

Uncovering hidden struggles among disaster survivors in Tanzania: Are they vulnerable survivors or resilient victims?

Egidius Kamanyi

Lecturer, Department of Sociology and Anthropology, University of Dar Es Salaam

aegykama@yahoo.com/kamanyi.egidius@udsm.ac.tz

DOI:10.56279/tajoso.v9i1.88

Abstract

Understanding experiences of disaster survivors as they struggle to bounce back from disaster-caused traumatic experiences, requires concerted and focused efforts involving scholars and practitioners. Developing countries like Tanzania accommodate people who after crisis end up living in misery and not completely recovering. Notwithstanding, however, those labeled resilient or vulnerable usually simply portray a distorted 'face value' reality of the struggles endured. Using a qualitative approach informed by a Chordal Triad of Agency Conceptualization, the paper's main objective is to uncover hidden struggles among disaster survivors. By recapitulating on the previous study conducted in Kagera¹⁴, I extend the argument based on 'mundane' experiences to enlighten complexities people encounter as they survive multiple disasters. Findings indicate that understanding vulnerability and resilience encounters among survivors, requires scrutinizing reductionist and exceptionist approaches normally applied by disaster responders often for concealed interests. This process produces vulnerable survivors and/or resilient victims. The paper therefore, unpacks post-disaster struggles among survivors considering their real voices mostly as always ignored by actors. I conclude that struggles of people cannot be summed up without a critical examination of their experiences.

Keywords: *hidden struggles, disasters, resilient victims, vulnerable survivors*

¹⁴ PhD thesis, titled "Exploring the Forms of Agency among Disaster Survivors: A Case of Earthquake Survivors in Bukoba District, Tanzania", 2020.

Introduction and Background

Scrutiny into livelihoods of disaster survivors deserves critical debates by scholars and policy implementers. There is enormous amount of literature detailing the experiences of disaster survivors in various places of the world. It is an undeniable fact altogether that people have suffered and will continue to interact with multiple disasters and the accompanied risks. However, understanding the experiences from these disasters will mainly mean much more to those who encounter them first hand as compared to actors and disaster responders if the two parties do not reconsider their nature of interaction whereby, the latter needs to exercise informed approaches in responding to such disasters. The main impetus being to help the survivors avoid being victims by recovering through informed and well-established actions based on the realities of life they live. This paper examines the struggles of disaster survivors in facing, responding, recovering and living within and beyond disaster times. As argued in various literature, the understanding of disasters has been important at the global, regional and country levels (UN/ISDR. Geneva 2004; URT, 2004, 2005, 2017; Mtenga and Mwakaje, 2016; 2018; AU, 2017; Mshana and Mushi, 2019; Rutatora, 1997; Bhavnani et al., 2008; and Klaus, 2000; Kamanyi, 2020). Scholars in various disciplines such as geography, sociology, psychology, archaeology, geology, economics, political science, engineering, and others (Letukas and Barnshaw, 2008; Drabek and McEntire, 2003) have attempted analysis of disasters and survivors' lives. Tanzania like other countries in and outside Africa such as Turkey, Syria, the USA, Indonesia, the Philippines, Japan, Haiti and others has lived experiences in disaster occurrences. Disasters known on local and global scales result from meteorological and hydrological hazards, climate extremes, and others that are man-made (UN/ISDR. Geneva 2004; IFRC, 016; Lori, 2015; Quarantelli, 1988; Spilerman, and Guy, 2009; Mtenga and Mwakaje, 2018). Thus, disasters include earthquakes, wars, floods, landslides, tsunamis, heavy winds, radiation or overheating, hurricanes, tornados, wildfires, accidents involving transport vessels like airplanes, ships and trains, and in many cases disease outbreaks that claim many peoples' lives such as COVID 19 (WHO, 2020; Shagembe, et al., 2022; Kamanyi and Katabizi, 2023; and Bhavnani et al., 2008). However, these disasters are unevenly distributed worldwide, at regional and national or local levels. Experiences from these disasters are similarly diverse and

asymmetrical among survivors due to various individual and structural reasons including the macro socioeconomic policies.

This paper critically examines the experiences of survivors¹⁵ by extrapolating-beyond reductionism- their struggles to survive disasters. It extends an argument against the normative conclusions by scholars and disasters responders (referred to as actors in this paper), who place the survivors in polar dimensions as either resilient/survivors or vulnerable/victims¹⁶ while in fact the opposite is eminent and highly the most possible reality. The effects of disasters on survivors befall them not as passive receptors but rather active actors with agency and able to turn the facts around. Reviewed literature identifies various effects as a result of disasters. The effects, however, differ in intensity, extent and sometimes in type, depending on the kind of disaster and situation around which people are living. Nevertheless, they all, at the bottom line, cause some disturbances in normal human life (Kathleen, 2007; Paton and Johnston, 2006; Djillali, 2005; Andrew, 2013; Kamanyi, 2020). Effects of disasters, say, an earthquake, usually presented in literature entails aspects like damage of settlements, loss of lives, destruction of infrastructure, cause of disability, food insecurity, social life disturbance like when people are displaced or forced to shift to new areas or when social institutions like schools and worship centres are dismantled. In short, many literature sources present such effects (for example, Drabek, 1986, 2005, 2006b, 2007b, 2007c; Djillali, 2005; FEWSN, 2016 IFRC, 2016; World Bank, 2008, 2009a, AU, 2017).

