

The context of Sofala and Manica in relation to cyclone Idai response in Mozambique

Summary

In Mozambique, cyclone Idai's strong winds, torrential rain and flooding killed over 600 people and injured more than 1,600 in addition to the destruction of livelihoods and properties in March 2019. OCHA reported 131,600 people are seeking shelter across 136 different displacement sites. Cholera vaccination and Malaria interventions are already underway.

The query put forward is:

What contextual factors (e.g. community structures and dynamics) are relevant in the urban and rural areas affected by cyclone Idai (Sofala and Manica provinces)? How do social and cultural factors shape communication and community engagement strategies across social sectors?

Socio-demographic factors

In Mozambique, people are commonly identified according to ethnolinguistic groups, considering identity to be closely related to language. The main groups in Sofala and Manica are the Shona (mainly Ndau and Manyika) and the Sena, both of Bantu-speaking origin. Mozambican identity tends to be shared with the ethno-linguistic identity, yet trust is often gained through language.

The Sena, Ndau and Manyika share similar traditional forms of government reconfigured into colonial and post-colonial institutions of power and authority - *régulos*, *chefes de grupos de povoações*, and *chefes de povoações*. They share the centrality of reciprocal relations with ancestors and spirits. The social structure is patrilineal: descent, succession and inheritance is traced through males from a founding male ancestor. Families are organised in totems, clans and family kinship systems with the male line dominant in the allocation of resources and decision making. Bridewealth (*lobolo*), in which the groom's family pays the family of the bride in kind or in cash is central in motivating migration and a driver of debt. Shona and Sena rituals of birth, initiation, marriage and death are still relevant in everyday lives and play important roles in harmonising kin and community relations as well as ensuring a good relationship with ancestors.

In Sofala, ChiSena is spoken (defined as mother tongue) by 49.1% of the population while ChiNdau is spoken by 29.8% of the population. There are other minority languages, like eChuwabo (spoken by 3.0% of the population, also spelled as Chwabo, common in neighbouring Zambezia province).

In Manica, languages are ChiNdau, spoken by 26.9% of the population and Chitewe (a Shona language similar to ChiManyika), spoken by 22.6% of the population. These are followed by ChiSena (13.3%) and ChiManyika (11.8%). Chibalke (similar to Sena and local to Manica) is spoken by 9.1% of the population.

Portuguese is predominantly urban. This is probably because urban areas have higher levels of education, and they are more likely to be multi-ethnic, hence a lingua franca is necessary. In rural areas, less than 45% speak Portuguese. Women are less likely to understand Portuguese than men, particularly in rural areas, where only one-third of women speak Portuguese.

Livelihoods and migratory movements

Farming has adapted to cyclical flooding in Central Mozambique. Granaries are kept on stilts. People and cattle will seek refuge on higher ground, leaving people behind to make sure that harvest and assets are not stolen. There is mutuality between lowland and upland communities, with family members offering shelter when floods occur. It is not uncommon to have two plots of farmland (*munda*) to adapt to seasonal flooding,

one in lower land close to the river (*matoro*), and another one in the uplands (*machamba*). Housing is also made out of grass and wood, that is more resistant to floods and can be replaced more affordably and with more ease than cement.

Local alternative explanations for floods have been documented in previous floods, for example in 2009: God's will or the work of wronged ancestors (although this did not discourage churches or communities from offering their support), or witchcraft practiced by certain individuals. Officials from the National Institute of Meteorology had to be sent to the area to offer alternative causal explanations of the drought.

Ethnic and kinship networks span across provinces and across countries: movement by Shona people can be expected between Zimbabwe and Mozambique, many (mostly men) will travel to South Africa as migrant labourers, and many internal migrants will visit family in their districts of origin for important social events. Internal migrant labour is rising, as energy and extractive companies are investing and creating jobs. These opportunities are pulling labour from other countries who transit through the centre and north of the country. There is also lots of internal migration between rural districts and urban areas, not only for formal employment but also for trade and small business activities. Rural-urban migration has grown rapidly as a product of the civil wars and many people have settled in peri-urban areas.

Political dynamics

Politics in Mozambique today revolves around the confrontations that emerged in the struggles for independence from the Portuguese and the civil war that ensued. The two main political parties today, FRELIMO (Mozambican Liberation Front) and Renamo (Mozambican National Resistance) were the main contenders in the civil war. From independence in 1975, FRELIMO ruled Mozambique as a one-party Marxist-Leninist state. Those in the centre of the country and the north (Sena, Ndau, Macua) felt unrepresented by the State and Renamo particularly harnessed the discontent amongst the Ndau, which dominated its leadership. Support to Renamo in Central Mozambique continued after multi-party elections in 1994. The Mozambique Democratic Movement has become another important party in opposition to FRELIMO, and it dominates in Beira city.

