SOCIOLOGY | RESEARCH ARTICLE

Challenges faced by humanitarian organisations in rendering services in the aftermath of Cyclone Idai in Chimanimani, Zimbabwe

Louis Nyahunda¹, Happy Mathew Tirivangasi²* and Thembinkosi E Mabila³

Abstract: This paper explores the challenges faced by humanitarian organizations in implementing disaster management services in the aftermath of Cyclone Idai in Chimanimani district. The tropical cyclone left footprints of humanitarian crises that overwhelmed the capacity of the Zimbabwean government and called for the intervention of international and local non-governmental organizations. This paper utilised the qualitative research methods guided by the exploratory research design. The purposive sampling technique was adopted to select 11 humanitarian organizations that rendered services during and in the aftermath of the disaster. Data were collected through one-on-one semi-structured interviews. Data were analysed thematically with the aid of the Atlas.ti software. The study established that some of the setbacks faced by the humanitarian organizations in assisting the survivors of Cyclone Idai include bureaucracy standard set by the government, unfamiliarity with the disaster-stricken areas, lack of coordination among humanitarian organizations, militarisation of interventions, limited resources and inaccessibility of most communities owing to damaged roads.

Subjects: Environmental Impact Assessment; Environmental Anthropology; Environmental Sociology

Keywords: Challenges; humanitarian organizations; Cyclone Idai; Chimanimani; Zimbabwe

1. Introduction

Humanitarian response and development have been central in fostering recovery, healing and resilience post-numerous plagues that have struck Zimbabwe since time immemorial (Mavhura, 2021).
Like many countries in the Southern hemisphere, Zimbabwe has been exposed to a myriad of environmental and social pressures. Also, the country has been vulnerable to various slow and sudden onset disasters in the name of floods, cyclones, heat waves, drought, and disease epidemics among others (Chitongo et al., 2019). As climate change-related disasters manifest in different forms in Southern Africa, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and international organizations have always partnered with national governments in carrying out a multifaceted humanitarian response in Sub Saharan Africa (Mavhura, 2020). In the history of climate change-related disasters that ravaged Zimbabwe including the tropical Cyclone Idai, humanitarian organizations have always bailed out the government of from its poor and under resourced disaster management systems at both local and national levels (Nyahunda & Tirivangasi, 2020). Zimbabwe has been under chronic economic fragility that warranted humanitarian action due to its compromised resilience to shocks, limited capacity to manage humanitarian emergencies, low adaptive capacity, and poor disaster management planning (Chanza et al., 2020; Nyahunda & Tirivangasi, 2020).

From the 15th to the 21st of March 2020, Zimbabwe was ravaged by the tropical Cyclone Idai which has been classified as the worst disaster to hit the Southern African region (Chitongo et al., 2019). The cyclone caused floods, violent winds, mudslides, and landfalls which affected more than 3 million people in the republics of Zimbabwe, Mozambique and Malawi (Chatiza, 2019). Amongst its devastating impacts, the tropical cyclone caused displacements, loss of human lives, destruction of infrastructure and livelihoods which became a humanitarian crisis (Nyahunda & Tirivangasi, 2020). In Zimbabwe, Chipinge and Chimanimani districts recorded horrendous impacts of the torrential rains because of their proximity to Mozambique where the cyclone wreaked havoc (Chanza et al., 2020). In Chimanimani alone, more than 18,000 households were affected, 271 people were reported dead, more than 300 people reported missing as they were swept away into the sea, hundreds injured and hospitalized (Chari et al., 2020; Nyahunda & Tirivangasi, 2020). When natural disasters strike, they always leave footprints of psychosocial distress, physical and emotional harm that gravitate generosity, good will and humanitarian assistance (Dominelli, 2018; Gwimbi, 2009; Shokane & Nel, 2017; Tirivangasi, 2018). As mentioned earlier that disasters that plagued Zimbabwe have always warranted humanitarian intervention to close the gaps in the country’s disaster management systems, the rippling impacts of Cyclone Idai saw NGOs, churches, Civic Societies and International Organizations partnering with the government to moderate harm, foster healing, recovery and resilience in the aftermath of the disaster. What should be noted is that, despite the commendable efforts made in the provision of humanitarian aid, a catalogue of challenges was registered by several organizations which if they remain circumvented, they pose a potential to worsen the circumstances of the disaster survivors in future. These challenges also pose hurdles in the management of future disasters which are likely to occur given the inevitability of the climate crises, the country’s vulnerability and its weak disaster management systems. Against this backdrop, this study explored the challenges encountered by humanitarian organizations in assisting the survivors of Cyclone Idai in a bid to suggest ways to avert similar challenges in future.