The mentioned effects truly happen and such reality is an unquestionable fact. However, what remains to be a gap is the taken for granted reality, that is, such effects go beyond and are deeper than described physical indications.

¹⁵ Referring to all affected directly or indirectly by disasters but alive as opposed to the dead who I consider main victims.

¹⁶ I will use '**vulnerable survivors**' to refer to people affected by disasters who in the process of responding and recovering from these disasters do face difficulties in such a way they are labeled as vulnerable by using the disaster responders' lens but in real facts they are comparatively better off; whereas '**resilient victims**' are those people who in using the same responders' lens are labeled as resilient whilst they are conducting a comparatively very difficult life. For instance, a family still residing in IOM-donated tents six years after the Kagera earthquake - would be considered as vulnerable survivors as opposed to a family in a new house but whose daughter entered into an informal pact with a well-off grown man to reconstruct their destructed house in exchange for continuous sexual favours, who I consider resilient victims.

Also that, ways to recover from such effects are multiple and produce nuanced struggles placing survivors in changing life situations that are beyond what actors normally recognize. I agree with Quarantelli (1998) in his book titled *'What is disaster?'*, where he draws empirical examples from studies conducted in USA, Sri Lanka and Indonesia (Quarantelli (1998)). He argues on the importance of understanding effects of disaster much deeply as he denotes the following:

“... the complexity of studying 'disaster forces us to go beyond our traditional understanding of disaster as a spatial reality and view it as a phenomenon, which has impact deeper than visual" (Quarantelli, 1998: 53).

Perhaps, the African Union, through the Sendai Framework implementation for disaster risk reduction, somehow reflects on this when they state:

To attain the expected global outcome in Africa, the PoA¹⁷ seeks to pursue the following goal: “Prevent new and reduce existing disaster risk through the implementation of integrated and inclusive economic, structural, legal, social, health, cultural, educational, environmental, technological, political and institutional measures that prevent and reduce hazard exposure and vulnerability to disaster, increase preparedness for response and recovery, and thus strengthen resilience.” (AU, 2016:7)

The question is how this translates into actions through stable and practicable state policies for individual countries and communities. Also, it is about whether the definition of disaster, vulnerability, resilience and all processes involved are the same across and within local contexts where disasters occur. Besides, I concur with Quarantelli, (1998) who believes that the effects of disasters cannot be reduced to physical boundaries because they extend deeply into humans' innermost consciousness. Psychological effects, for

¹⁷ Program of Action is the strategic plan for the implementation of the Sendai Framework in Africa.

instance, which emanate from trauma of disasters like earthquakes are very deep. The researcher is of the view that there is still a need to examine survivors' paths and actions amidst the disaster situation. Shortage of earthquake disaster management studies focusing on critical engagement with survivors' agency and behaviour needs to be addressed. This is also supported by study by Goltz and Bourque (2017:2) who argue that:

Human behavioral response to strong earthquake ground motion has not received the level of attention from social scientists that it merits and the scarcity of such studies has allowed a conventional wisdom to prevail suggesting that such behavior is driven by emotion, individualistic in character and largely maladaptive in result.”

Summing up on this, the literature reviewed suggests that a lot has been done in the field of disasters management. However, it is equally important to note, as pinpointed by Ahangama and Prasma (2015), that the contemporary generation of disaster scholars is increasingly contributing to the ongoing debate on applying resilience and vulnerability in theory and practice. Nevertheless, the theoretical foundations of resilience and vulnerability in the disaster management context have not yet been sufficiently validated on empirical grounds. This alludes on academic level, that there are still multiple controversies around disaster and crisis studies and practice to be settled. As indicated above, the field has attracted researchers who have engaged deeply to understand what constitutes a disaster (Drabek, 1999; Dynes, 2000; Enarson, 2005, Weichselgartner, 2001; and Williams, 2008); defining a disaster (Oliver-Smith 1999; Quarantelli, 1998); the perspectives and theories on disaster (Quarantelli, 1998; Drabek, 2007c; Enarson, et al. 2003; Fritz 1961); policies and practices in place (FEWSNET 2016; IFRC, 2016; URT, 2017; UNEP, 2008; AU, 2016; and WHO, 2021).

Hence, this paper goes beyond resilience/vulnerability-reductionist culture persistent in most of reviewed literature to examine what actually constitutes such realities by bringing to light the struggles individuals and in their collectivities assume in response to disasters, making them either

resilient victims or vulnerable survivors or both in various times and spaces within a life continuum.

