

Bottlenecks Encountered by the Military when Responding to Disasters in Zambia

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Abstract The purpose of this study was to explore the bottlenecks encountered by the military when responding to disasters in Zambia. The institution tasked with responding to disasters in the country is the Disaster Management and Mitigation Unit as mandated by the National Disaster Management Policy of 2015. The military in Zambia are tasked with preserving and defending the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the state against internal and external aggression. However, as part of their secondary role, they respond to disasters when called upon. The study adopted a nominalist ontology, interpretivist epistemology, value laden axiology using qualitative methodology. By so doing it followed a growing number of researchers arguing against positivism, pointing out that social science deals with action and behaviour which are generated from within the human mind and so cannot be studied externally by the researchers and the researched. The study is informed by hermeneutic phenomenology design meant to deduce individual experiences through description of the essences. Participants were drawn from the Zambia Army and officials from the DMMU using homogeneous purposive sampling method. The findings established that the main challenges encountered by the military when responding to disasters in the country are; delays in paying allowances, absence of military personnel at DMMU Headquarters, military response with inappropriate tools, incompatible equipment, inadequate resources, poor reaction time, bureaucracy and procurement of wrong materials. Thus, it is recommended among others that, the entire national disasters management structure in the country should be restructured. This should be replaced with the Disaster Response Team (DRT) to take over from the current Disaster Management Unit. The DRT should continue falling under the office of the Republican Vice President but headed by Director General (preferably a Major General) seconded from the serving or retired members of Defense Force.

Keywords: defense force, military, disaster, management, mitigation Zambia

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1. Introduction

In this study we explore bottlenecks encountered by the Military when responding to disasters in Zambia. This is an extract from the principal researchers' Thesis at the University of Zambia. Military engagement in disaster related humanitarian activities. Since the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami, many Western governments have deployed their militaries in support of states affected by earthquakes, floods, tsunamis and extreme weather conditions. The US, for example, has deployed its military 40 times since 2004 in support of disaster response operations around the world [1]. The increased deployment of military assets and capabilities in disaster response is linked to the increase in the incidence of natural disasters. It is also motivated by political factors, including the need to demonstrate the added value of national militaries at a time when defense budgets are coming under pressure. It is also linked to national and international security objectives and the need to improve

the global image of certain Western militaries, particularly after their experiences in Iraq and Afghanistan. In Zambia the military (comprising the Zambia Army, Zambia Air Force and Zambia National Service collectively referred to as the Defense Force of Zambia) has been engaged in disaster cases of one kind or the other. In March 2009, the military were put on alert to tackle the worst floods to have affected the country in four decades [2]. This left widespread devastation especially in unplanned settlements, (most townships in Lusaka are classified as unplanned) without the sewer system and drainages [3]. In December 2017 the Army was deployed to combat cholera with 41 mortalities, in the capital city of Lusaka. The Zambian President, who is also the Commander in Chief of The Defense Force, ordered the military to help stop the spread of cholera throughout the country. The Zambia Army rose to the occasion and the situation was controlled. In 2020 the Zambia Army was deployed to mitigate gassing incidents in the country. This involved a wave of attacks on civilians by unknown criminals who used a special gas to immobilise their victims. Cases of rioting and civil disturbances were soon brought to an end after

military deployment. During the 2022 Tropical Storm Ana that hit Southern Africa, including Zambia, Zambia Air Force (ZAF) was engaged to distribute food and non-food items and airlifting of affected victims from flooded areas (mostly in Southern Province) using their helicopters while the Zambia Army provided their marines to retrieve bodies that had drowned during floods [4,5].

1.1. Problem Statement

Factors that drive military response to disasters do exist. Nevertheless, opponents of the military's participation in disaster management claim that it is unproductive, wrong, inadequate and costly, dissimilar to humanitarian principles and anchored on political obligations rather than humanitarian prerequisite [6]. This study therefore explored bottlenecks encountered by the military when responding to disasters in Zambia.

1.2. Research Objective

This study sought to establish the challenges faced by the military in disaster management in Zambia.

