

Chapter 3

Building Resilient Communities Through Social Capital in Cities: Reflections From City of Harare, Zimbabwe

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ABSTRACT

This chapter explores community resilience in urban environments focusing on communities in the city of Harare in Zimbabwe. Despite its increased use in research and practical application for disaster risk management, resilience is a complex and contested issue. In this work, resilience is examined using a concurrent nested mixed method approach for data collection and analysis through the use of random and purposive sampling and questionnaire surveys. Some of the key findings include the diverse understanding of resilience by communities and urban local authorities leading to interventions mostly by urban planners that do not holistically promote community resilience. Urban informality is not always a hazard, but can promote community resilience if well managed, and social capital is one of the most important pillars for supporting community resilience building. The chapter concludes by emphasizing the importance of risk localization and a holistic understanding of resilience at community levels if city authorities are to reduce disasters and strengthen community resilience.

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INTRODUCTION

With the increasing magnitude and impacts of disasters the world over, governments and humanitarian organisations have implemented various strategies to mitigate impacts and reduce loss of lives. Urban communities have not been spared either from the impacts of disasters. By 2050, about 68% of the global population is projected to live in urban areas with the fastest growth likely to be in urban centres of developing countries (UN DESA, 2018). The disproportionate population living in cities is likely to lead to increased hazards and disasters. With such a high likelihood of increased urban risks, strategies that empower affected urban communities to effectively cope, respond, recover, and move forward in a sustainable way need to be implemented.

Despite contestations on the meaning of resilience, it is considered one of the strategies that can minimise the negative impacts of disasters on communities living in urban areas (Banica, 2020). A resilient community moves forward as they respond, adapt, recover, and transform livelihoods to sustainable levels (Kamara, et al., 2018). There is a need for a shift in disaster risk management strategies in urban areas if the unprecedented impacts of hazards are to be effectively addressed. It is imperative to implement strategies that promote adaptation, absorption, and transformation in the context of possible increase in disaster impacts. The strategies should not only focus on common resilience measures that include absorptive, responsive, and transformative capacities (Kamara, et al 2018), but also non-traditional measures and traits such as social capital and its role in promoting community resilience. Social capital as a resilience enabler is characterised by important resilience process measures that include networking, collaboration, learning, diversity of strategies and innovation (Rotarangi and Stephenson, 2015). The processes and or resilience pathways tend to be overlooked in urban resilience research and yet should be integral for a holistic understanding of resilience.

The chapter presents different resilience-enabling options for urban communities particularly in the face of climate change. Climate change is likely to cause a major shift in the livelihood patterns of urban communities as they grapple with increasing hazards and disaster impacts. In Zimbabwe, despite being regarded as one of the urban hazards, by urban local authorities (Kamete, 2004), informal urban agriculture has become the ‘new normal’ and a major urban land use depicting pronounced utilisation of social capital which promotes community resilience. The question to be addressed is whether social capital as reflected by communities who practise informal urban agriculture in Harare city of Zimbabwe plays a significant role in promoting disaster risk reduction and subsequently leading to community resilience.

Harare, Zimbabwe’s largest city has one of the most widespread urban informality practices in southern Africa, particularly informal urban agriculture. Understanding the local drivers of risk and community resilience is pertinent if urban disaster risk

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