Methodology

A qualitative approach was adopted in exploring and understanding the forms of agency among multiple disaster survivors taking the 2016 earthquake catastrophe in Kagera as a case study. Using key-informant Interviews (KIIs), focus group discussions (FGDs), observation and documentary review plus informal conversations that have spanned beyond 2020 to 2023, the researcher was able to generate a considerable amount of information from people in their local context both on the earthquake and other multiple disasters that have occurred in the area such as Uganda-Kagera War (1978/9); HIV/AIDS pandemic (1983 onwards); Mv Bukoba ship accident (1996), crop diseases- especially bananas (1998 onwards); and most recently the COVID 19 (2020 onwards). The experiences in these disasters make Kagera Region particularly, Bukoba Districts¹⁸ the most suitable study area¹⁹. The choice of these methods, area of study, and participants was purposive in an attempt to get a deeper picture of survivors' experiences. A total of 50 key informants were interviewed; 24 out of 50 were from Bukoba Urban, 21 from Bukoba Rural and five from the regional level. An average of 80 participants was also selected for eight (8) focus group discussions (four from each study site).

The data generation activity began with preliminary informal consultations with local leaders, specifically, the District Disaster Management Coordinators with whom we identified the relevant study sites. Then I went on to meet the Village/*Mtaa* and Ward Executive Officers (VEOs/WEOs) in both areas, urban and rural, for setting up logistics and identifying study participants. After that, I began interviews in Haumgembe *Mtaa* and later in Ibosa Village. The study population for this study included: i) Community members particularly those who had experience in a number of the mentioned

¹⁸ Formerly Bukoba was a single district now divided into Bukoba District Council and Bukoba Municipal Council.

¹⁹ The study was carried out in Bukoba, including both urban and rural districts, in Hamugembe and Bugabo Wards, and further down in Omukishenye *Mtaa*¹⁷ and Ibosa Village respectively (Figure 1). Bukoba was selected because of its intensive experience in multiple disasters, compared to other regions in Tanzania. The wards and villages were purposively selected because they had a record of more destructive effects by earthquake disaster compared to other areas.

disasters, ii) victims of the earthquake (those who were directly affected by the 2016 earthquake, including those who lost family members; those whose property like a house was stricken, those who suffered injuries or someone from the family suffered injuries), iii) leaders of both private and public institutions that were affected by the earthquake and other past disasters such as schools, religious buildings, roads, and hospitals; iv) local government officials/authorities such as village/street chairpersons, Village/*Mtaa* and Ward Executive Officers (VEOs, MEOs and WEOs), Councilors; v) designated disaster actors such as the fire brigade and police vi) The Regional and District Disaster Management office representatives; vi) NGOs whose functions in disaster/risk management were pivotal during and after the earthquake strike particularly World Vision, and Red Cross. This mixture of participants has deepened the undertakings of this paper to make an argument related to the experiences of survivors as they struggle to respond to disasters. I adopted a phenomenological²⁰ approach in data analysis.

Findings and Discussion

The section covers experiences of the survivors unpacking how the earthquake plus different other disasters created a significant chapter in their life patterns. Using the conception of chordal triad of agency as propounded by Emirbayer and Mische (1998), I cover different localized views and forms of agency, which different survivors adopted as a way to continue surviving multiple episodes of life disturbing events in Bukoba amidst poorly supportive socioeconomic policies in the area. Concepts developed by the two icons of the chordal triad of agency conceptualization are put to test. That is, the researcher used such concepts as iterative,²¹ practical-evaluation²² and

²⁰ That is, data in form of text was supported and complemented by observational information either in form of simple notes, memories or pictures from the field involving survivors everyday practices. Generally, data analysis began during the data generation process and went on through writing of findings and has superseded the period beyond 2020 to 2023 where additional analysis and data through documentary review and informal interviewing have been part of the methodology.

²¹ The Iterational Element: “the selective reactivation by actors of past patterns of thought and action, as routinely incorporated in practical activity, thereby giving stability and order to social universes and helping to sustain identities, interactions, and institutions over time”. (Emirbayer and Mische, 1998:971)

²² The Practical-Evaluative Element: “the capacity of actors to make practical and normative judgments among alternative possible trajectories of action, in response to the emerging demands, dilemmas, and ambiguities of presently evolving situations”. (Emirbayer and Mische, 1998:971)

projective²³ attention to explore survivors' experiences as they at times struggle invisibly to survive. The quote below gives some light to what is transpiring in this paper.

".... the temporally constructed engagement by actors of different structural environments [...] which, through the interplay of habit [iteration], imagination [projectivity], and judgment [practical evaluation], both reproduce and transform those structures in interactive response to the problems posed by changing historical situations" (Emirbayer and Mische, 1998: 970).

Reflection and Reconfiguration Lessons from Survivors' past in response to Survival needs

Findings reveal that from past times, people in Bukoba enjoyed many advantages both natural and human produced. Naturally as survivors believed and also supported in literature (Kwesigabo, 2001; FEWSN 2016), the area is endowed with good weather conditions supportive to multiple types of crops but most importantly, bananas, which are a permanent crop used for both food and cash. Also, coffee has been important as a cash crop and for drinking plus chewing as part of the culture among Bukoba majority ethnic group, the Haya. Additional to such better provisions from nature, people in Bukoba enjoyed an advantageous education system created a long time ago by colonial Missionaries who settled in the area. Many schools both primary and secondary were built, some of which have commemorated 128 years²⁴ of existence. The education system coexisted with other social institutions such as religion and health facilities. That is why even through observation, it was apparent that in the premises of many churches (most particularly Roman Catholic), there is always a school and a health facility (hospital, health center or a dispensary).

