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# Disaster risk policy problem framing: insights from societal perceptions in Zimbabwe

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## Abstract

As disasters are on the rise with devastating consequences, understanding the dynamics of disaster risk problem framing is crucial because the way in which a problem is framed circumscribes the search for solutions to that problem. This article sought to critically explore societal perceptions of disaster risk problems in Zimbabwe in order to give them meaning and render them manageable. This study is based on both secondary and primary data collected from disaster risk practitioners and local respondents from a number of districts in Zimbabwe. The results of the study suggest that the Zimbabwe disaster risk management system is dominated by the hazard frame and rival frames such as vulnerability and theistic frames are silenced. The silenced frames (vulnerability and theistic) were found to be crucial in understanding the social construction of disaster risk. The article argues that the locus of disaster risk problem is not to be found primarily in governmental agencies; rather, it is to be found in the communities where risk is generated and experienced. The article concludes that disaster risk problems should not be viewed as unitary and state centred, but as diverse and multi-centred. As such, practitioners should aim for a networked model of engagement where various stakeholders in the society are drawn together to form networks that can debate about disaster risk problems and formulate action plans.

Keywords disaster risk; framing; hazard; vulnerability, theistic

## 1 Introduction

World over, disasters are on the rise with devastating consequences [1]. They result in deaths, destruction and disruption to every aspect of society [2]. Given this context, the need for effective disaster risk reduction policy has never been greater for the safety and well-being of the citizenry [3]. The call for public policies that minimise disaster risk and build resilience has been emphasised since the declaration of the International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction 1999-2000. Both the Hyogo Framework for Action and the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction argue that countries which develop policy, legislative and institutional frameworks for disaster risk reduction have greater capacity to manage risks. Towards this end, there have been significant efforts to strengthen legal, institutional and legislative structures in many countries to minimise the devastating effects of disasters [3]. However, such efforts are being accompanied by rising disaster losses [4]. This raises an important question: how is disaster risk policy problem framed? This question is crucial because many policy changes being implemented to minimise the impact of disasters in many countries continue to be both ineffective and inefficient [4]. As Bradbury [5] argued, if a policy problem is not structured appropriately, that is, if it does not take into account all the

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