



POLICY *Brief*

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Silveira House Jesuit Social Justice and Development Centre



*Enhancing climate
change mitigation
and adaptation
in Rural Zimbabwe*



Draft by David Bote

In the wilderness I shall plant
cedar trees (Isaiah 41:19)

Introduction and Background

Climate change is a serious threat to Zimbabwe's chances of achieving inclusive, prosperous sustainable development. Zimbabwe is broadly characterized by low adaptive capacity due to its low GDP per capita¹, weak institutions, poor health and education systems, high dependency on primary-based production, gender non-inclusive policies, low-access to capital and insurance, and low levels of awareness.² A study by Brazier Zimbabwe contends that the country's average temperatures will rise by about 3 percent and annual rainfall decline by between 5 and 18 percent before the end of the 21st century. Accordingly, current climate changes suggest that Zimbabwe is and shall experience unprecedented weather extremes that have adverse multidimensional impacts on socio-economic, environmental and political facets of human lives. The government of Zimbabwe has made strides towards putting in place a National Climate Policy Framework (2016), the Summary for Policy Makers, Climate Smart Agriculture Manual for Agriculture Education in Zimbabwe (2017) and National Climate Change Response Strategy (2015).

This policy brief is built on an empirical study from five rural districts councils to inform deliberations about climate change mitigation and adaptation in Zimbabwe. Climate Change implications are wide and varied. Rural local authorities are particularly vulnerable as they constitute about 68% of Zimbabweans³, who are mostly dependent on rainfed agriculture for a livelihood. Not only that, Zimbabwe's rural areas constitute a large proportion of women and highest levels of poverty. Swinkels et al (2019) posited that rural extreme poverty is thirteen times higher relative to urban extreme poverty.⁴ Some of local authorities' key service functions such as road maintenance, provision of education and health, sanitation, provision of water, housing and general infrastructure development have been affected. Under these conditions responsive local policies and approaches are vital.⁵

However, little is known on mitigation and adaptation in rural areas. Local governments interface with citizens and host numerous stakeholders, making them a critical cog of national mitigation and adaptation.

Objectives of the Policy Brief

The main objective of this policy brief is to proffer policy recommendations based on the knowledge gathered about the impact of and responses by rural authorities to climate change.

Methodological Approach

The study was qualitative in nature. It used focus group discussions (FDGs) and individual interviews particularly with local policy makers (Councillors) in five rural district councils of Marondera, Bindura, Mhondoro-Ngezi, Umzingwane and Runde. A questionnaire guide was used during the interview process. Secondary data sources such as pamphlets, newspapers, journal articles and other published material complimented the empirical sources.

¹ According to the World Bank, Zimbabwe's GDP/Capita for year 2019 was US\$1464. Due to high levels of inflation experienced in 2019 and 2020 the figure could have declined.

² Ibid

³ Zimbabwe Statistics Agency. 2017. Intercensal demographic survey 2017.

⁴ Swinkels, et al. 2019. Analysis of Spatial Patterns of Settlement, Internal Migration, and Welfare Inequality in Zimbabwe.

⁵ Maupin, A. 2017. The SDG13 to combat climate change: an opportunity for Africa to become a trailblazer? *African Geographical Review*, 36 (2):131-145.

Major Research Findings

1. Local Authorities Adversely Affected and Underprepared

As climate change effects are becoming more pronounced in Zimbabwe, local governments that purposely develop capabilities to tackle and adapt in the new normal are most likely to thrive. Local governments are also being tested as farmers can hardly remit rate payments to councils; citizens are food and water insecure, resources are being diverted for disaster recovery and local economies are struggling. Moreover, most councils struggle with undertaking infrastructure repairs particularly with regard to roads, water systems, building structures and bridges in the wake of adverse weather events. Councilors were particularly concerned with the manner in which the councils are struggling to provide key services.

2. Lack of Robust Localised Mitigation and Adaptation Plans

The Silveira House research findings established that local authorities lack comprehensive locality-relevant climate change mitigation and adaptation plans. In light of this, it is critical for each and every rural district government to develop responses that best suit the circumstances of their context. Key local authorities' policy makers and councillors acknowledged not having documented plans on how their respective wards and the councils at large can deal with the challenges being brought by climate change. Equally, even the Environment Committees in councils seem to not pay concerted attention to the problems being caused by climate change. In that regard, councils have limited policy direction in terms of developing their own plans.

3. Limited Participation by Vulnerable Groups in Climate Change Decision Making;

One major observation from the study is that vulnerable groups are not well-integrated in local authority decision making structures. The study also established that though women constitute the majority of rural dwellers, they are not at the centre of key decision making on key issues such as land ownership and use and water development initiatives, which tend to be harshly impacted by climate change. It was also established that youths tend not to be proactive in local government affairs in the various districts. Concerns of vulnerable populace seem to be considered a priority of government arms such as department of social welfare and development partners.

4. Leadership and Capacitation Gaps;

From the study findings, another peculiar factor was that as much as the interviewees agreed that climate change was devastating their local authorities, there was however no significant leadership in terms of crafting solutions. This a major gap in local areas is the absence of harmonised efforts on championing climate change mitigation and adaptation particularly from policy makers and other key stakeholders in councils. Even the councillors, as ward development leaders, were not playing a role in mitigation and adaptation drives in their own communities.

