

Iyanna Hayden  
Chicago High School for Agricultural Sciences  
Chicago, IL

### **Zimbabwe, Factor 9: Water and Sanitation**

Worldwide, more than 925 million people suffer from food insecurity on a regular basis. This is especially in Zimbabwe. Zimbabwe is located in southern Africa, where more than one third of the population is malnourished. Today, there is a woman in Zimbabwe who has not seen her husband for almost a month. He is running away from his responsibility because he cannot take care of himself let alone his family. (N.D 2008). Zimbabweans face several adversities. However, the woman was an exception in this crisis.

Zimbabwe is the 59th largest country in the world. It is located in Southern Africa.. It is a land-locked country of 242,700 square miles 390,580 square kilometers between the Zambezi River to the north and the Limpopo River to the south. Zimbabwe is bordered by Mozambique, Botswana, Namibia, and Zambia. Most of the country is a high to middle veld plateau with extensive areas of wooded savanna. (Hogan, 2012). The temperate climate portrays that the low veld of the Limpopo and the Zambezi Valley is hotter and has less rain. On the Mozambique border, the only mountainous area, the Eastern Highlands runs from Nyanga in the north to Chimanimani in the south. Rainfall is higher in the north of the Eastern Highlands and lower in the Zambezi Valley and the low veld.

The climate is tropical, although markedly moderated by altitude. There is a dry season, including a short cold season during the period May to September when the whole country has very little rain. The rainy season is typically a time of heavy rainfall from November to March. The whole country is influenced by the Inter-tropical Convergence Zone during January. In years when it is poorly defined, then there is below average rainfall and a likelihood of serious drought in the country (as happened in 1983 and 1992). When it is well-defined, then rainfall is average or well above average, (as in 1981 and 1985).

The roles of men and women in farming are determined by a land tenure system, in which men are allocated land in the communal areas and own most of the land in the commercial areas. Both men and women work the smallholdings in the communal areas, and women are responsible for domestic work. 70% women farmers, compared with 35 percent of men. According to the constitution, men and women are equal. However, in terms of the law there are many areas where women are discriminated against. These are laws governing the conditions of part-time work, inheritance law, and the fact that bride prices (*lobola* ) are still allowed.<sup>1</sup>

Zimbabwean rural areas are characterized by various factors that negatively influence the delivery of quality education. Many of these rural schools are poor and disadvantaged, lacking basic infrastructure for teaching and learning, roads and other transport, electricity and information communication technologies. The rural areas are not attractive for teachers because of limited resources. It was difficult to retain teachers in rural areas as well as finding suitable accommodation as another challenge for teachers in rural areas.

Pre-colonial Zimbabwe was a multi-ethnic society inhabited by the Shangni/Tsonga. Pre-colonial Zimbabwe societies, large and small, were mainly farming communities who adopted iron to modernize their agriculture and cultivate more extensively than their stone age predecessors. They also practiced pastoralism and put much faith in their livestock. Cattle were an important indicator of wealth and a means of maintaining clients over and above being useful as commodities for bride wealth and as objects of sacrifice in the propitiation of the ancestors. (James,2013). External trade was an equally important activity in the Zimbabwe subsistence oriented economy while gold mining was a seasonal activity, confined largely to the summer and winter seasons although gold washing continued throughout the year and remained the main source of the gold for trade. Even the Ndebele, who early historians described as largely predatory, relied more on cultivation than anything else. Cattle keeping only augmented their economy while tribute collection was principally a means of imposing political control, not a mode of survival.

At the time, Zimbabwe's government is doing nothing to fix the water and sanitation crisis. It is causing several more unnecessary problems for the country. Zimbabwe's citizens suffer more than they have to with one problem and without their governments help they drown in exposure. "Harare's water and sanitation system is broken and the government isn't fixing it," said Tiseke Kasambala, Southern Africa director at Human Rights Watch. "In many communities there is no water for drinking or bathing, there is sewage in the streets, there is diarrhea and typhoid and the threat of another cholera epidemic." The water shortage and the lack of functioning indoor toilets or community latrines sometimes gave them no choice but to defecate outdoors.

---

<sup>1</sup> zimbabwe. n.d.