2. Natural disasters and humanitarian intervention

Natural and human-made disasters have a record of overwhelming the coping capabilities of their victims when they converge with vulnerability and poor adaptive capacity (Bhatasara, 2018). Climate change disasters such as cyclones and floods cause massive displacements, death of humans, injuries, loss of livelihoods, high disease incidences, damage, heightened poverty levels and destruction of infrastructure (Tirivangasi, 2018; Tirivangasi et al., 2021a). All these constitute disaster shocks that compromise the resilience and adaptive capacity of disaster survivors (Nyahunda et al., 2021). In this regard, humanitarian intervention involves the provision of logistical and material assistance in a bid to save lives, protection of human dignity and alleviation of suffering (Dominelli, 2018). To add on, humanitarian intervention is essential because most climate change disasters cause environmental, material and human losses that overwhelm the coping abilities of the survivors using their own resources (Chari et al., 2020). What should be noted is
that humanitarian assistance in the wake of climate disasters encompasses a wider range of actors that include the government, churches, non-governmental and international organizations and civic society organizations among others (Gwimbi, 2009). The interventions of these actors are hinged on the basic humanitarian principle of the obligation to provide assistance in emergency scenarios impartially and neutrally (Chari et al., 2020; Tirivangasi et al., 2021b).

In continuation, the purpose of humanitarian intervention in the wake of disasters is to provide lifesaving and sustaining assistance. This is normally achieved through provision of food and non-food items as well as health and nutrition supplements (Mavhura, 2020). According to Gwimbi (2009), humanitarian actors focus on meeting the basic needs of the disaster victims such as water, education, food and nutrition, hygiene and sanitation that always ravaged by climate-induced disasters such as cyclones and floods. From the viewpoint of Mavhura and Bongo (2017), humanitarian intervention is premised on the restoration of livelihoods where special focus is dedicated towards resilience building through provision of livelihood opportunities among other capacity-building mechanisms. These interventions are guided by the ethical principle to protect the rights and dignity of the affected populations. That being said, most post-disaster management services in Zimbabwe have been shouldered by NGOs, international organizations, civic societies and churches. This is mainly because the government’s interventions are marred by a myriad of intricacies such as poor disaster response planning, inadequate resource mobilisation and dependence on donor funding (Chari et al., 2020; Tarisayi, 2015). Furthermore, in as much as the role of non-governmental actors is to support the government efforts in post-disaster management, there are systematic challenges that hamper the smooth operation of these organizations (Gwimbi, 2009; Tarisayi, 2015).

Emerging from above, some of the challenges that are faced by these organizations are logistical based while the government serve as the oasis of majority of setbacks that they encounter. Despite having weak disaster management prowess, the government of Zimbabwe has failed to acknowledge its shortcomings to pave way for autonomy among non-government actors especially in the wake of life-threatening disasters (Nyahunda & Tirivangasi, 2020). Tarisayi (2015) further alludes that there has always been a frosty relationship between the government and NGOs. As such, there is high mistrust on the motive behind the interventions by most NGOs in pursuit of humanitarianism. This concocted relationship subjects non-governmental actors to rigorous vetting prior to rendering disaster management services. In most cases, the government entrusts the Civil Protection Unit presided over by the Zimbabwe National Army to execute disaster management services and this accounts for most challenges faced by non-government actors.

3. Overview of services rendered by humanitarian organizations in the aftermath of Cyclone Idai

The outbreak of the tropical Cyclone Idai left footprints of psychosocial distress, trauma, injuries, food and economic insecurities, emotional malaise and health repercussions. All these calamities constituted a humanitarian crisis (Chanza et al., 2020; Chatiza, 2019; Mavhura, 2020). As the worst disaster that ravaged the Southern hemisphere, the impacts of Cyclone Idai were extensive and unpredictable. Towards this end, there was a widespread humanitarian intervention mobilised by the government in partnership with various humanitarian organizations. As such, several disaster management services were rendered during and in the aftermath of Cyclone Idai (Chazovachii et al., 2019). Notably, the services rendered in the aftermath of the disaster were poised to moderate harm, foster healing, recovery and resilience. In this section, the authors provide a summary of the services rendered by the humanitarian organizations in the wake of Cyclone Idai. From the view point of Chitongo et al. (2019), the services rendered by humanitarian organizations in the aftermath of Cyclone Idai can be categorised as material, logistical, psychosocial and emotional support. In light of this, food and non-food items were mobilised and distributed to the affected populations. This also includes the implementation of feeding programs in schools (Chatiza, 2019).
Some interventions involved provision of essential health services such as medicines, vaccines, systematic immunisation, water purification, establishment of mobile clinics and disease surveillance control systems (Nyahunda & Tirivangasi, 2020). In the same vein other services include mental health and psychosocial services through counselling and debriefing. Other services include the exhumation of dead bodies that were buried in the debris and mud as well as burial assistance (Chamunogwa, 2019). Furthermore, humanitarian organizations offered support repairs and reconstruction of damaged infrastructures. These include roads, bridges, schools and health facilities. On the same note, some services include, protection of vulnerable groups such as women and girls from sexual exploitation and gender-based violence (Chitongo et al., 2019). In the main, identification, family reunification and establishment of safety shelters for orphaned children were provided (Chatiza, 2019). Extrapolating from the brief summary of the services rendered in the aftermath of Cyclone Idai in Chimanimani, it is evident that the discrepancies animating the Zimbabwean government’s disaster management systems would not have made it possible for it to offer such services. Hence, it is commendable to acknowledge the roles played by non-governmental actors during and in the aftermath of the disaster. As maintained in the gist of this study, these organizations faced a number of challenges in that process that shall be delineated in the sections to follow.