5. Differential Impact

The study noted that the vulnerable groups in the Zimbabwean context were higher among low-income groups, children, women, persons with pre-existing illnesses, elderly persons and people living with disabilities. Broadly, these people experience manifold, complex and disproportionate risks to their lives and well-being as a result of climate change. Some of the main determinants of exposure are livelihoods (e.g. farmers relying on rain fed production), time spent in the prone areas (many live in these areas), ability to respond to extreme occurrences (often lack the know-how, and other resources to respond), access and condition of infrastructure (often live in poor structures and communities have skeletal infrastructure such as roads, schools and water facilities) and other factors.

6. Water and Food Situation is Dire

A substantial portion of respondents associated climate change with declining food and nutrition as well as water situations in their respective districts. Drier parts of the country (region 4 and 5), particularly the Runde and Umzingwane rural districts are much water stressed relative to the Marondera and Bindura rural districts. Many families are being forced to utilise distant and sometimes unsafe water sources. The findings of the study reveal that hunger is the biggest concern for many rural areas as they have experienced low yields, shortages of food and higher prices of food over the past many years. Some respondents acknowledged a slight increase in the adoption of planting small grains. A decline in the flora and fauna has meant those who supplement their food with foraging can hardly do so. Few households in drier districts like the Runde and Umzingwane are food and nutrition secure.

Even traditionally higher rainfall districts of Bindura and Marondera are experiencing an uptick in food insecurity especially in year 2020. Councillors decried a big percentage in boreholes drying as a result of the receding water table. People, mostly women, are travelling long distances in search of potable water.

7. Weak Mitigation and Adaptation Frameworks;

Though people are now feeling the effects of climate change, they have not made credible responses. As gleaned from the study, climate change is increasing the disaster risk of many parts of the rural areas. For example, public and private infrastructure is now more susceptible to damage by strong wind and rains. Yet, some people still reside in places that are susceptible to floods. This brings into question rural planning and land allocation practices. Equally, rural areas do not have prescribed building (codes) standards for residential structures. This endangers the lives of those who normally put up structures that cannot withstand strong winds and rains. Many farmers are still growing drought prone crops such as maize instead of drought resistance varieties.

8. Scant Local Data

The study also established that rural areas in Zimbabwe suffer from a dire shortage of reliable and timely climatic information. At present, the majority of rural residents rely on information from extension officers and traditional meteorological knowledge systems which hardly disaggregate data. Their major sources of climate related information also include radio weather reports, which tend to provide generalised information.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Rural areas have differential vulnerabilities due to resources endowments, geographical location, technical and financial capacity, governance and political culture, and a host of other factors. Tough policy choices must be made and the following recommendations are offered to local authorities and other stakeholders seeking to promote climate mitigation and adaptation in rural areas of Zimbabwe.

- a. *Climate Mainstreaming:*** Local socio-economic plans are likely to spawn better outcomes if they mainstream climate change mitigation and adaptation. Local government and other institutions operating at the local level need to place climate change at the heart of their plans, rules, policy, regulations and investments thinking. Mainstreaming also means ensuring that existing departments, human resources, systems and structures are well versed with climate issues and they respond accordingly. For example, budget or financial projections need to take into cognisance the impact of climate change.
- b. *Expand Climate Change Communication and Education:*** The success of policy climate change interventions lies in the public having a good understanding of what climate change implications are. Local authorities and institutions should play a leading role in climate communication by ensuring that councillors, development partners, use of social media, community radios, village heads and other local entities become conduits of awareness raising.
- c. *Harmonisation of Approaches:*** Climate change is a cross-cutting challenge that requires broad and harmonised responses within and across various stakeholders. Local councils ought to ensure that their local policies are in sync with the national and regional adaptation and mitigation policies. Equally, inter-institutional and intrainstitutional collaborations are critical.
- d. *Creating and Seizing New Opportunities:*** Rural local policies can help accelerate green-economy investments by incentivising developments of solar power plants, roof-top solar, eco-tourism, biogas, waste-recycling, and restoration of ecosystems. Local authorities owned businesses can also be exemplary by leading the drive in using solar power.
- e. *Local Social Equity Policies:*** Differential impact of climate change requires local authorities to pay attention to those most vulnerable. Local policy instruments can be designed targeting the vulnerable to help them mitigate and adapt. Equally critical is to be considerate of the gendered mitigation and adaptation challenges.

f. *Climate Change Leadership Development:* In order to realise substantive changes on the adaptation and mitigation front, climate change leadership at local levels is essential. Leadership development courses and training targeting local traditional leaders, business community, youth groups, and other local champions can accelerate mitigation and adaptation pace. Development partners and government can play a leading role in climate change leadership capacitation.

g. *G. A Strong Emphasis on Food and Water Security:* Local authorities and government can play a leading role in advocating and incentivising use of water saving irrigation infrastructure and technologies, better management of water bodies (using water bodies status systems) and community based water governance systems. With regard to food security, the government, private companies and local councils may partner with farmers in developing cost-effective agriculture insurance that targets livestock and crops. Models such as crop-index insurance that compensate farmers in the event of poor rains and harvest could be beneficial to rural Zimbabwe.

h. *Building Local Climate Change Database:* It is important to develop a contextspecific climate knowledge database. A critical step forward is to have ward-specific climate knowledge. This requires investments in weather data collection and monitoring, early warning systems, information sharing platforms and global positioning systems data which allows for appropriate policy planning and implementation. A robust climate change aligned knowledge management system is fundamental for local authorities.



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