

ZGC PRESS BRIEFING ON GENDER ASSESSMENT OF CYCLONE IDAI

INTRODUCTION

The aftermath of the cyclone naturally triggered a response mechanism spearheaded by Government with a lot of support from Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) development partners and individuals. And indeed, a lot of work was done. Roads and bridges were temporarily repaired such that almost all parts of the affected areas are now accessible; tents and homes were erected to at-least provide shelter for everyone; public facilities such as schools, clinics, business centres were rebuilt, electricity and communications lines were reconnected and most importantly, food, clothing and psycho-social support services were provided. As I speak, we understand that I can safely confirm that all stakeholders who are responding are striving to meet minimum humanitarian standards, and conditions including human rights for the Chimanimani community to try and carry on with their lives.

Having said that, allow me to unreservedly express our gratitude to all the institutions and individuals who are working tirelessly to bring back life to Chimanimani to normal. And in the same spirit, I would like to commend all Zimbabweans and the international community for supporting, in so many ways, the people of Chimanimani and all those who were affected by Cyclone Idai. I also wish to acknowledge the commitment from Government, CSOs, development partners and even individuals, to work towards restoring minimum requirements for human life by international standards in the affected areas.

I also wish to acknowledge the resilience that the mission noted among the people affected by Cyclone Idai especially women and girls. Many continue to make very progressive steps towards personal and communal rehabilitation by way of rebuilding their own homes and banana plantations; assisting in the response mechanism such as rebuilding roads and other public infrastructure; actively participating in the provision of psycho-social support services as well as assisting several visitors to appreciate what really happened on that fateful night.

Therefore, while we are in the process of compiling a full report on the mission, we thought, together with Oxfam, that it was prudent to have this press briefing in which we intend to share our preliminary findings and recommendations with the media and our stakeholders. **And please note that this is a preliminary report. A full report will be shared with all our stakeholders and will also be made public as soon as it is finalised.**

As directed by its functions, the Commission in partnership with Oxfam Zimbabwe, visited Manicaland province, Chimanimani from the 19th to the 25th of May 2019 with an objective to appreciate the effects of Cyclone Idai from a gender perspective. The aim was to assess and identify key gender, protection and safeguarding gaps and produce recommendations that will increase the capacity of Government and humanitarian actors to adequately respond to gender inequalities and improve the effectiveness and efficiency of the response mechanisms to Cyclone Idai.

During the gender assessment of the response mechanisms, the mission considered the following broad topics:

ACCESS TO SERVICES AND RESOURCES

(1) SHELTER AND GBV

Information on access to services and resources was provided by Government, local and INGO staff working in Chimanimani. We found that humanitarian efforts are striving to ensure that at least every individual has a roof over their heads. There are concerns relating to types of shelter provided in terms of convenience. These include:

- a) Tents – the tents have two compartments only, inadequate particularly for parents with grown up children/wards of different genders.
- b) Private homes – those who still have their homes intact are having to accommodate relatives who lost their homes due to limited temporary tent shelters.
- c) There were allegations of sexual harassment during food and non-food distribution. Although this could not be immediately substantiated during our short visit, the Commission is considering to carry out thorough investigations on these allegations. Should such allegations be proved the Gender Commission will facilitate measures to bring the perpetrators to account.
- d) There is no security around the camps. The Camp manager knocks off around 6pm and no security is provided during the night which may pose security risk especially to women and children.
- e) There is no perimeter fence around the camp so trespassers come in and out of the camp without control especially at night. This may expose inhabitants to violence, and sexual abuse by trespassers.
- f) Lack of privacy presents a huge risk of exposure to anti-social behaviour such as sexual abuse as both girls and boys share the same compartment.

Recommendations on shelter

- there is need for more tents to reduce overcrowding and ensure that children of different genders sleep in different tents. .
- Urgently enhance security by establishing a gendered satellite police station at each of these camps and facilitate the setting up of neighbourhood watch committees managed by the camp inhabitants.
- Urgently assist those who are rebuilding their homes which were partially damaged by the cyclone.
- In the long term, there is need to consider other forms of emergency shelter such as a traditional hut, log cabins which can be dismantled and used by the tenants when they relocate to permanent homes. etc.
- Urgently start the process of constructing permanent housing for the survivors since tent accommodation is not sustainable given the approaching winter season.
- The survivors, across genders, should be involved in the relocation process.