4. Methods
The methodology used in the study focused on humanistic philosophy (Creswell, 2014) informed by the lived experiences of the Chimanimani people during the Cyclone Idai and its aftermath. The problem under study is socio-ecologically constructed. Thus, the study focuses on the challenges faced by humanitarian organizations in rendering disaster relief services in the aftermath of Cyclone Idai. As such the study utilised the qualitative research approach guided by the exploratory research design. Data was collected through in-depth interviews with humanitarian organizations. The purposive sampling technique was used for the selection of the participants because due to the COVID-19 pandemic, some participants were not eager to participate whereas other preferred certain venues that were more convenient and safer. Basically, the interviews with humanitarian organizations were centred on establishing the challenges they faced in rendering disaster relief services in the aftermath of Cyclone Idai. The researchers hired two research assistants familiar with the organizations that operated in the area and through snowball sampling, the researchers were able to identify participants for the study. Procedurally, the research assistants were trained during the first day of the field work, this process was meant to provide an orientation to the research and training on the data collection tools. The participants were selected from 11 organizations as depicted in Table 1 with a total of 20 participants being interviewed.

The above table provides a description of the organizations that rendered services in the aftermath of cyclone Idai in Chimanimani district. This study established that organizations from different backgrounds devoted themselves to rendering assistance to the survivors of the tropical Cyclone Idai. The wide range of areas of specialisation for these organizations was imperative in responding to the multifarious impoverishment risks caused by the disaster. In the light of this, the survivors were plunged in the dire need of shelter, food, vaccinations, sanitation services, restoration of livelihoods and psychosocial support. Also, the emergencies posed by the disaster called for multisectoral intervention to save human lives and fostering a quick recovery and healing (Chari et al., 2020). What should be noted is that these organizations were composed of personals with different professional skills necessary in the wake of disasters. The data were analysed thematically following Creswell and Poth (2018’s data analysis spiral. This process involved managing and organising data, transcription of voice recordings of participant’s interviews and uploading the typed transcripts into Atlas.ti 8. Software which is a qualitative data analysis software. After organising the themes into Atlas.ti, the researchers identified codes which were later classified into themes. The themes emerged from data and the researchers interpreted the data guided by literature standpoints and their own views.
5. Findings and discussion

5.1. Vetting processes set by the government

There were universal lamentations among the participants that they underwent a rigorous vetting process from the government before they gained access to the affected communities. In actual fact, there were strict regulations inhibiting the easy penetration of organizations in the affected communities. The clouded perceptions of NGOs as agents for regime change by the Zimbabwean government always set standards and vetting processes to ascertain their intentions before granting them permission to make interventions. In essence, bureaucracy from the government was a major challenge. This brewed some confusion and delays in the execution of efforts that were meant for disaster recovery and restoration. On that note, the bureaucratic glitches created by the government created unnecessary delays in reaching out to the disaster victims. Furthermore, this even created a room for rampant human rights abuse by the soldiers who were first deployed under the Civil Protection Unit because there was no checks and balances (Chatiza, 2019; Nyahunda & Tirivangasi, 2020). From the submissions by Tarisayi (2015), the bureaucratic processes set by the government on NGOs always cause the proliferation of disaster harms as these organizations have to satisfy the vetting processes from the government before they are given the green light to intervene. To worsen the situation, the vetting processes set by the government meant that the donations mobilised were channelled through the Civil Protection Unit and there was a lot of confusion in the process. Some organizations that specialise in monitoring interventions of NGOs for quality control castigated the surveillance from the government’s state security agents that affected the autonomy of these organizations.

