

Keywords:

developing countries, climate change is considered one of the main global challenges for the 21st century [1].

In sub-Saharan Africa many regions and social groups are most vulnerable to climate change due to dependence on climate sensitive sectors and as a result of prevailing social, political and economic conditions [1-3]. Although the potential effects of climate change and variability on various aspects of human health has been extensively researched [4], the social aspect has received little attention. Most social sciences research on climate change and variability has focused on the political and economic impact assessments from a sectorial perspective [5]. Population based risk assessment which includes social risk factors, vulnerability indicators, adaptive capacity as well as risk perception and communication has received little research attention. This is partly due to the complex inter-linkages between predisposing social and natural

and skills as well as shortages of due to adult morbidity and mortality, and the related increase in numbers of dependents and the burden of care for sick adults and children orphaned by AIDS.

In 2007 floods in Zambia affected livelihoods in several districts and provinces as crops were washed away and/or submerged, and caused damage to infrastructure such as roads and bridges limiting education and medicine [2]. The combination of higher temperatures, prolonged droughts and floods coupled with scarce water resources and poor sanitation lead to the 2008-2009 cholera outbreaks which affected thousands of people in Zimbabwe, South Africa, Mozambique, Malawi, Angola and Zambia [13]. All these events highlight the complex inter-linkages between natural conditions and predisposing social conditions. Another dimension of climate change and variability in southern Africa reported from the 1980's to the early 2000s was the less severe but increasing frequency of climate shocks as a result of which many families were increasingly unable to recover after these shocks [10].

Priorities and opportunities for social sciences research

The nature and extent of the involvement of the different social science disciplines (sociology, anthropology, psychology, economics, geography, political science, etc.) will depend on the scope of planned research and target population. This can involve collation of relevant social and natural sciences data / information and utilization of mixed method approach towards an integrated interdisciplinary framework for social risk and vulnerability assessment at different spatial and temporal scales (Table 1). Firstly, identifying vulnerable groups and associated risk factors at a local level is important for generating adequate knowledge base to support efforts for vulnerability reduction. Secondly, assessing households coping capacity will help identify important strategies and practices for building adaptive capacity and resilience at a local level. Assessment of community awareness and knowledge will help identify barriers that limit transfer of knowledge and responsive action, and in turn contribute in developing culturally

is does not imply a simplistic interdisciplinary approach that involve social scientists in a subservient role to natural scientists in order to deal with the social dimension, but rather an innovative