[http://www.nytimes.com/2013/11/20/world/africa/zimbabwe-sanitation-crisis-causes-new-cholera-risk.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2013/11/20/world/africa/zimbabwe-sanitation-crisis-causes-new-cholera-risk.html?_r=0) (accessed 6 3, 2014)

Working on sustainable water and sanitation initiatives in Zimbabwe. n.d.

<http://www.ifrc.org/en/news-and-media/press-releases/africa/zimbabwe/working-on-sustainable-water-and-sanitation-initiatives-in-zimbabwe/> (accessed 6 4, 2014). water and sanitation crisis. n.d.

<http://www.hrw.org/news/2013/11/19/zimbabwe-water-and-sanitation-crisis> (accessed 6 2, 2014). *Zimbabwe*. n.d. *zimbabwe crisis*. n.d. [http://www.unwater.org/downloads/waterquality\\_policybrief.pdf](http://www.unwater.org/downloads/waterquality_policybrief.pdf) (accessed 6 5, 2014).

Zimbabwe's health care is at a poor state. During 2000-2010, Zimbabwe had less than two doctors for every 10,000 citizens. Many Zimbabweans use traditional healers, who offer both spiritual and medicinal advice. These healers provide herbal remedies for minor ailments and may also treat more serious illnesses, particularly psychological or psychiatric problems. Due to these circumstances Zimbabweans have suffered a lot among their population.

Zimbabwe's economy is growing despite continuing political uncertainty. Following a decade of contraction from 1998 to 2008 (Zimbabwe's period of economic turmoil), Zimbabwe's economy recorded real growth of more than 9% per year in 2010-11, before slowing to 5% in 2012, due in part to a poor harvest and low diamond revenues. However, the government of Zimbabwe still faces a number of difficult economic problems. It was estimated in 1991 that 14 percent of the population was below the U.S. dollar-a-day poverty line (this line is based on the income required to provide the absolute minimum nutrition, clothing, and shelter). This means that 16 percent of children under age 5 are mal-nourished.

Ongoing problems with water supplies in Zimbabwe are being described as a worsening national crisis, with the government being blamed for doing little to solve the problems. Zibusiso Dube, the information manager for the Bulawayo Progressive Residents' Association, told SW Radio Africa that the water problems are "severe," and there are regular shortages that sometimes last up to a week at a time. "The water is a failure of leadership and we have had problems since independence. It is appalling that the government has failed to come up with a solution for more than 30 years," Dube said. He explained that some of the areas around the capital have not had running water for about a decade, while others areas are now solely reliant on boreholes for water. Simbarashe Moyo from the Combined Harare Resident's Association (CHRA) told SW Radio Africa that the situation is "out of control." He also said it is a "failure by government" to not supply this most basic need. The water is scarce and very unsanitary.

Zimbabwe's water and sanitation situation remains poor in both urban and rural areas. Nationally, eighteen percent of the population does not have access to improved drinking water sources, and fifty-six percent do not have access to improved sanitation facilities. The rehabilitation of over 500 boreholes provided safe drinking water to 63,000 people in nine rural districts. UNICEF has helped develop a new national water and sanitation policy. In the context of a dilapidated water and sanitation infrastructure and a weak health system, the practical implementation of control measures remains a challenge. Due to the crisis W.H.O. has been sending different health kits out to Zimbabwe. These health kits are to help citizens recover until they can find a better solution. W.H.O is supplying Diarrheal Disease kits, Emergency Health kits and other medicines.

So far, W.H.O and UNICEF have done a lot to help the Zimbabweans with their water crisis. They have developed policies, health kits, sent out troops and health experts to maintain the problem, and more. But it's not enough to help solve the problem. W.H.O and UNICEF have done enough to maintain and hold off the problems for short periods of times. But what happens when they run out of resources to help? Holding off the problem doesn't solve it. UNICEF and W.H.O need to help Zimbabwe by finding ways to get them clean and fresh water that will last long periods of time. They have only given them enough help to push off the problems until it arises again. The longer the problem is pushed off the worse it gets.