(ii) FOOD AND NON-FOOD ITEMS DISTRIBUTION MECHANISMS

The mission noted that there was a lot of aid which came through Government, CSOs, development partners, NGOs, well-wishers including Churches and even individuals. These donations, except some from a few NGOs, were deposited at a single central distribution point. It was from this central distribution centre that all the affected wards would then access respective aid. And considering this system from a gender perspective, we were informed that:

- The distance between the distribution centre and other wards was too long which affected women and girls more than men and boys. Women and girls reported that sometimes they would go back home without any allocations due to the stampede that characterised the access to food and clothing. This meant that women and girls are forced to walk to and from the distribution centre even at night. Men and boys sometimes had to sleep at the distribution centre. In cases where some women and girls decided to sleep at the distribution centre, it triggered violent backlash from their husbands and/or fathers.
- While gender considerations were put in place from the beginning some aid bodies did not fully consider the gender requirements as focus was on saving lives and/or recovery of bodies.
- The central distribution point system meant people with better social connections, (predominantly males) and power were reportedly claiming the best donated goods.
- Donations are also not reaching the most isolated communities.
- It was also alleged that some men who were given responsibility to distribute food and clothing were abusing their power by seeking sexual favours from females in need of the aid.
- There was suspicion from some husbands that their wives could have given in to these sexual demands in turn created domestic violence.
- It was also reported that in the usual instances aid was given to men who were regarded as heads of households. This criterion ended up disadvantaging women and girls headed families as well as women in a polygamous relationships.
- The fact that men predominantly oversee sourcing of assistance and its distribution, of items such as sanitary wear and under-garments, which meet the needs of women and girls ended up being regarded as secondary and at times being completely disregarded.
- Because of this arrangement where men were distributing aid, some older women and men at times ended up receiving sanitary wear at the expense of women and girls.

Recommendations

- Collection of disaster statistics should as much as possible be disaggregated.
- Aid distribution should be decentralised in a manner that will make access to aid as easy and transparent as possible.

- Aid distribution should be based on a proper needs analysis, organised vetting system and downward accountability so that items end up in the correct hands in appropriate quantities as well.
- Women and/or girls should be represented in all response structures and mechanisms especially those relating to aid distribution.
- Aid distribution systems should always be cognisant of the fact that there are women and child headed families just as much as there are women in polygamous marriages who would also need aid.
- Any aid distribution centre should establish distribution mechanisms that are transparent, efficient, effective and most importantly, gender sensitive.
- Most people interviewed preferred donors to distribute the aid directly to beneficiaries since there is not likely to be any favouritism.

HEALTH

Health and gender are always an inseparable matrix and indeed general health of the people in Chimanimani was an area of interest to the mission. It was observed that:

- Some women reported that their reproductive health medication such as birth control pills were swept away leaving them exposed to unplanned pregnancies. The service providers were alleged to not be fully responsive to the special needs of women in this situation.
- While it was noted that more women received psycho-social support, it was also a worrying observation that less men have received this very crucial service especially members of the Civil Protection Unit.
- Elements of anti-social behaviour have also been noted especially on the side of men who at times resort to violence as a way of compensating for the loss that they have suffered.

Recommendations

- It is not clear what coping methods are being used by the affected communities. We observed that most adults are passively relying on donated goods and government distributions. More psycho-social support is needed especially to the victims. And there should be a deliberate strategy to reach out to the men for psycho-social support as many are overwhelmed by denial and the feeling of guilt for ‘failing’ to protect their families in the face of the cyclone. Psycho-social services should also accommodate individuals who have been working with survivors.
- In the meantime, there is an urgent need to sustain supply of primary health services in general and services relating to maternal and reproductive health services for the benefit of women and girls.
- There is a need for government and other organisations operating within the health sector to work closely with the local village health workers for access and distribution of drugs and other health services.
- In the long term, there is a need to establish a district hospital for Chimanimani. The whole district, which is highly populated as well, does not have a district hospital such that emergency cases are referred to Chipinge or Mutare.

LIVELIHOODS

Before the cyclone, Chimanimani was a thriving economic hub with huge banana and macadamia nuts plantations as well as avocados, oranges and many other fruits. The means of livelihood have been affected by cyclone. Artisanal mining was also another source of livelihood for the locals. Some of these economic activities were either severely disrupted or virtually wiped away by flooding. There is need to support the affected communities with agricultural inputs and implements, and introduction of income generating activities.

Recommendations

- There is need for income generating projects that are supportive of women such as vegetable gardens and poultry. This is necessary so that women can have other income generating project for themselves. The support to be provided should be to restore livelihoods and enhance resilience of communities to build their capacity to meet future shocks Rehabilitation of productive agricultural assets such as irrigation facilities as part of the early recovery efforts.

- **Other gender related issues**

The mission also discovered that child marriages is a huge problem in the province. While, the issue does not have a direct relationship with Cyclone Idai, its existence has implications for gender and social relations in the face of natural and other disasters which increase the vulnerability of girls and young women. Prevailing problems imbedded in the cultures of the people particularly their traditional and religious beliefs and practices only serve to exacerbate the situation of certain groups of people within the community, in this case the underage mothers and their children. There is need for a comprehensive field assessment into the gender dynamics which were at play before, during and after Cyclone Idai. Such an assessment will allow for thorough investigations into other pertinent issues such as the allegations of sexual harassment during aid distribution.

Key informants

- Resident Minister for Manicaland
- Provincial Administrator
- District Administrator and representatives of relevant government departments including Civil Protection Unit
- Humanitarian agencies & Civil Society Organisations on the ground including Musasa Project, Padare and development partners.
- Local leaders
- Survivors, men, women and youths

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