From these findings, the authors argue that bureaucratic regulations are only logical from the government that has the capacity to intervene and foster quick recovery on the survivors without external aid. As such, there is no modicum of reasoning in accelerating disaster risks under the pretext of regulating the operations of NGOs. What this means is that some of the post-disaster risks that took a toll on disaster survivors would have been minimised had it been there was autonomy in the operations of the non-governmental actors. Further, the authors contend that despite the trust issues of the government towards NGOs and international organisations where they are perceived to be frontiers of the regime change agenda by the Europeans, it is rare under
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Figure 1. Runyowani village, Chimanimani.
Source: Matonhodze (2019, p. 1)

Figure 2. Power lines destroyed by landslides caused by Cyclone Idai, Chimanimani, Zimbabwe.
Source: (Chatiza, 2019, p. 16).

the principle of humanitarianism for these organizations to harbour sinister agendas in life -
threatening situations as witnessed in Chimanimani. This is because the focus in such situations would be on saving lives and livelihoods (Gwimbi, 2009). Based on this, this study established that the proliferation of the hazards, psychosocial distress and other calamities faced by the disaster survivors is attributed to the draconic measures set by the government on non-governmental actors in the wake of disasters.

5.2. Inaccessibility of certain disaster-stricken areas
The wanton destruction and damage caused by tropical cyclone made some post-disaster interventions a nightmare for most organizations. The storms and torrential rains caused extensive flooding and this had a bearing on logistical operations of humanitarian organizations that volunteered to render services. This was due to the inaccessibility of the disaster-stricken areas owing to the damaged roads and bridges as noted in Figure 1. Also, this was further aggravated by disruptions to communication facilities where coordination became a challenge. This was further aggravated by the destruction of electricity power lines as noted in Figure 2 and backup generators were not available. As such, post-disaster interventions were delayed in some areas such as Buwa Biwa, Pondo and Chipendeke because the roads leading to those areas were unsurpassable. To add on, it took more than 5 days for disaster relief services to reach survivors in Vimba, Mutsangwa and Muchadziya due to the bad state of the roads. This caused some delays towards the amelioration of impoverishment risks caused by the disaster and some survivors spend many days without food and access to other basic needs including health-care facilities (Chamunogwa, 2019; Mavhura, 2020; Nyahunda & Tirivangasi, 2020; Tirivangasi et al., 2021c). The viable option was to use military helicopters to airlift food, non-food items and medical personals. In some instances, this option was animated with setbacks as helicopters could not fly due to bad weather or shortage of jet fuel. What should be noted is that the presence of the military personals was marred with complaints over human rights abuses and exploitation of women perpetrated by these members. The inaccessibility of disaster-stricken areas was further aggravated by lack of familiarity of the area among the humanitarian organizations that volunteered to assist in the aftermath of the disaster. What should be highlighted is that Cyclone Idai and its repercussions became a national disaster because of the unprecedented damage and challenges it posed. As a result, most organizations acted out of haste to offer assistance without proper design of the modus operandi prior to making interventions. This posed hurdles for these organizations to manoeuvre through the logistical glitches.

5.3. Militarisation of disaster response and Politicisation of aid
There was a universal acknowledgement among the participants that militarisation of disaster response served as an impediment towards their effective intervention in the aftermath of Cyclone Idai. In Zimbabwe, disaster response lies largely within the Civil Protection Unit that is predominated by armed forces including the Zimbabwe National Army (ZNA), Airforce of Zimbabwe (AFZ) and the Zimbabwe Republic Police (ZRP). As such, there is still high reliance on military actors in the wake of disasters. Disaster reduction and management in Zimbabwe is a command-and-control model stemming from a militaristic system. As such, the National Civil Protection Coordination Committee consists of Military Commanders and Police Commissioners among other stakeholders (Mavhura, 2016). Extrapolating from this, the high reliance on militaristic interventions impeded the recognition and acknowledgement of non-governmental actors by the government that gives credence to unnecessary vetting processes towards NGOs. The participants acknowledged that in as much as the military and police have valuable expertise, capacities, skills and resources, there are important skills they lack such as protection of the victims. It emerged in this study that most cases of women abuse were perpetrated by the armed forces. The issue of abuse was cross cutting where force was used in the rescue camps to maintain order. Furthermore, the presence of the military at phases where some humanitarian organizations that deal with trauma counselling, psychosocial support and healing made some survivors especially women not to cope with the services rendered. This is because of the horrendous experiences they were exposed to from the military forces. In this regard, the predominance of the armed forces in Zimbabwe’s disaster management planning and response
systems was perceived by various humanitarian organizations as a hurdle because of lack of transparency, intimidation of disaster victims and lack of culture of consultation. It further emerged that information about their methods of operation was not shared with non-governmental actors to influence joint planning which was necessary given the extent of the calamities dovetailed by the disaster.

