

ABSTRACT

This study sought to determine the coping strategies regarding the impact of the cholera epidemic in Zimbabwe from 2008 to 2009, focusing mainly on a community in Budiriro suburb, which is located in the city of Harare. The cholera epidemic affected the whole country of Zimbabwe and it took one year to be contained. Although concerted efforts were made to mobilize support from various international and local partners, a total of 98 592 people were infected and 4 288 died. This represents a case fatality rate of 1.7% and for Budiriro it was 2.3% as it was one of the most affected suburbs, where 206 people died. The death of so many people motivated the researcher to find out how the community managed to cope with the devastating impact of such a nationwide epidemic. The findings from the study were that at the time of the cholera outbreak in Budiriro, safe clean water was no longer available to the residents. Cholera came at a time when Zimbabwe was on its knees socio-economically and politically. Similarly, Harare City Council was facing several challenges that compromised its capacity to maintain and replace water and sanitation infrastructure. Sewerage systems had collapsed in most parts of the suburb and toilets were no longer functional, forcing most of the residents to defecate in the open spaces. Faecal contamination of the alternative water sources contributed to the high death rate in Budiriro. The study made several recommendations which are categorized into immediate, short term and long term in order to guide prioritization and implementation. More resources should be allocated to ensuring that sewerage and water infrastructure is fully functional. Council could start with smaller but critical tasks such as clearing of drainage systems before the onset of the rainy season. More importantly, cholera health education should be amplified with the assistance of humanitarian agencies that have the means for such programmes. Above all, active participation of citizens in civic issues should be mainstreamed into programmes spearheaded by Council and other stakeholders in the water and sanitation sector.