²³ The Projective Element: "the imaginative generation by actors of possible future trajectories of action, in which received structures of thought and action may be creatively reconfigured in relation to actors' hopes, fears, and desires for the future". (Emirbayer and Mische, 1998:971)

²⁴ It was a colonial agenda to establish three basic institutions for the purpose of serving the colonial interests; i.e. religion, education and health were closely connected together. Therefore in areas where settlers and/or colonial missionaries settled, they introduced churches, schools and health facilities for their own interests in form of study or teaching people who would later work for them in plantation and in the capacity of secretaries and clerks in their work (Settles, 1996).

Thus, people in Bukoba, were endowed with natural advantages of food availability and sources of income, plus strong leadership of chiefs - 'Abakama.'²⁵ Findings show that many families had ability to have some children access good education while others remained to take care of farms and livestock. In a nutshell, it was established that people, for a long time, enjoyed better socio-economic life. Such situation had an impact on their social interactions in terms of their life style including eating styles, relationship with other non-Haya ethnic groups, types of work, and the general concept of the 'self.'²⁶ Among the ramifications of such life styles, were satisfaction and adopting to norms that, in turn, produced stagnation to innovation and creativity such as: accepting the differences and status quo unquestioned on the pretext that everyone has power in what they are good at; rejecting intercultural mix-up both in living settings, marital relations, politics and business; selective and despise against certain food types especially those that are not bananas²⁷; despising types of work especially casual labour which they believe reflect a master-slave dynamic for instance working in someone else's farm for food or money; rejecting all types of hard labour and others regarded as low class such being hawkers or street vendors (*machinga*); appraising alcohol drinking as sign of wealth, manhood and power; to mention a few.

However, considering the need to survive hardships emanating from the afflictions of the disasters fueled with unfavorable macro socioeconomic policy landscape, survivors of the earthquake in Bukoba began acting differently and in many ways circumnavigating their deeply rooted cultural rites and values which don't encourage innovative forward going. This way, rethinking and reconfiguring their way of life to avoid being victims. Some of these new struggles that exhibit as forms of agency among survivors are described in the prospective sections.

²⁵ Colonialism under the British indirect rule retained Local Chiefs commonly known as 'Omukama sing. Abakama pl.' in the interlacustrine region.

²⁶ "The individual's belief about himself or herself, including the person's attributes and who and what the self is". Miller & Ross, (1975)

²⁷ Banana has been a permanent food crop in Kagera and Bukoba, in particular. According to participants, banana crop has been so important and most people's lives depended on it for both food and cash after sale of the extra. Bananas were a sign of wealth and hard work. Other food types were stereotyped as 'foods of the poor *cum* lazy.'

Appraising Cultural Shift: Reconsidering Norms and Values limiting Innovation and Creativity

In response to the above mentioned highly held cultural values that contradict the positive response to disaster management, survivors told that they had to rethink the value of '*I have enough*' as setback to progress hence adopt to creativity and subjectivity as a way towards resilience and coping with the changing situations not only to bounce back as propounded in mainstream reports (FEWSNET 2016; IFRC, 2016; URT, 2017; UNEP, 2008; AU, 2016; and WHO, 2021) rather to survive more sustainably. The study noted that presently, there have been lots of changes in terms of how people relate and act. More subjectivity²⁸ and creativity beyond the norms and customs limitations were observed. It means that in reflecting on their life which is influenced by multiple unresolved disaster repercussions amidst uncertain policy atmosphere, survivors had to either avoid or reform some of their past norms and values. That is, there has been an increasing adaptation to new ways of doing things including believing and acting. Some of such creative and subjective forms of agency adopted by survivors are presented in the next subsections.

Demystifying Life beyond 'Death' and 'Shame' to Survive Disasters

Findings reveal that there has been an increasing change among survivors who progressively denounce some of their past norms and values as a mechanism to respond and recover from the earthquake. Previously, it was captured that the norm was for people, especially the Haya to be resistant to any kind of actions that would make them look cheap or low class. One of these was to avoid shame by any means possible. That is, refrain from any actions or acts that would make one seem less important or needy. People would choose death over shame as perceptible to the community. The study established that at the moment, there is an increase in ambivalence among people on what is the best. Participants expressed changing norms among many people who now see shame as just part of life and thus, would bear with it. It should be noted that death mimicry denotes suffering and death itself. Thus, there has been reconstruction of the belief from what they call in

²⁸ The persons actions which are not necessary based on other people's views; it is a big part of human agency indicating a character of activeness and creativity among individuals.

