Vulnerability Assessment Committee (ZIMVAC) Mwenezi District was rated number three on food insecurities. Mwenezi District is found in region five which experiences erratic rainfall pattern which is not adequate for crop production. Production of small grain such as millet and sorghum that are drought tolerant is common in the district. However, even with the construction of Tokwe Mukorsi Dam to harness water, shortages of food have not been reduced in-fact, Tokwe Mukorsi has ushered in a different kind of mass violation to the community.

Background

Agro-ecological zones are land areas representing unique combinations of homogenous agro-climate, ecology, soil units and agricultural activities (FAO, 1978). Climate is a prime factor that exerts major influence and control over vegetation, soil type, water resources and ultimately human activities. Earlier work by Vincent and Thomas, (1960) divided Zimbabwe into five agro-ecological zones, with best agricultural suitability being highest in Region 1 and least in Region 5. Spatial distribution of average rainfall was the basis of this classification. An Agro-ecological Zone is a land resource mapping unit, defined in terms of climate, landform and soils, and/or land cover, and having a specific range of potentials and constraints for land use (FAO 1996). Several techniques have been employed to achieve that, but usually climate takes an overriding influence. The full knowledge of one's ecological environment has been quite handy in weighing land use planning options as well as land and water resources management practices. Mwenezi District is found in region five which is prone to erratic rainfall pattern which is not adequate for crop production. As a result of low productivity, resource sharing is bound to cause friction among community members. This presentation shall unmask the kind of mass violence that Mwenezi experiences as a result of food and water shortages.

Study Area

Masvingo Province

Masvingo is one of the ten provinces in Zimbabwe found in the drier south-eastern lowveld of the country. The province has an area of 56,566 km² and a population of approximately 1.3 million (CSO, 2002). There are seven administrative districts run by Rural District Councils (RDCs), namely Bikita, Chiredzi, Chivi, Gutu, Masvingo, Mwenezi and Zaka. The province is predominantly semi-arid, rainfall is minimal, highly variable/erratic and uncertain making the province prone to droughts. The bulk of the province is set as region 5 in the country's climatic agro-ecological regions. Though most of the province is generally dry, it does possess some of the most agriculturally fertile soils, inland water bodies and river systems (Save, Runde,

Mwenezi, Mutirikwi and Limpopo river systems dominate the drainage system in the province), drought tolerant and sturdy vegetation like Mopani trees, and very rich natural pastures (Murwendo and Munthali, 2008). The dominant agricultural activities include subsistence cultivation of drought resistant cereal crops (sorghum, rapoko, millet, and some varieties of maize) and cattle rearing (and commercial cattle ranching) (Simba, 2012a; Wikipedia, 2012).

Statement of problem

There is evidence of environmental change in Mwenezi District as a result of climate change observed over the years. These changes include silted rivers, extinct plant, animal and bird species, failure of some traditional crops, shortages of pastures, firewood and water. Mwenezi District has experienced food shortages as a result and the district being multi-cultural comprising the Nambia, Shona, Ndebele, Venda and Shangani ethnic groups who are intermingled yet each has strong cultural traits, friction has arisen especially with the Tokwe Mukorsi Dam flooding disaster. This presentation explores the environmental changes and the mass violence that occur during resource sharing. The research brings to the fore the dimension of mass violence introduced by Tokwe Mukorsi Dam construction and its bursting early 2014.

Aim

This study seeks to identify features of environmental change in Mwenezi District and explore approaches to food security with the aim of unmasking mass violence that occur due to lack of adequate food compounded by disasters.

Objectives

1. To identify features of environmental change in Mwenezi District in Zimbabwe.
2. Explore approaches to food security employed by people in Mwenezi.
3. Unmask mass violence that occur due to lack of adequate food made complex by disaster.

Research Questions

1. What are the observable features of environmental change in Mwenezi District?
2. What are the different approaches that people of Mwenezi have employed to ensure food security?
3. What kind of violence has befallen Mwenezi as a result of food inadequacy due to failure of some mitigation strategies?