1.3. Theoretical Framework

The disaster proponents inclined to the Weberian viewpoint, argued that disaster causality is a creation of human shortfalls in adjusting to natural perils [7]. A change in thinking and behaviour, including institutional improvements to mitigate hazards, is observed as essential elements to disaster management. Sustainable hazard alleviation. According to [8] acquisition of more knowledge on hazards can be through education and capacity building, land-use planning, early warning systems, engineering, insurance and application of technology. In their study on designing novel institutions for implementing integrated disaster risk management, [9] emphasize that culture, customs and traditions also shape and colour approaches to disaster response. [10] propose a plan for effective design and construction of proficient, sustainable and purposeful disaster management institutions involving eight vital elements which comprise; awareness and access to information, independence to make decisions, affordability of technology, responsibility, adaptability to local conditions and sustainability. In other words, a powerful institutional infrastructure, reinforced by science and technology, and cohesive disaster risk management, has the possibility to improve disaster management.

2. Literature Review

A shared theme in disaster linked literature is that the diverse cultures of military and humanitarian actors present a major challenge to operative interaction. The humanitarian community is termed generally as a roughly configured system or web of actors which come together around mutual funding sources and voluntary standards, deprived of an effective chain of command [11]. Humanitarian players have often been plainly hostile to local and foreign military armies, including United

Nations forces, although literature from the military community does not usually reflect on the influence of their actions on humanitarian operations and recipients. That being the case, most militaries make use of the assumed incapability of the humanitarian community to donate to what is generally accepted as a unit of effort.

Nonetheless, as [12] declare, the tensions between these actors are not just to do with cultural variances, but also branch from essential variances in motivations, goals and tactics. The literature highlights several key factors in this regard; the swelling politicisation and militarisation of humanitarian support, and challenges intrinsic in the nature of the humanitarian community itself.

Notwithstanding the comparative advantages the military might have in certain contexts relative to certain capabilities there remain grave concerns about the explicit joining of humanitarian and military or political objectives and the resulting growth of the military into activities beyond their traditional obligations and areas of expertise [13]. The dialogue has fixated mostly on conflicts, yet the similar principle applies in natural disasters. According to international humanitarian law the military have a duty to carry out certain humanitarian undertakings, such as the evacuation of the wounded in battle areas in spite of which side the victim fits [14]. Nevertheless, concerns regarding 'contagion' rise when humanitarian assistance becomes part of the military scheme:

Where humanitarian support is perceived, rightly or wrongly, as linked to military activities, being help to, or as being partisan to, one party to the conflict, humanitarian players at best lose the acceptance vital to operate safely [15].

Another concern various humanitarians have is 'complicity', or the anxiety that their involvement with the military will mean that they are complicit in inappropriate or ineffective support that does not meet the needs of affected populace or nose-dives to observe the norm of 'do no harm' [16]. There is also dread by humanitarian actors that coordinating with the military will be used to convey humanitarian support under military scrutiny [17].

These apprehensions are not astonishing given experiences in settings such as Kosovo, Iraq and Afghanistan, in relation to UN integrated missions. The humanitarian literature does not clarify in practical terms why the direct provision of support by the military is inappropriate, or how it has placed civilian populace or humanitarian staff at higher risk. The humanitarian literature does not offer reflections on the impact the deviation of military resources into aid efforts may have on the apparently key role militaries play in decreasing violence and augmenting security. The modern origins of the use of humanitarian support by the military for tactical and strategic attainments are closely connected to the counter-insurgency campaigns of the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s, principally the British familiarities in Malaya, Oman and Aden [18]. This tactic is entirely opposing to the humanitarian philosophies of humanity and impartiality providing support to all those who need it, with import given to those in greatest need.

In addition, numerous have declared that counter-insurgency processes not only decrease access for humanitarian organisations to populations in need, but also jeopardize recipients. Communities accepting support