Luhaya language “*Olwokugooka mfa to Olw'okufa ngooka*” Translated as better 'death than shame' to better 'shame than death.' This is a new twist, which juxtaposes the new struggle amidst times of need. Henceforth, some of the new creative and subjective forms of agency include the following:

- a) *Working for survival through innovative mechanisms:* Data revealed indications of '*a change of plan.*' Survivors maintained that due to lessons learned from the past experience in addition to what they experienced from the earthquake as exacerbated by compounding socioeconomic setbacks, people have increasingly adapted to working much more for their survival than fulfillment of what others wish to see from them. Selectivity of work type is increasingly becoming tactless. This is because the situation has changed. Options have progressively withered away. Sometimes even casual jobs usually rejected by people are no longer available as revealed in the statement below:

“I can tell with certainty that currently, some people in here look for the least respected jobs and they may not get any... For example, in the past, one could need someone to fetch water... People rejected the work because it seemed low class. But today, there has been increasing supply of water through the government... More people don't need to walk kilometres to get water... You may not have a water tap at your home but it is closer at your neighbor's. Thus, it is easy to access water, meaning there is no need to hire someone to do so...In addition, even if one wanted water, there have been people engaged in such activities as a form of employment to them... At times, someone will come knocking at the door to ask if you wanted to purchase water, indicating there is high need of jobs among survivors, something that you couldn't see in the past” (KII/Male/Elderly/Hamugembe/Bukoba).

From the quote, there are so many things to learn that come as struggles survivors go through to be resilient. Findings indicate survivors confront the following situations:

First, availability of social services – water in this case – has reduced some opportunities to casual labourers. Second, some informal jobs have been informally formalized among business persons, for example, in this case, water vending business has shut down casual water fetching from far places. Third, levels of unemployment are becoming unbearable. For instance, in the past, it was really very difficult for one, especially the native to knock on someone's door in search for jobs, especially casual labour like fetching water. Findings indicated that currently, this has become a job people are struggling to secure. Fourth, easygoing conditions have faded away with increasing pressure and stress from people searching for the same jobs everywhere. Therefore, it is in that same manner this study established that changes in norms and values have been inevitable. Survivors have adapted more creative ways of doing work as a way of orchestrating against resultant vulnerabilities. However, given the slow change in culture- some people who adapt to such new forms of doing things look vulnerable in the face of fellow community members. However, they have ways to avoid such labels by proactively reshuffling and adopting resilient techniques such as:

- *Seeking casual work far from home* - searching for casual labour in the next three or four streets/villages from home where people barely recognize him/her.
- *Pretending not to be a native* - some adopt a self-denial form of agency in order to easily seek and do such casual jobs. This is caused by two reasons: *one*, people denying their identity so that the 'boss' who also happens to be a native would not notice he is offering a job to a person of his nativity, which most dislike to do because of the attached meaning already discussed. *Two*, there is a stereotype that offering casual labour to people from Bukoba is wastage of money and time because most of them do not do such jobs and those who try, do not perform well. Denouncing one's identity thus becomes a positive deviance and camouflage that helps in resilience.
- *Establishing water selling as a formal business*. Some survivors decide to organize some funds and buy gallons and buckets then fetch water ready for sale to whoever wishes to. It was noted that at the beginning, such people who adapted this kind of business pretended they did not fetch water themselves while in fact, they did it themselves at night.

This is another denial but yet a helpful form of agency to keep life moving.

- *Forming groups of casual labourers with a mix of people from various backgrounds.* The groups are composed of people such as those from Mwanza, Kigoma, Musoma and so forth. Participants mentioned that this mechanism helps them avoid labeling and naming by their fellow natives.

- b) *Adapting to new eating styles and food diversities by avoiding food naming.* The normative values towards food and eating, as aforementioned, were not very friendly to welcoming new types of foods and/or seeing it to be normal that somebody can eat whatever food he/she wants. Findings revealed that such past norms have been reconstructed, to a great extent. The change began when bananas were highly affected by crop diseases. The strong banana paradise concept in Bukoba was contravened due to more people losing their farms. With fewer bananas in the area, most people have found it inevitably necessary to venture into other forms of foods that they used to name as worthless. In fact, talking to youths, most in their early 20s, it was clear that the value of bananas is not important to them. This means that new eating styles have been adopted in many families. While the value of bananas as the most respectable food to offer to a visitor is still important, it does not make other types of food insignificant as it used to be. Signifying deconstruction of such values, the following creative ways of accessing food were denoted: *First*, planting other diversities of banana- for instance the ‘fia’ type dating back to 1990s when it first appeared. *Second*, adapting new technologies of food keeping such as drying and exchanging with grains like maize and beans and other legumes. *Third*, other food types have gained popularity. Cassava, potatoes (sweet and irish), maize, ugali, rice and other types of meals have received significant attention and use. *Fourth*, modern farming mechanisms are increasingly adopted. That is, adoption of agroecological practices such as use of manure and choice of the most weather resistant type of banana seedlings rather than the normal type, which seems to be less resistant to disease and weather conditions in the area.

- c) *Rethinking the drinking behaviours*: This study established that culturally, drinking is a sign of masculinity among natives of Bukoba, for those whose religions permit. Participants commented that it was a sign of being a man to drink daily, it also signified wealth and power in the society. At the moment with multiple disasters impacting their life negatively aggravated by slow support from macro socioeconomic policies, survivors mark drinking as a cost. In order to get access to alcohol, one must have money or strong networks of drinking, which also cannot certainly make offers every day. Thus, some survivors said some people decided to do away with alcohol or at least reduce its consumption in order to concentrate on their family survival. Nevertheless, it does not mean there are no survivors drinking. There are and others are actually new to drinking and had to adapt it as a way of releasing stress. But just as a cultural value or norm, it has been increasingly losing its value as an indication of masculinity or manhood in that sense.