Evidence of delayed or inadequate response will likely be framed by communities as continued neglect by the state, following well established political (MDM in Beira and Renamo in Central Mozambique) and ethnolinguistic lines: Ndau and Sena are perceived to be oppressed by Southern Shangan elites in Maputo. Unfair distribution of aid is often not merely a misperception, but is based on first-hand experience. People observe uneven patterns in who receives food aid, for example the family or friends of a neighbourhood secretary, and who does not: "often people who suffered the most during the cyclone are those who are already marginalised in local political and/or social circles" (contribution Schuetze).

In a particular locality, you find three types of administration (sometimes overlapping, sometimes complementary): (1) municipal decentralised administration, (2) local State administration and (3) community administration. This 'community administration' would include customary authorities (chiefs or *regulos*; population group chiefs or *chefes de grupo de povoacoes*; and population chiefs or *chefes de povoacoes*, but also other elements of civil society, including:

- Neighbourhood secretaries
- Dynamizing groups (those who previously formed part of the FRELIMO local groups)
- Religious groups
- Other civil society groups (e.g. youth and women's groups)
- NGOs
- Community leaders

After independence, in its drive to 'modernise' the country, FRELIMO abolished or sidelined customary authorities. In 1992, as a result of the introduction of a multi-party democratic system and decentralisation, these customary authorities have been legitimised again. FRELIMO, however, has sought to instrumentalise customary authorities by opting to formally recognize those primarily perceived to be its supporters and to co-opt those perceived to support the opposition parties.

On the ground, even if most customary authorities claim that they work with the government of the day, they are also among its critics, often pointing to unfulfilled promises made during electoral campaigns. There is still resistance and opposition to their legitimation by people linked historically to FRELIMO, such as the OMM (Organização da Mulher Moçambicana) and the OJM (Organização da Juventude Moçambicana) and particularly the *secretários de bairro* and *secretários de célula* (party branch secretary), and members of the *Grupos Dinamizadores* (Florencio 2004). However this political opposition is tempered by kin relations, as members of the same family may form part of these different groups. Hence community dynamics should be assessed in each particular locality.

Religion

The main religions practiced in Manica and Sofala are the Zion church, Catholicism, Evangelical/Pentecostal, Indigenous/traditional beliefs, Islam and Anglican. Catholicism and Evangelical/Pentecostal are more prevalent in urban settings. The Zion church (an independent African church that hybridises African and Christian traditions) and traditional cosmologies are more likely to be followed in rural areas. Comparing Sofala and Manica provinces, the Catholic Church has a stronger presence in Sofala, whereas Zion church is more prevalent in Manica. A significant number of Sena converted to Catholicism in colonial times and today 82% are Christian. The Ndau mainly follow traditional religion (69% of the population), with 25% reporting as Christian.

In both Sena and Shona cultures, healers, diviners, prophets, and initiation counsellors are influential spiritual people. These roles can coalesce: the *nyanga* is an indigenous doctor, a diviner-healer. A prophet (*maprofeta* in Ndau, *profeta* in Portuguese) is a diviner healer linked to Independent African Churches. Most church groups, particularly Pentecostal churches, have both a male and a female leadership structure.

Communication

In the affected areas, a majority of people do not speak Portuguese fluently (more so in rural areas) and are not literate. Women are less likely to be literate or speak Portuguese, and similarly, comprehension and literacy decreases in older age cohorts. As described by the Translators Without Borders needs assessment, mother tongue radio messaging has the highest rate of comprehension. Women are less likely to understand written messaging than men, regardless of the language. Audio messaging is more effective, particularly for women and people over 50. Audio messages in local languages should be supplemented by pictorial representations (short graphics-heavy leaflets in the local language or Portuguese). There is a need to conduct similar assessments on languages, comprehension and community feedback in other affected areas.

Recommendations

Communicating in local languages

- Recruit locally and on an ethno-linguistic basis. Involve local populations in the delivery of the response. Whilst a Mozambican identity is present, people have a tendency to trust responders from their ethnolinguistic group. Be aware of the historical distrust of Sena and Ndau of the State in general and of communities from the South.
- Deliver messages in local languages and make careful use of the language, making sure all groups feel represented. For example, even if Sena may be able to understand Ndau, if material is produced in Ndau, it should also be produced in Sena.
- Conduct language assessments in affected regions. For example, eChuwabu (originally from Zambezia) proved to be important among displaced people from Beira - something that would not have been obvious from secondary literature reviews due to recent population movements.
- Movement of people can be tracked through participatory assessments to predict disease patterns.
- Use audio messaging in local languages, complemented with pictorial messaging, for example graphic-heavy posters in the local language or Portuguese.
- Streamline community feedback mechanisms with surveys, participatory assessments and focus groups conducted in local languages. Work towards closing the loop in feedback mechanisms, ensuring perceptions, needs and complaints are incorporated into the response and lead into strategic change visible by communities.