Zimbabwe needs wetlands to clean its water (as a solution). Wetlands filter contaminants such as ammonium, nitrates, phosphorus, and sediment and restore groundwater supplies by recharging aquifers. Wetlands clean water and make it available for humans. International donors have addressed much of Zimbabwe's water crisis. For example, the Red Cross set aside 3.4 million U.S. dollars to improve access to water and sanitation. These programs do not adequately address maintaining natural ecosystems which could provide fresh clean water for Harare's citizens (ecosystems solution). The Ramsar Convention on Wetlands helps countries protect wetlands. Zimbabwe would be well served by this international agreement. Unfortunately, Zimbabwe has not yet ratified the convention. The Ramsar Secretariat in Switzerland welcomes Zimbabwe's participation, but stated that it has been unable to "keep the communication channels between Gland and Harare active." Zimbabwe would sign the Ramsar Convention if they were serious about protecting their wetlands and solving their water crisis. If Harare wants to avoid the same fate as Zimbabwe's first capital city, it must address its shortage of clean water with more than just infrastructure financed by donors. On World Wetlands Day,

Zimbabwe should consider how upholding national environmental laws and signing the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands can play a role in solving its water crisis.

In 2002, Zimbabwe experienced a severe crop failure due to early termination of the rains in February. This led to a seventy percent shortfall in production to meet annual food requirements. This created severe food shortage in both urban and rural areas. The food shortages, in turn, deteriorated into a famine and a humanitarian disaster. World food aid became a major source of relief to avert national food security disaster. According to the Zimbabwe Emergency Food Security Assessment, 486,000 tons of food aid was needed to meet requirements of forty-nine percent of the population. This was over the period September 2002 to March 2003. Out of the 49% of the population requiring food aid, 5,900,000 were in rural areas and 850,000 were in urban areas. Seventy percent of the rural population was at risk of famine induced starvation (WFP, 2002). It was projected that the rural population at risk would increase to 80% and 100% by end of 2002 as households ran out of stocks.

This was a problem because forty-nine percent of the population had to suffer from lack of food. They all required food aid for seven months. This means that they are unable to consistently access nutritious and adequate amounts of food necessary for a healthy life. This causes several diseases, illnesses and deaths in the country. Lack of access to a nutritious and adequate food supply has implications not only for the development of physical and mental disease, but also behaviors and social skills.

In my opinion, I believe that Zimbabwe should request help from organizations that are willing to help and clean the wetlands so that they can receive clean water. If that isn't possible Zimbabwe should have other countries with a sufficient water supply to import as much water as needed in order to start building and filling water wells in the areas that are most fit to keep it in. They should start organizing certain parts of clean and sanitized land so that they're able to build water wells if they were to receive more water. With the water they receive from different countries they can recycle and collect even more water from rain and other resources and discover different ways to sanitize the water.<sup>1</sup> Zimbabwe can collect helpful resources from organizations, and build their own water system that keeps the water fresh and sanitary.

---

<sup>1</sup> Zimbabwe - Poverty and wealth. n.d.

<http://www.nationsencyclopedia.com/economies/Africa/Zimbabwe-POVERTY-AND-WEALTH.html#ixzz33sloVstK> (accessed 6 5, 2014).

## Works Cited

*water and sanitation crisis*. n.d.

<http://www.hrw.org/news/2013/11/19/zimbabwe-water-and-sanitation-crisis> (accessed 6 2, 2014).

*Working on sustainable water and sanitation initiatives in Zimbabwe*. n.d.

<http://www.ifrc.org/en/news-and-media/press-releases/africa/zimbabwe/working-on-sustainable-water-and-sanitation-initiatives-in-zimbabwe/> (accessed 6 4, 2014).

*Zimbabwe - Poverty and wealth*. n.d.

<http://www.nationsencyclopedia.com/economies/Africa/Zimbabwe-POVERTY-AND-WEALTH.html#ixzz33sloVstK>

(accessed 6 5, 2014).

*zimbabwe*. n.d.

[http://www.nytimes.com/2013/11/20/world/africa/zimbabwe-sanitation-crisis-causes-new-cholera-risk.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2013/11/20/world/africa/zimbabwe-sanitation-crisis-causes-new-cholera-risk.html?_r=0) (accessed 6 3, 2014).

*Zimbabwe*. n.d.

*zimbawe crisis*. n.d. [http://www.unwater.org/downloads/waterquality\\_policybrief.pdf](http://www.unwater.org/downloads/waterquality_policybrief.pdf) (accessed 6 5, 2014).

Hogan, M. (2012, June 15). Zimbabwe. Retrieved July 9, 2015.