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Social vulnerability during disasters and its impact on community development: the case of the 2014 Tokwe-Mukosi dam flood in Masvingo, Zimbabwe

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the nexus between social vulnerability, disasters and community development with a particular focus on the 2014 Tokwe-Mukosi dam flood. It advances its central argument by asserting that social vulnerability, particularly lack of political power, exposes marginalised and vulnerable communities to natural disasters and it makes it difficult for them to recover from these calamities, while at the same time jeopardising community development. The thesis is qualitative in nature and was informed by data gathered through interviews, observation and focus group discussions. The study, thus, makes it clear that, while the Tokwe-Mukosi flood can be viewed as a natural disaster by the government of Zimbabwe and other groups of people, it is worth noting that, from a social vulnerability perspective, the disaster was deeply rooted in power inequality between the government and the affected families. The thesis further exposes the reality that when social vulnerability manifests itself in political powerlessness, it leads to the violation of fundamental human rights, particularly the rights of disaster victims. Through the social vulnerability perspective, the thesis reveals how disasters are shaped by prevailing socioeconomic and political factors within nations. This has been realised through an examination of the pre- and post-disaster experiences of the Tokwe-Mukosi villagers. The study also unearthed the fact that political powerlessness, imbedded in social vulnerability also produces informational uncertainty which impedes development initiatives and efforts by the affected families to improve their wellbeing.