

**GENDER CONSIDERATIONS, PRIORITIES AND STRATEGIES IN  
THE TIME OF CRISIS: TANZANIA'S EXPERIENCE  
WITH EL NINO RAINS (1998)**

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**ABSTRACT**

*The re-emergence of the El-Nino phenomenon in the equatorial Pacific Ocean pointed to a strong possibility of global havoc of disasters, ranging from drought to floods, sink holes to landslides.*

*This paper presents an analysis of the trend of events in Tanzania at the time when most parts of the country were experiencing floods from the El-Nino rains of November, 1997/98.*

*The analysis focuses on strategies used in dealing with the crisis, priorities and criteria for the same, and gender considerations.*

**1.0 INTRODUCTION: Global Overview**

The El Nino is a freak weather phenomenon that has its origins in South America. The phenomenon is named after a young tempestuous boy in Spanish. When the name is capitalized, it means Christ. When the El Nino strikes, normally established weather patterns in many parts of the tropics go haywire as weather patterns in the tropical Pacific shift violently.

The El Nino was first noticed and recorded in the 19th Century in Peru when it was noticed that around Christmas time, coastal waters warmed up and the ocean current shifted southwards. It occurs once every three to five years generally, but its actual frequency and regularity has continued to elude meteorologists the world over. The weather changes are linked with change in the atmospheric pressure, the Southern Oscillation (SO) which is a large-scale atmospheric see-saw between the western and central parts of the Pacific Ocean. The SO and the warm waters of El Nino, are part of the same climate phenomenon referred to as El Nino/South Oscillation (ENSO) which influences climate in distant regions.

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Tanzania necessitated the issuing of an international appeal for food aid to meet the shortfall in production (Benson C. and Clay E. 1998).

In Kenya, many districts were declared disaster zones due to widespread famine and drought. The prolonged drought in Southern Sudan resulted in an impassioned appeal for international aid for an estimated 2.6 million people threatened by starvation. In Rwanda, state run radio reported that children had been abandoned in Gikongoro by impoverished families that could not afford to feed them due to skyrocketing food prices attributed to the prolonged drought (Onchere N:1998).

In Zimbabwe, financial institutions were not willing to lend farmers money this season following predictions of drought caused by the El Nino. By October 1997, the El Nino effects had changed from causing drought to resulting in unseasonal torrential rains in much of the Eastern Africa Region. The Kenyan coastal region experienced the heaviest torrential rains in living memory. Much of the coastal town of Mombasa was flooded for many days, water supply was disrupted, roads and bridges were destroyed and individual property was left in ruins. The same happened in Tana river district and the normally drought prone districts of Wajir, Mandera, Marsabit, Garissa, Isiolo and Moyale where many livestock drowned in seasonal rivers and floods (Chisvo M. 1998).

In Somaliland, torrential rains have resulted in widespread flooding causing heavy damage and necessitating emergency food aid to starving communities. In Ethiopia, the prolonged and unseasonal rains continued to pound the highlands causing widespread destruction and uncertainty about the food security situation (Onchere N:1998).

## **2.0 THE EL NINO EFFECTS IN TANZANIA**

As pointed above, by October 1997, the El Nino effects had changed from causing drought to resulting in unseasonal torrential rains in much of the Eastern Africa region. In Tanzania, the El Nino rains have caused serious damaging effects on the national physical assets (i.e. roads, railways, buildings etc.) agricultural production and the delivery of social services. The transport infrastructure were the most affected. Agriculture and other productive sectors including mining were also affected as the flow of inputs and marketing system were disrupted.

The El Nino effects have far reaching adverse implications to the on-going economic reforms, on-going programs and on development potential and sustainability. Let us briefly examine the El Nino effects by sector:<sup>1</sup>

### **Social Effects**

There was a widespread outbreak of water-borne diseases notably cholera and dysentery due to floods in both rural and urban settlements. Several water schemes were either partially destroyed or were non-functional. Floods rendered a number of families homeless and caused loss of food reserves and personal properties. A number of other projects serving local communities were also destroyed e.g. school buildings and dispensaries. Dams and empounded reservoirs were filled with water beyond their capacities (e.g. Mtera Dam).