from the military may be deemed to be taking sides in the conflict, thus exposing them to the danger of retaliation from other belligerents [19]. The presence of numerous humanitarian actors, with dissimilar mandates and diverse levels of professionalism, expertise and resources, presents a key challenge to operational coordination, as does the manifestation of multi-mandate organisations like the United Nations Children Emergency Fund and the World Food Programme, which often follow both humanitarian and development objectives in the same setting [20]. Similarly, the scope of actions carry out by humanitarian organisations has stretched, and many are moving past the objective of saving lives to attending to the root causes of conflict and volatility sponsoring recovery and building the 'resilience' of indigenous communities to future astonishments and hazards [21]. This is challenging in a number of ways. Some researchers emphasize that while peace and stability are honorable objectives, still, when aid organisations pursue to transform a society by endorsing the strategy of one of the belligerents in the middle of a war, they are no longer perceived as impartial by all sides and consequently lose the ability to access and deliver support to all people in need. For this motive, it is virtually difficult for any organisation to concurrently provide humanitarian support while also looking for ways to resolve a conflict. The contradictory and often inconsistent positions adopted by numerous humanitarian agencies are undermining the relationship with the military and abating the influence that humanitarian players might have on their policies and practices [22]. The International Agency for Standing Committee, for instance, has frequently echoed the need for a more coherent method to humanitarian CIMIC [23]. The humanitarian community might approve in principle on common frameworks for collaboration with military players at the global level, and even in a given situation, but observance to these frameworks is often challenging [24].

[25] elucidate that while concurrently calling for veneration for humanitarian values, in the recent past various humanitarian organisations have also readily compromised a principled method in their own conduct through close alliance with political and military deeds and other players. Other researchers contend that aid agencies cannot have it both ways; requesting for armed escorts to reach populace in need one day and criticizing those same military forces for distorting the lines the next cannot be an answer. The experiences in Iraq and Afghanistan were chiefly polarising for the humanitarian public, and there is ample position in the literature to the detachments that resulted from the differing positions taken concerning international services in these contexts [26].

In reference to Afghanistan, it is noted that UN agencies were not impermeable from direct connecting of military deed and relief [27]. Some humanitarian players admit that unsuitable commitment with the military by individual humanitarian organisations has insinuations not just for themselves but for the wider humanitarian community operating in similar circumstance, since perceptions and expectations of one humanitarian player often encourage how the sector as a whole is viewed [28]. Accessible literature likewise exemplifies numerous

challenges linking to the relationship between international humanitarian and military players that are specific to disaster response situations. These include an absence of coordination between military and humanitarian players at the operational level and in pre-planning and evaluations. Organisation efforts during disaster responses to natural disasters appear to have been disadvantaged by the sheer number of humanitarian organisations engaged leading to misunderstanding on leadership.

The literature also show a lack of coordination amongst the numerous military players engaged in some disaster situations. These internal issues are evidently linked to unproductive coordination between those engaged in numerous humanitarian actions. In Haiti, for instance, although the 2010 earthquake response is credited with delivering a large capacity of assistance in a very problematic working environment, coordination was noted to be a significant shortcoming [29]. Coordinating such an enormous number of humanitarian players was challenging, and this, combined with the negative position of some agencies concerning the military, entailed that coordination was compromised at best [30].

The excess of foreign military players can also present operational encounters to engagement with the humanitarian community. In extensive disasters such as the Indian Ocean and Japan tsunamis, the Pakistan earthquake and floods and the Haiti earthquake, manifold foreign militaries were engaged [31]. In the Haiti earthquake response in 2010, 26 different foreign militaries deployed assets and 19 dissimilar militaries sent personnel, often with little coordination between themselves and the host countries. For their part, the military are also not always willing to coordinate with humanitarian players in such circumstances. A number of analysts have also underlined the tendency of foreign militaries and the international humanitarian community to lose sight of the fundamental role of the national military in crisis response, particularly in the Asia-Pacific region [31]. In the case of the flood response in 2010, at times the international humanitarian community was averse to coordinate with the Pakistani military, in spite of the fact that it dominated the national response and international actors had greater capacity to influence its strategies and behaviour than local players and affected populace. However, such an approach to integrated planning raises concerns amongst many humanitarians, as noted by [32]. In some instances, contingency planning has raised expectations amongst member states that military resources will be applied [33].

Thus far the literature review point to the presence of bottlenecks inherent in the military intervention during disasters border on coordination, attitudes and acceptance among other players among others. However, it is not clear where the noted bottlenecks do exist within the sub-Saharan Africa particularly Zambia. Hence this study.

3. Methodology

This study adopted a nominalist ontology, interpretivist epistemology, value laden axiology using qualitative method. The study is aligned to a growing number of

researchers arguing against positivism, pointing out that social science deals with action and behaviour which are generated from within the human mind and so cannot be studied externally by the researchers and the researched [34].