These findings present a form of struggle not easy to grasp on just observation. Apparently, reasons for such creativities are due to (what is already pinpointed in this work) power of social norms and values. However, survival becomes more important than such norms and hence, making different survivors adopt multiple creative and subjective life ways. It is clear that in these exchanges- people assume changing statuses and positions as resilient or vulnerable. However, the two are not isolated from each other because being resilient doesn't present itself directly as being a survivor instead some are resilient victims- such as those who have to deny their identities or be temporarily displaced to search for work. It is this same level of analysis and in practice that makes them vulnerable survivors in these new areas all of which our simple censorship of disaster management cannot conceive and make sense of. Hence, the disaster responders and other actors including scholars get it all wrong without critically looking at these people's struggles beyond observable realities.

Survivorship through Social interactions and Networking

Segregation and discrimination against non-Haya under the umbrella of ethnic 'purity' have been dominant practices in Bukoba society. Discussions with participants indicated that for a long time, it was difficult for the Haya to interact with people from other places outside Bukoba signaling to a belief in keeping ethnic purity. While not pronounced, comments regarding where and who to marry indicated a push-away of people from different ethnic groups as seen in the narrative underneath:

“Indeed, it was important that a boy from Bukoba get married to someone from here, even the boys and some girls who went for studies or businesses in other areas were encouraged and at times forced to make sure they got married to somebody of the same origin... In due regard, it has really taken long until interactions and intermarriages were allowed here”

(FGD/Female/Adult/Hamugembe/Bukoba).

With disasters defecting many social and economic relations, changes to adapting behaviours that lead to sustainable futures has been a precarious reality. Findings indicate that increasing social interactions have been inevitable in Bukoba, compared to the past. The area has increasingly been a destination to many people from different areas in the country. It was noted that people of various origins currently reside both in town and in the rural. Apart from the majority ethnic group – the Haya - together with various subgroups within it, there are so many other ethnic groups in the area. Notably, the Sukuma, Kurya, Hangaza, Kerewe, Jita, Zinza, Chagga, Maasai, Ha, Nyamwezi and others, plus Ugandans, Burundians, Rwandese and from many other nationalities. Such diverse groups with different cultural backgrounds have formed a new pattern of interactions and thus, affecting and changing the natives in many ways. The mixture of people has positive socioeconomic and demographic advantages like improving technological development, influencing 'harmful' cultural values with new ways of life, sharing the best cultural practices from other areas and working hard. For example, some of the works never entertained before in Bukoba are now part of the business life. Welcoming and accepting new and multiple social

interactions has meant for more diverse activities calling for new innovations and dynamics as well. Some noted social interactions include:

Allowing social mixture among different people: The data revealed that unlike in the past, people in Bukoba, have been increasingly receptive to newcomers. It is said that newcomers were denied access to buy land, not openly but impliedly, through difficult sanctions against selling clan or family land. Currently, participants commented that such values are no longer so strong, especially in the urban center and increasingly in the rural as well. Additionally, calling new-comers names²⁹ is no longer as important as it used to be, meaning more integration is welcome.

Intermarriages are increasing: There has been changing value regarding marital norms among the natives of Bukoba. The study established that because of the increase in education and intermingling of people, leading to changing social interactions, currently intermarriages have augmented. Belated intermarriages should also be understood in the context that the natives did not encourage it just for the sake of celebrating ethnic purity, but imagining a relationship which would last, at least from the point of view of common socialization. Hence, I noted that intermarriages have encouraged more adaptive behaviours towards changing social circumstances due to persistent disasters in the area. For instance, it has been observed that there are changing gender roles whereby even a woman can go fishing, which is not something a native Haya woman could do in the past. But it was said that this is because a Haya is married to a Kerewe or Jita, for whom fishing is just part and parcel of life. Hence, the mentioned changing interactions have generated various forms of agency that support the life continuum of survivors of disasters in Bukoba. As such, while an observer might consider a fisher woman as vulnerable whilst regarding a non-working woman as resilient, the findings indicated the opposite resonates in some situations. That is, the former could be regarded as a vulnerable survivor for she does what is regarded as tough and non-feminine work and rightfully survives while the latter might seem resilient but suffering abuse from the one providing for her

²⁹ Noted that newcomers were usually given disgusting names to discriminate them from integration and discouraging them to stay. For instance, they were named as 'abarungu' or 'abanyamahanga' which literally means 'people from the jungle/bush' - the unknown.

be it a husband, or who the participants named as ‘sponsors or sugar daddies’ all of whom were considered predatory and abusers in many occasions. The state of affairs above calls for an in-depth analysis of hidden struggles among disaster survivors rather than benching on exclusionist and reductionist approaches normally applied by disaster actors, claiming to build resilience to disaster survivors whilst deepening their misery instead as variously argued in literature (Mtenga and Mwakaje, 2016, 2018; AU, 2017; Mshana and Mushi, 2019; Rutatora, 1997; Klaus, 2000; Ahangama and Prasanna, 2015).