Methodology

Network referencing was used to select 40 respondents among members of Mwenezi District to respond to a self-administered questionnaire interview schedule. Respondents of 40 years and above, and who have stayed in the District for more than 30 years were considered credible and had experienced sufficient environmental changes and episodes of mass violence. Six

interviewees (3 males and 3 females) aged 60 and above, among the victims were selected and interviewed. The kraal heads (or chiefs), the district agricultural research and extension (AGRITEX) officer, the District environmental management (EMA) officer, World Vision and CARE non-governmental social welfare organisation officers were interviewed for their expert ground experience on environmental change and food security in the District. Direct observation was used to 'ground truth' evidence of environmental change.

Findings

Global warming will lead to higher temperatures and changes in rainfall, and this in turn will modify the extent, sustainability and productivity of land suitable for agriculture. The application of a set of temperature and rainfall sensitivity scenarios have revealed a modest increase of cultivable rain-fed land for temperature increases up to 2 °C on a global scale. If temperature increases further but precipitation patterns and amounts remain at current levels, the extent of cultivable rain-fed land starts to decrease. When both temperature and rainfall amounts increase, the extent of cultivable rain-fed land increases steadily (Le Houérou et al. 1993, Kannangara, 1998).

Zimbabwe is grouped into five Agro-ecological zones or Natural Regions (NRs) according to rainfall patterns. Natural regions I, II, and III are areas of higher agricultural potential and NRs IV and V are erratic rainfall areas hence of poor agricultural potential. People in these regions experience long periods of hunger throughout the year due to crop failure. The poor distribution of rainfall resulting in food shortages and extreme poverty led to the development of water harnessing strategies for irrigation schemes in Zimbabwe to enhance food security and rural livelihoods of its people. Smallholder irrigation schemes in Zimbabwe are divided into two categories namely, supplementary, which is part-time irrigation in nature and the full production are full time irrigation schemes.

Tokwe Mukorsi

One of the most widely upheld recommendation for agricultural development, food security and growth has been the harnessing of water and the development of irrigation schemes in Zimbabwe (Zawe 2000). As a way of mitigating climate change and water shortages the Zimbabwean government set out to build a dam at Tokwe Mukorsi in Mwenzezi District. Construction of the Tokwe-Mukorsi dam began in the early 1990s, but came to a halt in 2002 at the start of Zimbabwe's economic woes. The dam was meant to bring relief to the drought prone Masvingo province. On completion, the dam should have been the largest in Zimbabwe, bearing in mind that Lake Kariba is "shared" with Zambia. Construction is estimated at US\$200 million and the dam is expected to carry nearly 2 million cubic litres of water, and a flood area covering more than 9,600 hectares, larger than the nearby Lake Mutirikwe which has a total flood area (when full) of 9,100 hectares. Construction resumed in 2009, but experienced numerous delays and deadline extentions. When the heavy rains of 2014 caught up with the project, still incomplete, disaster struck.

Despite being made a 'high priority project' at Independence (1980) because of Masvingo's dry weather, construction of the Tokwe-Mukosi Dam did not begin until 12 years later (1992), and was halted 10 years later in 2002 when the government claimed to have run out of more money. Construction resumed under the GNU government in 2009 and missed several deadlines until the heavy rains of the 2014 rain season caught up with the project.

Zinwa indicated during oral evidence that indigenous contractors usually bring equipment which would break down in two or three days time. In such an event, they are given advance payment, but still do not repair the broken equipment. Zinwa resort to engaging a sub contractor with equipment to assist the non performing contractor instead of cancelling the contract. Contracts were awarded to companies already working on other projects e.g Multiforce awarded a contract to construct the Beitbridge pipeline in 2007 when it was struggling to complete Bubi-Lupane Dam awarded in 2005. As a result, it was disaster over more disaster, with government last year saying it did not have \$12m to pay for the concrete lining to be installed prior to the rains last year.