3.1. Research Design

This study is informed by hermeneutic phenomenology design meant to reduce individual experiences with phenomena to a description of the universal essence. Hermeneutic phenomenology, as advanced by Heidegger's thesis on 'Being and Time', and further expanded by van Manen's four reflective thematic areas on lived experiences; lived body (corporeality), lived relations (relationality), lived time (temporality) and lived space (spatiality) guided the study [35,36].

3.2. Study Area

The study was carried out in Lusaka, Zambia. Lusaka was picked on due to the fact that apart from being the capital city and centrally located, it is also the headquarters of all the Defence Forces in Zambia (the Zambia Army, ZAF and ZNS). It is also the headquarters of the DMMU under the Republican Vice President's office.

3.3. Target Population

The target population involved the military personnel involved in disaster management (those from the Corps of Engineers), officers from the DMMU under the office of the Republican Vice President who are mandated to be first responders to emergencies in the country.

3.4. Sample Size

For this study, the sample size was initially pegged at 12; four each from military personnel and officers from the DMMU selected using homogeneous purposive sampling and four from participants selected using heterogeneous sampling method respectively. Saturation was, however, arrived at 10 participants.

3.5. Data Generation Procedure

Data was generated from three different sources as highlighted above; military personnel (four) using FGD, officers from the DMMU (two) and participants (four) using interviews respectively. Use of multiple tools strengthened the trustworthiness. The FGD was captured on camera and all interviews were voice recorded.

3.6. Conduct of FGD and Interviews

Four participants from the military who met the inclusion criteria were subjected to the FGD. This method was ideal because it is a carefully planned and moderated informal discussion

Participants from the DMMU who met the inclusion criteria were subjected to interviews and they highlighted various incidences in the country where they have been participating as first responders and if overwhelmed they

have been calling on the support of the military. Other remaining participants were also interviewed and they gave an insight into various calamities which had befallen the country in their respective communities in the recent past and how the military had intervened to mitigate the situation.

Data was analysed with the aid of a computer assisted qualitative data analysis software called Nvivo 2021. Four trustworthy strategy of credibility, transferability, dependability and conformability were used for Data Quality Assurance [37].

4. Findings and Discussion

Eight themes emerged on the topic under discussion; delays in paying allowances, absence of military personnel at DMMU Headquarters, military response with inappropriate tools, incompatible equipment, inadequate resources, poor reaction time, bureaucracy and procurement of wrong materials.

4.1. Delays in Paying Allowances

Military personnel are entitled to certain conditions of work whether they are deployed in their primary or secondary roles. One such condition is that they are entitled to allowances when conducting disaster operations which are supposed to be done by the DMMU. Through admission from participants from the DMMU, it was revealed that they are times when they are unable to meet this obligation due to paucity of resources. Nevertheless, the DMMU always endeavour to meet their end of the bargain but delay in doing so. This delay affects the project completion and morale of affected soldiers. The DMMU attribute this shortcoming to irregular funding from the central government and other sponsors. A participant from the FGD narrated the following:

'We always respond to the requests by DMMU by releasing men and equipment even at short notice. The only condition given to the DMMU is for them to provide allowances to our soldiers because it is part of their condition of their service. Whereas DMMU meets this condition most of the time, unfortunately they have been occasions when our soldiers have not been paid on time which affects their morale. Sometimes this extends to delays in releasing money meant for the procurement of building materials for the project under construction which also affects the completion time' [DMMU_02, 2023].

4.2. Absence of Military Personnel at DMMU

Both participants from the FGD and the DMMU lamented the absence of military personnel at DMMU Headquarters which affects the swift response when needed during a disaster. A DMMU informant said the following:

'It is unfortunate that there is no military presence at DMMU Headquarters and this ultimately affects coordination which is currently done through the Ministry of Defense' [DMMU_01, 2023].