Adoption of New Business Ventures, Styles and Creativities

Survivors in Bukoba have adapted different business ventures and styles as per findings of the study. Study participants hinted that everyone is struggling to do some business of different nature, scale and styles. A number of ventures have been explored in different styles and ways but all with a mission to support livelihood and avoid further suffering from disasters. Survivors tend to use innovative approaches to make significant impact as they struggle to keep up with life. Some of such businesses include:

Proliferation of street vending businesses: It is noted that this type of business has extended beyond the normative one that was specific to fish sellers who used to go around in the villages and streets in town, hooting a cow horn in order to alert potential customers. Ultimately, the fishers were among people who were regarded as low class as aforementioned. They were seen as people without alternative ways of surviving. The current findings indicated that there has been change in such beliefs and perceptions. As a result, many people have adapted to marching businesses not only selling fish but also all kinds of goods. With accelerated interaction with sellers from other regions such as Mwanza, Shinyanga and Dar es Salaam, people in Bukoba have adapted the business style in other goods such as ripe bananas and other fruits, second-hand clothes (*mitumba*), underwear and socks, fried grasshoppers commonly known as ‘senene’, bottled water and beverages, simple mechanic motor tools, cosmetics, and fish or sardines (*dagaa*). In the said urban centers, people doing such businesses are commonly known as '*machinga*'.³⁰

³⁰ This is a person who walks around selling different merchandise normally regarded to be informal traders. It is a very common business in big cities like Dar es Salaam though as of such business is also found in rural areas (Mukono and Kamanyi, 2013)

More women into business: Breaking the gender norms, as already pointed out, has meant an increase in the number of women doing businesses in Bukoba. Unlike in the past when women were confined to domestic chores, currently, there are equitable norms that allow more women into the public space, especially businesses. Family needs have amplified including, but not limited to, school fees for children, daily household needs such as food and other requirements like clothing, rent for town dwellers, paying bills including water, electricity and decoder for television services plus phone chargers. Dependency on husbands was termed as risky since some end up abandoning families and/or just stopping to support altogether due to hardships. The next quote details the claims:

“Honestly speaking, life has changed a lot nowadays. In the past, women depended on men to provide for almost everything. That is, not possible today... In the past, studying was not as a priority as it is today. Now all children require an education, which despite the current free education policy, there are some things like school uniform and extra tuition. Others want their children to study in private schools. Thus, if you depend on your husband to provide for each and everything, you can't make it, and the family will remain backward”
(FGD/Females/Ibosa/Bukoba).

Such views were supported by different participants, including men and youths. The Government officials whom we interviewed also corroborated that women's involvement in businesses has been important in order to reduce the burden on men, on the one hand, but to cope with family needs for those who are single, separated or neglected, on the other. However, it was noted that this was not easy for men to accept that women can equally engage in businesses, but with time, the approval level is increasing as evident in the following quote:

“Most men don't easily allow their wives to do business, but the thing is they can't provide them with everything they want... For example, many women are currently engaging

in VICOBA³¹, which they have to commit contributions for every week. Not all men are ready or able to provide that every week. Thus, they have to allow their wives to also engage in businesses in order to make sure they contribute to the family... ” (FGD/Males/Ibosa/Bukoba).

Thus, it was established that due to the compounding nature of needs and wants at the family level, plus other factors like being widowed, single or separated, more women have been part and parcel of businesses in Bukoba. As mentioned before, all these forms of agency occur in line with how individual actors practically make an evaluation of their life by engaging their past, present and projection of the future as a way to avoid vulnerability to disaster afflictions. It is a hidden struggle.

Increasingly adopting urban life style in the rural: It was noted that rural dwellers, especially survivors of the 2016 earthquake disaster in this case, have adopted business styles peculiar to urban areas. Rural style business was normally confined and with less innovation but currently, following competition from people coming in from urban areas and starting up some businesses, survivors had to acclimatize the competition. For instance, in Ibosa Village, which is also close to Lake Victoria shores with a lot of fishing businesses, have attracted the construction of many bars and guest houses. All were said to be new life styles in many villages in Bukoba. Establishing guest houses means allowing more people from other areas to visit and do business. This is a reason which some participants gave for rampancy of sex activities in many places, both urban and rural. Establishing alcohol selling bars also indicates improving business, but at the same time entails the fact that more people from urban areas are increasingly visiting or shifting to rural areas with such urban culture.³² Therefore, this is a form of agency pertinent to the present life of survivors as they venture into multiple options against the effects of the earthquake and other previous disasters. It is normally a struggle

³¹ Village Communal Banks - groups for depositing and lending/borrowing money.

³² "The literal concept of 'urban culture' is broadly referred to as the culture of towns and cities, or, as any of the behavioral patterns of the various types of cities and urban areas, both past and present. It refers to a culture placed and rooted in an urban space, a space from which the culture has originated and manifested itself in a manner strictly related to the spatial characteristics of the specific given urban context" (Terzoglou, 2001).

not given sufficient attention. However, it is a change that produces resilient victims and vulnerable survivors. Single women and men abandoning families and moving to these new places mean a lot is desired as considering the neglected families. The question is how much is known and considered by disaster responders when addressing disaster management issues.