During the land resettlement programme the government could have provided land for the people, but instead- the Zanu (PF) bosses themselves were allocating the land to themselves, with President Robert Mugabe himself and his Justice Minister, Emmerson Mnangagwa, implicated in the land-grab in Nuanetsi Ranch, with their partner in crime Billy Rautenbach.

Only last year in October 400 families (equivalent to about 2,500 individuals) were moved, according to Irin News, to Nuanetsi Ranch. The ranch is some 100km away from their ancestral homes and each household was given a four-hectare plot of uncleared land and between US\$3,000 and \$8,000 as compensation for their previous property. The area lacks schools, shops, boreholes and toilets.

So they had to build pole and dagga (mud) huts for shelter, use the bush for toilets, and, with the onset of the rainy season, they needed to plant for food, but they were still busy clearing the land of trees and bushes using their bare hands, axes and hoes.

According to Irin News, Tasara Wamambo, the director and founder of Tokwe-Mukosi Rehabilitation and Resettlement Trust (TMRRT), the government failed to construct promised infrastructure such as schools, clinics, cattle dip-tanks and shops, before resettling families.

About 150 children were missing out on schooling as a result of the relocations and a number of them were unable to write their final examinations. Life should not be hard for these gallant people who have sacrificed their land, developments, relationships and culture,” said Wamambo.

“Their momentous sacrifice allows for the development of the dam and the nation. Thus the people need to be treated in the best regard. By seeking to re-establish them into the new community, the people will not be disadvantaged. As it stands, over 60 000 families are in desperate need of assistance due to persistent rains and flooding in Masvingo and surrounding areas.

Some families were then relocated to Chingwizi Transit Camp where life was not easy as episodes of violence were witnessed. The Community Tolerance Reconciliation and Development (COTRAD) on August 4, 2014, gave a report of the violence. COTRAD greatly condemns the use of violence in resolving the long overdue impasse at Chingwizi transit camp. The civil unrest between the citizens, police and soldiers is totally unacceptable as the latter should be responsible for maintaining peaceful environments for the general populace in Zimbabwe. On July the 30th the Chingwizi victims through mass advocacy demonstrated against the relocation of the clinic which was serving more than 20 000 victims of the floods and blocked vehicles carrying medical equipment and drugs off the camp site.

Police brutality was heavily unleashed unto the weaponless and defenceless citizens who have for long being waiting for the government to act responsibly by way of providing descent shelter and food to the victims of the floods. Police violently tried in vain to disperse the villagers and this resulted in the disarming and thrashing of the police as well as burning of 2 vehicles belonging to the police.

COTRAD greatly condemn the use of violence as a mechanism to solving disputes and demand the government of Zimbabwe provide adequate space for relocation without moving services which in turn compromise the living standards of the victims who are already stifled by the way they are living in the transit camp.

Health is a basic need that must be guaranteed to every citizen by the government hence relocation of the clinic to Naunetsi ranch at the expense of the 3000 households was unwarranted. The use of force by the police and soldiers in assaulting the villagers and burning the tents in a bid to disperse the villagers is barbaric and in acceptable act from the uniformed forces. As part of COTRAD aim in maintain transparency and public accountability the organization is in the process of engaging the provincial government and other relevant

stakeholders in this process with the intention of restoring sanity and ensuring elected leaders are responsible to their communities.

In this process COTRAD urges the government, as a matter of urgency, to mobilise resources to compensate the villagers and speed up the relocation process without compromising constitutional provisions of the citizens. It is now almost 7 months since about 3000 families which is about 20 000 scores of villagers were forced to evacuate the flood basin of the Tokwe-Mukosi Dam in Masvingo province to the Chingwizi Transit camp in Mwenezi district of Masvingo province with virtually no end to the cause in sight.