The prolonged rains adversely affected some water supply schemes by washing away some parts of the water mains and most of the water sources were heavily polluted particularly in the urban areas. Outbreak and intensification of communicable diseases resulted into a considerable number of deaths.

The most affected parts of the country were Tanga, Kilimanjaro, Shinyanga and Lindi where dams, intakes and pipelines were washed away. Other affected regions included Arusha, Morogoro, Rukwa, Ruvuma, Coast, Kigoma, Kagera, Mbeya and Mwanza, where some portions of the pipelines were washed away. Water quality deteriorated requiring additional use of water treatment chemicals.

### **Effects on Agriculture**

Agriculture is the most dominant sector which contributes higher to the economy of mainland Tanzania. The sector contributes about 5% of GDP; employs about 80% of population workforce; and accounts for about 75% of foreign exchange earnings. The sector accounts for about 96% of the income of the population with lowest income.

From 1985 to 1995 real agricultural GDP had grown at an annual average rate of 5% - significantly higher than the rate of increase in population (2.8%). This was the first time that such a growth had been achieved over an extended period of time.

The recovery was stimulated by the current government policy reforms which included removal of marketing and pricing control, exchange rate adjustment, liberalisation of external trade, privatisation/liquidation of parastatals and rehabilitation and extension of road networks.

During the period of 1997, the significant growth which was registered by the agricultural sector was disrupted due to effects of El Nino. The following were the most significant effects of El Nino in the agricultural sector.

conference on National Disaster Reduction in May 1994, emphasized on the need for developing local capacity for disaster management, as well as the capacity required for policy co-ordination and monitoring. The strategy calls on education and training programs in disaster to focus on, among other things, the strengthening of national capacities and capabilities, including the mobilization of NGOs and the participation of local communities. The strategy also calls for proper identification of, and focus on vulnerable groups, as well as proper setting of priorities (Human Development Report, 1997).

The Tanzania Government's immediate response to the 1998 El Nino rains effects had been ad hoc. Priority was to make passable the critical portions of roads and railway network. Using available local resources including community and private sector mobilization, the government managed to temporarily make passable some critical portions of the trunk roads and the railway line including bridges. These emergency works cost the government a total of US \$ 3.4 million on roads and US \$ 0.5 million on the railway. A preliminary assessment on the effects of El Nino done by the government indicated that substantial financial resources were required to restore the situation to normal. Recognizing the magnitude of resources required to undertake emergency, medium and long term measures to mitigate the effects of El Nino, the government adopted priorities and strategies contained in a "comprehensive" programme.

The overall objective of the programme was to initiate immediate, medium and long term measures to redress the socio-economic effects of the El Nino rains on the economy. The aim being to restore the delivery of economic and social services to normal to enhance sustainable economic growth and poverty eradication.

The programme accorded high priority to the following specific objectives:

- i) to restore and strengthen transport infrastructure especially roads and railways.
- ii) to ensure national food security
- iii) to build local capacity and capability for disaster management

The programme was multi-sectoral and focuses on those sectors which were directly affected by the negative effects of El Nino rains; namely: roads, railways, water supply and agriculture. Overall implementation of the programme was estimated to cost a total of US \$ 189.1 million, to be solicited from Government of Tanzania and donor community.

### **Agriculture Sector**

The programme covered five major priority sub-sectors in the agriculture and livestock sectors which included irrigation, plant protection, food security, and control of outbreak of livestock diseases, translated into the following objectives:

- To rehabilitate small holder irrigation schemes affected by floods during El Nino period
  - To provide emergency seed assistance to poor small scale farmers and control the outbreak of crop pests in all El Nino weather affected areas.
  - To provide emergency food supply to food deficit areas
2. To control the outbreak of livestock diseases including strengthening the National capacity for surveillance and Early Warning System (EWS) for transboundary animal disease.