Working beyond normal working time (a 24/7 style): Among the struggles noted as new behaviour that different people embraced to survive the changing life was espousing to limitless working style. Accordingly, it was observed that some people assumed multiple working roles. For example, a teacher at a government school goes to their work station and reports at 08:00 hours then work until 15:30 hrs. After that he/she moves to a private tuition center where s/he begins teaching from 16:00 hrs to 18:00 hrs, and then moves to a home place of some well-to-do family to teach their children from 19:00 hrs to 21:00 hrs. Another example concerned women doing casual labour. For example, one wakes up and collects laundry from different people then she washes them and hangs them back home to dry while she moves to do some marching business on fruits between 10:00 hrs to 12:30 hrs. Thereafter, he/she goes home to prepare lunch for her children expected to be back at 15:00 hrs from school. After giving them lunch, she irons clothes and delivers them by 17:00 hrs. Then she goes back home and prepares dinner while preparing some porridge to sell at the roadside later at 19:30 hrs.

The study established that such working styles have been adopted by different survivors as mechanisms to manage the challenging life experience. Such people when looked at in terms of what they have accomplished, one may not really understand the level of struggle invested. Thus, it is deductive to consider survivors' resilience or vulnerability just as a mere result of a simple disaster recovery process. The study established that whatever is seen as a recovery process, be it resilience or vulnerability, goes through a very unique process which one needs to engage with actors to be able to comprehend, the least of which the attempt to sum up their struggle as if it was just a simple event ends up misrepresenting the whole picture. Understanding the present critically helps to make sense and reflect on the past as much as it supports projection and imagination of the future all understood in consideration of the socioeconomic and political challenges accompanying these life episodes. As

Quarantelli and Perry (2005) hold that understanding of disaster management is complex, I also comprehend the same, arguing that this process produces multiple and controversial definitions and understandings of a disaster, and what it takes to be resilient and vulnerable, or to be a survivor or victim.

Conclusion

The paper has expounded the complex nature of disaster management by deepening the debate that illuminates the hidden struggles endured by survivors as they respond to disasters. The paper demonstrates an intrinsic power within human actors; who also should not be seen as a conglomeration of homogeneous groups but rather people sharing a culture but at the same time enduring other differences in age, sex and/or gender, level of education, economic background, religion and other multiple intersectional variables, which fall beyond the dominant reductionist ideas on human agency. It is apparent that disaster survivors are active and creative beings who make use of their agency to circumnavigate various life conditions through time and space. However, the survivors do not appear to be stuck in provisions of time or events instead, they are always in a dynamic reality from the past, present and future. People re-imagine their past actions, opportunities as well as challenges and practically evaluate their present through a process involving problematization, characterization, deliberation, decision-making and execution as propounded by Emirbayer and Mische (1998) in their chordal triad of agency conceptualization.

Nevertheless, survivors act on the present by making an imagination of how the future should be organized. Ultimately, the past is juxtaposed to the present and then to the future. This reality provides an active engagement, which sees people act tirelessly for their survival. Consequently, it is noteworthy to consider disaster survivors as active for there is no time they are passive in their life, and this makes all their conditions of life to be temporally refuting the conclusive dominant reference to survivors of disasters as either exclusively resilient or vulnerable. This also refutes the simplistic confinement of these people as victims.

Reality from local contexts where disasters are felt and experienced portrays that resilience and vulnerability happen to people; yes, but they are never

permanent conditions. In addition, they do not occur in one-to-one fashion rather, they encompass a long process of living their (survivor's) life. It is eminent and probably logical to underscore the fact that disaster management process produces ever-changing situations that make people temporal resilient victims and vulnerable survivors, and this is not to say there are no people who are completely resilient or vulnerable. The argument is that to provide them with these labels requires a critical dimension in understanding their life encounters from their lived experiences. This is to, therefore, demystify - with a deconstructive intention - the dominant approaches applied by disaster responders which tend, for far-deserted intentions, to group people in post-disaster stricken contexts as exclusively either resilient (survivors) or vulnerable (victims). Further studies are recommended to extend the discussion into the power politics and divide between the global south and global north experiences. It is also recommended that policy makers and implementers and all other actors in a disaster management sphere engage in understanding the controversies and complexities inherent in disaster survivors' lives to be able to provide inclusive and sustainable solutions in reconstructing, recovering and improving their disturbed livelihoods. By this, I support the conclusion made in the Global Assessment Report to Risk Reduction (2022) stating that "To accelerate essential risk reduction and resilience building, the Global Assessment Report (GAR-2022) calls for action to: Measure what we value; Design systems to *factor in how human minds make decisions about risk*; Reconfigure governance and financial systems to work across silos and design *in consultation with affected people*." (Emphasis added by the author)

Acknowledgement

This study received no extra financial support apart from PhD sponsorship from the University of Dar es Salaam. I would like to acknowledge support in form of time and academic engagement during the six months' fellowship at Montpellier Advanced Knowledge Institute on Transitions (MAK'IT) of The University of Montpellier, France as a Cohort-2023 fellow. The author declares that there is no conflict of interest related to the publication of this article.

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