Building trust

- Build trust by working with a wide variety of religious leaders in communities. Most church groups, particularly Pentecostal churches, have both a male and a female leadership structure - engage both where relevant. Involve them in community engagement, response delivery and messaging. Ensure that messages resonate with the language and worldviews of the different denominations and local traditions.
- Respect and create space for rituals. For example, in the case of deaths, be aware that a 'social cause' of death is sometimes sought, and rituals may be practiced to resolve suspected tensions within the community. People involved in communicating information about cyclone-related deaths (e.g. health-workers) must have two-way conversations with families and communities to remove doubts or confusions that could manifest in a sense of mistrust. Protection and/or mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS) actors may consider mechanisms to facilitate different mourning, burial and grieving practices. All responders must be aware of the importance of protecting sacred burial sites where possible.

Relocation

- When relocation (temporary or permanent) is explored, bear in mind that land should be allocated by chiefs (rather than by the state) with the support of the communities, and responders should hold local consultations to respect local customs around the consultation of ancestral and guardian spirits, and to avoid the idea that foreigners are moved by greed (*mbawu*).
- Relocation away from flood-prone areas may be resisted as livelihoods depend on farming and fishing in the area. Relocation can only occur as a result of a participatory process.
- When returning to flooded areas and in the reconstruction of Beira and other areas, ensure that the access to land by women is not jeopardized, for example, considering the homegardens and *machambas* (periurban plots) in Beira city.
- In other Mozambican contexts, the floods and who have been affected by them have been explained by some through the lens of God's will, ancestor intervention or witchcraft. Alternative (albeit not majority) explanations should be captured through community feedback, participatory and other social science research. Community engagement with trusted leaders can help dispel or resolve problems arising from these alternative explanations.

Building on local initiatives

- Solidarity networks consisting in labour exchanges, pooling of tools, and shelter and food in times of crisis are present in several areas of the country. It is particularly important to identify traditional arrangements for mutual support, and to see how they can be facilitated in a way that the response encourages and builds upon locally-led initiatives.
- Build on local initiatives of agricultural households' adaptation to floods. These initiatives should be learnt from and supported in the reconstruction process (and in any preparedness work) instead of imposing solutions, as they may be more feasible and appropriate while also encouraging agency and local ownership. Housing with durable materials is likely to be inadequate in flood prone areas

Working with authorities and identifying trusted leaders

- Responders should present themselves as neutral, avoid negative associations with the FRELIMO party, Renamo or MDM, and build independent trust. Respondents should carefully collaborate with relevant political and administrative institutions regardless of which political party is in control of it. To avoid unfair allocation of aid (as has happened in the past), systems for the creation of distribution lists should not rely solely on political or customary authorities such as *secretarios de bairro* or *chefes do posto*, but rather include a variety of non-state actors. These systems should also incorporate monitoring and complaint mechanisms. People should be clearly informed about what services and goods are available, who is eligible and the criteria for eligibility.
- Carry out a rapid assessment to determine trusted authorities. Customary authorities often include a chief (*regulo*), a sub-chief (*mfumo*), a head of population group (*chefe de terras or grupo de povoações*) and a head of population (*chefe de povoação*) and in some areas a *sagute* (responsible for a smaller area

than a chefe de povoação). The state also recognises *secretarios de bairro*. It is important to be aware that different people may portray themselves as the legitimate leader of a community. Recognition of customary authorities is still in flux and needs to be approached sensitively. This should be understood on a community-by-community basis. There is a need for power-mapping and other participatory approaches to determined trusted leaders.

- Engage with local authorities and relevant civil society organisations, although be aware that they may be in opposition to each other: Traditional authorities may be opposed by Frelimo-associated women and youth movements, ex-members of the *Grupos Dinamizadores* and *secretarios de bairro*.
- Other trusted people to take into account in community engagement are: members of the council of elders, members of the *matombo* council, *nyanga* (indigenous doctors), teachers, local Church leaders and *profetes* from the different denominations.
- Other relevant actors for the response could be health volunteers, agricultural extension workers and networks of volunteers for DRR preparedness projects.

Gender inclusivity

- Recruit women for community engagement with women and women groups, including trusted actors such as midwives, nurses and women taking traditional roles in initiating young people. When doing community engagement in rural areas, aid responders should ask residents where they are working to identify who are the most trusted/respected/well known women in an area, as they vary from setting to setting. Typical figures include Mae Pastoras or “Mother Pastors” (wives of church leaders), or Mae Conselheiras—trusted elder counsellors of Pentecostal churches. Female healers (whether herbalists, midwives, spirit mediums, or church-based healers) should also be considered.
- Be aware that women are particularly vulnerable as they have less access to cash compared to men. They have more to lose when agricultural production is destroyed, as is the case with the cyclone. When conducting emergency social protection programmes, incorporate women and other vulnerable groups accordingly. Create participatory mechanisms to determine specific needs and response strategies.

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