There is a lack of preparedness to disasters by the government of Zimbabwe and the capacity of the ministry of social welfare in addressing the challenges faced by various communities across Zimbabwe which have been affected by natural catastrophes. The situation at Chingwizi Transit Camp is deplorable. Government should come up with a solution to the crisis as a matter of some urgency. Sporadic outbursts of violence undermine efforts to successfully relocate the affected people as well as the law enforcement agencies. Government should be honest in its dealings with the Tokwe-Mukorsi flood victims.

PETITION FROM THE PEOPLE OF CHINGWIZI CAMP 16 July 2014

Background

We, the people of Chingwizi Camp were displaced from our homes because of floods caused by the construction of the Tokwe-Mukosi dam. We were moved to Chingwizi Camp in February 2014 and currently over 2000 families stay in the camp.

The government promised to give 17 hectares of land to each family that was displaced and compensation after valuation of each household. To-date only a few families have been allocated 4 hectares of land each for residence and farming. The majority of them remain in the overpopulated camp. The provincial administration office is forcing them to move to one hectare pieces of land which is not enough for farming. The provincial office has resorted to cruel methods to force people out of the camp, methods such as:

- 1) Denying people food and starving them
- 2) Limiting their access to water
- 3) Barring and diverting donations intended for assisting these flood victims
- 4) Blocking toilets
- 5) Closing the satellite school near the camp
- 6) Closing down the clinic near the camp.

The government of Zimbabwe is called upon to address these people's plight. Immediately required is compensation for removal, enough tents for shelter, allocation of land, protection of families from further displacement, provision of water, toilets, schools, clinics and food. These flood victims lack basic needs and their rights are violated while they stay in this squalid situation in the camp.

Conclusion

Environmental changes in Mwenezi are a sign that climate change is real. Efforts at mitigating its impact have ushered in different dimensions of successes and challenges. As a coping strategy, the shift to small grain has yielded some modicum of success in boosting yield. Harnessing of water in form of constructing the Tokwe Mukorsi Dam has resulted in a disaster that saw the community around the dam basin suffer flooding and having to be relocated to Chingwizi transit camp fraught with its own challenges. Signs are glaring that the Zimbabwean government is not very ready to deal with disasters that befall communities as a result of climate change.

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Senga

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27 August 2015

Dear Dr Nyawo

Re: Acceptance of your article into the volume on Climate Change

I would like to inform you that your article, **Copying with Climate Change in Mberengwa District: Women and Traditional Knowledge**, has been accepted for inclusion in the forthcoming book titled: **Climate Change, Environmental Change and Community Development in Zimbabwe**. The book will be published by MSU Press.

Would you kindly attend to comments from reviewers and re-submit the article by 15 September 2015.

Yours faithfully



Emmanuel A Makadho

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**Copying with Climate Change through Traditional Knowledge: The case of
women in Mberengwa District**

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Abstract

Effects of climate change are wide-ranging and complex. Climate change continues to cause a warming trend, average temperature increase, a decrease in rainfall in the Sahel, droughts as well as an increase in rainfall in east central Africa. Such unpredictability of the climate has impacted on food production and poverty greatly. From a food security perspective, sub-Saharan Africa is arguably the most vulnerable due to its reliance on rain-fed agriculture for food and economic growth. Mberengwa is a district in Midlands Province in Zimbabwe, sub-Saharan Africa. The district is in agro-ecological region 5. Agro-ecological zones are delineated by soil type, rainfall and other climatic factors. Region 5 receives the least rainfall which is also erratic and unreliable, soils are sandy and infertile. Women as household care givers have the burden of feeding the family. In Mberengwa women have turned to traditional wisdom to continue to put food on the table in the face of climate change. Using desktop, interviews, focus group discussions, the researcher set out to find out the extent of the impact of climate change in Mberengwa and document the strategies that women have resorted to in coping with effects of climate change. Purposive and convenient sampling methods were used to select women and men of different age groups from 12 wards in Mberengwa District. Findings are that traditional