4.3. Military Response with Inappropriate Tools

When the military are invited to respond to disasters, they are expected to do so with own resources at their disposal. The military sometimes respond to disasters with inappropriate PPE or none at all. Fortunately, the military quickly adapt and improvise or the DMMU is requested to fill in the void. This can be attributed to the fact that responding to disaster by the military is an aid to civil authorities, a secondary role they are not particular trained or equipped for. A DMMU informant participant highlighted the following:

'The military lack requisites needed for them to undertake their tasks expeditiously in emergencies. In some cases DMMU is requested to provide PPE to the military to facilitate their intervention' [DMMU_03, 2023].

4.4. Incompatible Equipment

One of the bottleneck linked to the military responding to disasters is the use of incompatible equipment during such moments. A case in point is one involving the military erecting a bailey bridge over a washed away bridge. The main contractor, in this case the Road Development Agency, provided materials including the bridge to be erected. It turned out the Bailey bridge to be erected was of German origin different from the type used in the military which are mainly of Eastern Bloc origin (Russia and China). Nevertheless, being engineers, they quickly adapted and erected the bridge after adjustments, with a few difficulties. This was observed by a participant from the FGD in the following excerpt:

'The main challenge we faced was the incompatibility between the Chinese and the German made bailey bridge specifications. The Chinese made bailey bridges on which we are trained on in the military are different from those from German which are usually provided by the Roads Development Agency despite being of the same make' [ZAM_01, 2023].

4.5. Inadequate Resources

The DMMU relies on the funding from the central government for its routine operations. However, during time of disasters other stakeholders come on board and provide finances or the actual materials depending on their abilities. Being government funded, they are occasions when their requirements are not fully met due to other competing needs. This situation ultimately affects the smooth running of operations. Even depending on other stakeholders to fill the void may not be enough because there is no guarantee that they will do so in good time with the required resources. Over relying on other stakeholders may also lead to donor fatigue and resentment. Nevertheless, according to the informants, the current DMMU has exhibited resilience by constantly anticipating and planning for future calamities (such as floods and cholera outbreak during the rainy season) by engaging the government and other stakeholders during times of calm.

'When dealing with disasters in remote areas, we usually face difficulties in procuring and delivering resources to the point of need' [DMMU_03, 2023].

4.6. Poor Reaction Time

Urgency in reacting to any emergency situation cannot be over emphasised. Any laxity in reaction may prove costly and compromise the mitigation strategy. Unfortunately, this trend seems to be the norm in the country among agencies tasked with combating disasters. The military personnel cited:

'Civilian counter parts of not responding quickly during time of emergencies. This could be attributed to the fact that the military are trained for warfare which calls for prompt action in any situation at any time no matter how dare the conditions are. The same cannot be said of other civilian agencies' [ZAM_02, 2023].

An example was given of when the military engineers were engaged to erect a bailey bridge over a washed away bridge. The military engineers quickly mobilised and moved on site immediately but had to wait for materials to be delivered by the RDA and therefore could not immediately commence the works. This frustration was expressed by one of the participants from the FGD.

'The challenges mainly faced were, you find when given a warning order to move, you prepared yourself even at short notice but dealing with civilians they would probably not move at the same speed that you as military would want them to move. This also affected the timely completion of renovating the damaged bridge' [RDA_02, 2023]

4.7. Bureaucracy

This hinges on following laid down procedures even in a dire situation which calls for immediate action. As cited by an informant from the FGD, who were deployed in Mwinilunga, North Western Province, Some of the materials required for the project could have been procured locally from nearby towns such as Solwezi, but the sponsor agency (RDA) insisted that they could only secure them from Lusaka according to government tender procedures. This proved to be costly and time consuming and thereby affected the completion period of the project as brought out in the following excerpt:

'When you are on the ground, material delivery and transportation on time has sometimes been a challenge especially when dealing with some organisations which always insist on following procurement procedures. Imagine we are in North Western Province, Mwinilunga, we do estimates on the materials that you require to be on site for phase one. You find that when you are done with that phase, you have already pushed in a requirement for the next phase but the materials for the first phase are not yet delivered thereby affecting completion time' [RDA_04, 2023].

Bureaucratic delays could be attributed to lack of civic awareness on the need for promptness and dedication to civic duty [38,39,40,41].

4.8. Procurement of Wrong Materials

There are times when some stakeholders come forward during time of emergencies and offer their help materially or financially. Whereas such help is always welcome, the problem arises when it is material not required at all or

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