

Children and Climate Change in Zimbabwe Study

PROJECT CONTRIBUTION FROM INSTITUTE OF ENVIRONMENTAL STUDIES, UNIVERSITY OF ZIMBABWE AND UNITED NATIONS CHILDREN'S FUND, ZIMBABWE

Climate change is one of the biggest threats facing mankind today. It has subjected many Zimbabweans, particularly those who lead agriculture-based livelihoods in the rural areas, to a crisis. Farmers, for instance, can no longer predict planting seasons based on past rain patterns. Observing that climate change has an adverse effect on the development of children and that there are knowledge gaps in our understanding of the same, this piece highlights the perspectives of children in an attempt to include their voices in the conversation.

Children are an especially vulnerable group and are at an increased risk of disease, under-nutrition, and water scarcity. Seventy-three per cent of children in Zimbabwe live in rural areas (ZIMSTAT 2012) and are directly affected by low food crop production, food insecurity and hunger which are made worse by frequent droughts, flooding, and unreliable rainfall patterns. Under-nutrition in children is a major public health problem in the country (Food and Nutrition Council 2010).

The Institute of Environmental Studies, University of Zimbabwe, in partnership with the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), Zimbabwe, carried out a study on the vulnerabilities of children to the impacts of climate change and climate variability in Zimbabwe in 2013. This process involved listening to children's special needs and perspectives so that these may be incorporated into national policies, planning, and practices.

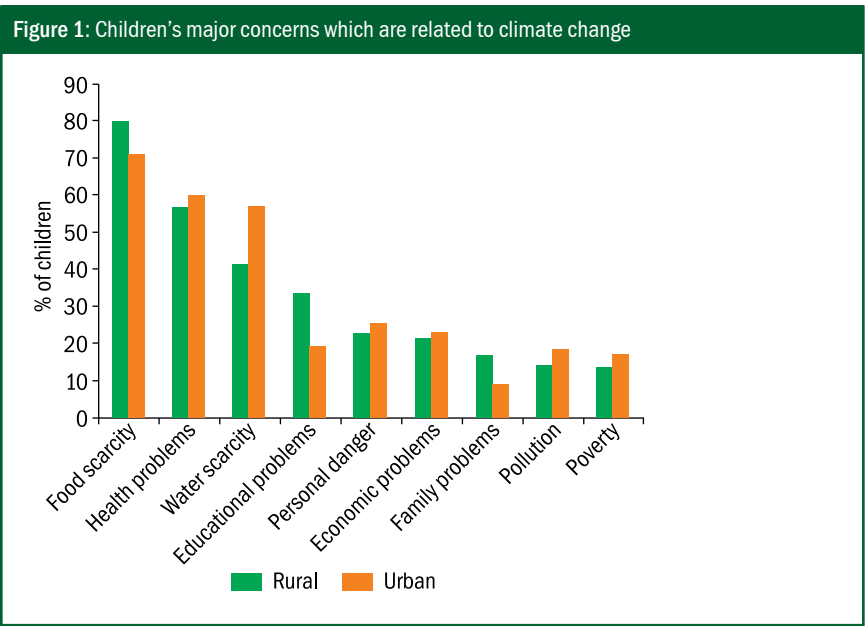
The study consisted of a questionnaire survey administered to 1,229 primary and secondary school children in six sites in marginal regions that are prone to drought and flooding, purposively selected because of their vulnerability to climate change. The questionnaire consisted of four sections: background of the children and their vulnerabilities; children's experiences of the impacts of climate change-related issues; children's knowledge of climate change; and children's perceptions, concerns, and recommendations about climate change.

In addition, qualitative data was gathered through group discussions and interviews with local leaders and teachers to find out more about the situation in the surrounding area on climate change awareness and education.



Findings of the Study

During the study, it was discovered that the children knew a lot about climate change and were concerned about it. Their major concern regarding climate change was food scarcity; other concerns included water scarcity and health and educational problems (Figure 1).



Children were adversely affected by climate change. Direct impacts of droughts include food shortages, hunger and malnutrition, and poverty.

“This area experiences drought every year and a lot of families do not have food.”
“When I am hungry I feel weak and sleepy even when the teacher is talking.”

Seeing the parents struggle to secure food or acquire money to buy food places emotional and psychological stress on the children.

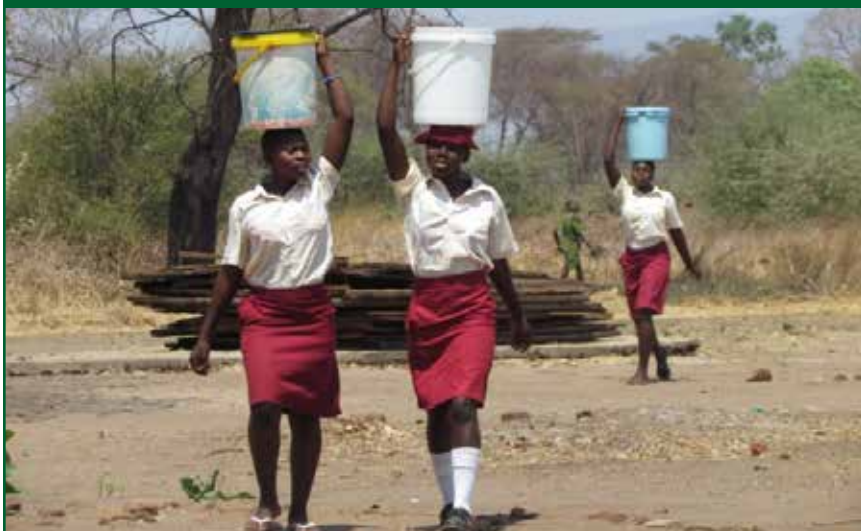
“When there is no food at home you cannot even talk to parents easily. Sometimes you cannot tell them that you have been sent away from school for non-payment of school fees because of fear of making them angry.”

“My brother is at home because his money for school and examination fees was used to buy food.”

Another challenge is water scarcity which has led to reduction in productive time as children have to spend time in terms of waiting for collection of water for basic needs of their households.

“We spend the whole night here waiting to fill our containers. After filling two 20 litre containers there would be no water coming out so we have to wait for up to 20 to 30 minutes for the borehole to recharge 50 litres”

School girls in Mbire, Zimbabwe, carrying water collected from the school borehole to their homes in the village



The study also found that children are interested in contributing to climate change mitigation and adaptation. Some children already engaged in climate change-related activities, especially in school clubs, and they were keen to be more involved. Involvement of school children in research on climate-related issues,

such as manning the weather stations and collecting rainfall records should be encouraged. Some children participated in the policy process, particularly in the development of Zimbabwe's Climate Change Response Strategy.

Children participating in consultations for Zimbabwe's National Climate Change Response Strategy



The study facilitated the incorporation of children's views and concerns into Zimbabwe's National Climate Change Response Strategy as well as their suggested strategies for action to combat climate change and in the process become more resilient to its negative impacts.

Note on contributors: Contributors to this article are Jeanette Manjengwa, Collen Matema, Joice Mataruka, Doreen Tirivanhu, Mufaro Tamanikwa, Amy Wickham, Samson Muradzikwa, and Sara Feresu. Corresponding author e-mail: jmanjengwa@ies.uz.ac.zw

References

- Food and Nutrition Council. (2010). *Zimbabwe National Nutrition Survey. January – February 2010. Preliminary Findings*. Food and Nutrition Council. SIRDC, Harare.
- ZIMSTAT. (2012). *2011 Child Labour Survey Report*. ZIMSTAT, Harare.

