Abstract

This article is about managing flood disasters affecting the built environment in the rural communities of Zimbabwe. Using Tsholotsho district in Matabeleland North province as a case study, the authors argue that flooding has adversely impacted the built environment through destroying infrastructure. The principal objectives of this study were to establish the impact of flood disasters on the built environment, to demarcate factors that perpetuate communities' vulnerabilities to flooding and to delineate challenges that negate the management of flood disasters in the built environment. This qualitative study was based on a purposive sample of 40 participants. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and observation methods. The findings were that floods can damage human shelter, roads, bridges and dams. Locating homesteads near rivers and dams, using poor-quality construction materials, and lack of flood warning were found to perpetuate vulnerability to flooding. Poverty and costs of rebuilding infrastructure, lack of cooperation between the communities and duty-bearers, and failure to use indigenous knowledge were found to be impeding the management of flood disasters. The study concluded that flood disasters can wipe out community development gains accumulated over many years. Further, community vulnerability to flooding in the built environment is socially constructed. The study posits that addressing the root causes, reducing flood vulnerability and avoiding risk creation are viable options to development in the built environment. Lastly, reconstruction following flood disasters is arduous and gruelling, and not an easy exercise.