Total estimated cost was US \$ 17,895,274 million

### **Water Supply Sector**

The program targeted the following activities:

- Reconstruction and repair of damaged water dams
  - Rehabilitation and repair of water intakes
3. Pipe replacement and repair
  4. Borehole cleaning
  5. Procurement of chemicals
  6. Other civil works

The main objective was to restore services of water schemes affected by El Nino rains to ensure the supply of clean portable water to target populations.

The total financial requirements for implementing the water sector was estimated at US \$ 6,629,925.

there had been failure to realise that the programme would have a different impact/effect on men and women.

The strategies adopted did not include an analysis of the socio-economic, political, legal, cultural and psychological levels of the crisis and how differences between sexes affect or be affected by the practices and strategies. There was no consideration on how these factors related to discrimination based on sex, and how they may impose obstacles to a person's opportunities in the crisis.

Failure to engender the response to the crisis resulted into lack of reliable gender disaggregated data on the crisis i.e. statistical information which differentiates between men and women e.g. "number of women and men who died in the floods" instead of "number of people who died in the floods". This would have allowed one to see where there were gender gaps. One of the missing links is within the Department of Disaster and Relief Co-ordination, where there was no gender expert to compile the relevant data. I quoted one prominent official in the Department saying: "Our strategy is to minimize bureaucracy, otherwise it ceases to be an emergency, after all disasters cannot be planned for."

This contradicts the growing acceptance among development practitioners and professionals that disasters have an impact on the socio-economic development of a country, either positively or negatively; and over recent years there is an increasing concern to view gender issues as part and parcel of the socio-economic development process of a country. While I am in total agreement with the significance of the priority sectors presented in the programme i.e. agriculture, water supply, rail, road and capacity building; the question of settlements (housing) had not been addressed as a priority in such crisis.

One of the major effects of the El Nino rains was that a number of people were made homeless. The inclusion of housing as a priority sector in the programme should have been a natural phenomenon.

Housing is both a social and an economic issue. But the crucial importance of housing as a development issue is far too often taken for granted and hence neglected or treated in an ameliorated manner in the development process. Yet there is no sphere in development which is sustainable when divorced from the housing process.

People whose access to housing is hindered are often forced into a situation where their ability to contribute to development is below their real potential. Housing is an integrated concept, including the supply of individual dwellings and related infrastructure; hence all aspects of settlement formation and development are important factors in development planning.

governments have to take a more comprehensive approach in managing disasters. In particular, governments have to realize that they need to incorporate disaster management in their national development programs, rather than responding to the issues in an ad hoc basis.

➤ This is a major shift from previous times when the cause and effect relationship between disasters and development on one hand and gender and development on the other was greatly ignored. Disasters have traditionally been perceived within the context of emergency response; you fly in, administer "first aid" in one form or the other and leave as swiftly as you came in. The effects, by gender, of these "fly in, fly out" activities on the lives of the victims were largely ignored. This was the case with the 1997/98 El Nino crisis in Tanzania. Since gender perspective had not been captured, the effects or impact of the disaster on different vulnerable groups were not properly gauged.

## **5.0 CONCLUSION**

In addressing the effects of the El Nino rains, the Government was dealing with crucial aspects of the development of the country. We have seen that the entire programme ignored gender analysis and planning; such that in the priority sectors stated, the housing sector was overlooked, as well as other gender concerns.

We need strategies that will get us from here to there, take us beyond the fragmented efforts. Any effective strategy must integrate the gender perspective. Our national development plans must include gender aspects and disaster management if we are to move "from here to there".. It is a misguided concept to believe that disasters cannot be planned for. Unless disasters are properly managed, the economy will be mismanaged. Unless development plans are engendered, they will be endangered.

The effects of the El Nino were well established and known. If the El Nino causes drought, some of the effects of drought could be mitigated. The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) and the National Centre for Environmental Prediction (NCEP) had predicted a moderate-to-strong La Nina event for 1999 and its conditions might persist for as long as two years. Likewise, it is quite possible to adopt mitigation measures in the event that the El Nino causes floods and torrential rains. Alongside food security and health measures, housing strategies and priorities by gender are of paramount importance.

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