ABSTRACT

The strengthening of community systems for disaster-affected communities or in anticipation of occurrence of a disaster remains an important part and process of any disaster risk reduction strategy or plan. Community Systems Strengthening as a vehicle of translating public participation principles into practice recognises that disaster-affected communities need to be organised and adequately resourced in order for them to play proactive roles in all efforts designed to prevent, mitigate and prepare for disaster. This is particularly critical in the context of cholera because the disease and hazard is dependent on public health management principles in situations where basic water and sanitation facilities and infrastructure are not in place or do not meet the minimum standards.

Contemporary disaster risk reduction policy and practice recognise that public participation is critical to both development planning and disaster management. In contrast, traditional development planning and reactionary disaster management approaches have been associated with the shortcomings of excluding affected and potentially at risk communities from the planning and decision-making processes.

This study is an assessment of the capacity of communities in Kadoma to respond to cholera disaster from the perspective of the potential role and impact that Community Systems Strengthening can play and have on the lives of disaster-affected communities. The study reviews key literature on public participation at international and country (Zimbabwean) levels to identify options available in the political economic environment for intervention through Community Systems Strengthening. At the level of Kadoma the research provides insight into the options for Community Systems Strengthening, and a framework for the city’s scope of improving public participation for cholera-related disaster management.

**KEY WORDS:** Community; Community Systems Strengthening; Community-based Disaster Management; Public Participation and Disaster Risk Reduction