This study further established that there was involvement of traditional leaders by most humanitarian organizations in the distribution of aid in honour of the oversight role they play in their respective communities. However, this process was marred by hostility over political affiliation were the survivors that are perceived by these leaders to be supporters of the opposition party that is the Movement for Democratic Change were deprived of the right to aid. Notably, the politicisation of aid includes food and non-food items mobilised by some of the humanitarian organizations. The participants castigated this retrogressive stance as an impediment because it created variances in the interventions, they made whereby other disaster survivors had access to their services, while others were denied access under the pretext of political affiliation. The egregious culture of political intolerance, impunity, and discrimination against perceived non-ZANU PF supporters impeded the smooth flow of the interventions by the humanitarian organizations (Nyahunda & Tirivangasi, 2020). Towards this end, these developments are in variance with the basic humanitarian principle to provide assistance in emergency scenarios impartially and neutrally (Stokke, 2007). This further impacted the prospects of fostering resilience among disaster survivors, which is another principle of humanitarianism in the wake of disasters (Dominelli, 2018).

5.4. Lack of inter-agency coordination
Another challenge that was noted by majority of the humanitarian organizations was hinged on lack of inter-agency coordination which created some discrepancies in their interventions. The participants lamented that in other instances, the rendered services were haphazard owing to lack of information sharing and coordinated planning among the humanitarian organizations. This underestimated the importance of finding common areas of convergence and divergences that would either create joint planning or delegation of responsibilities. This gives credence to Tirivangasi (2018) who opines that information sharing on disaster management among humanitarian organizations is rare in Zimbabwe even in non-disaster situations. The importance of this process is the creation of planned and clear catalogue of interventions in emergency situations by these organizations. Consequently, lack of coordination caused some duplication of interventions in Chimanimani and this posed a risk of other essential needs being neglected. Some participants submitted that, in as much as provision of food and non-food items was essential, most humanitarian organizations focused more on that while issues of psychosocial support, mental health, trauma briefing received moderate or little attention. From this, the authors argue that mental health issues are crucial in disaster response mechanism and in cases where they are not prioritised, the disaster impacts cause more harm on the psychosocial wellbeing and resilience of the survivors and these anchors the baseline of humanitarianism (Nyahunda et al., 2021; Shokane & Nel, 2017). Furthermore, the participants submitted that lack of inter-agency coordination among the humanitarian organizations that are mostly constituted with personals with acute professional skills that are essential in fostering healing saw some of their expertise not being tapped into. In essence, this created some gaps in the services rendered by the humanitarian organizations.

5.5. Limited resources and humanitarian expertise
The abrupt outbreak of Cyclone Idai and its rippling impacts caught the government of Zimbabwe and most humanitarian organizations unprepared in almost every sphere. On this note, the severity of the damage and losses caused by the disaster was not in tandem with the level of preparedness and the capacity to mobilise resources. In this regard, majority of the organizations cited resource constraints as a major challenge that impeded their interventions. In as much as humanitarian assistance is premised on supporting national efforts in alleviating human suffering and protection of the lives and dignity of the disaster victims (Stokke, 2007), this cannot be said for the Zimbabwean government
with special reference to Cyclone Idai (Chanza et al., 2020). This is because effective disaster management in the country is stymied by poor resource mobilisation and financing strategies (Bhatasara, 2018). The issue of limited resources also affected the non-governmental actors where their planned catalogue of interventions could not meet the severity of need caused by the floods. The fact that there is high dependency on donor funding by most humanitarian organizations saw the delay in the mobilisation of resources aimed at assisting the disaster survivors. In the same vein, this study established that nature and extent of the damage caused by Cyclone Idai superseded the prowess of most staff personals from these organizations as they had not dealt with the disaster of that nature before. At this juncture, the abrupt outbreak of the disaster and the life-threatening situations it posed even in its aftermath phases saw some humanitarian organizations deploying staff personals without adequate experience in disaster management. Consequently, these personals found it hard to navigate along with limited resources and other structural challenges especially those created by government’s vetting processes and visibility of the armed forces. Furthermore, this created some setbacks in mainstreaming the disaster survivors in the disaster recovery processes.

6. Conclusion
This study unearthed factors that stymied the disaster management efforts of humanitarian organizations that rendered services in the aftermath of Cyclone Idai. The challenges that impeded the smooth operations of the NGOs were both structural and logistical. Notably, the exploration of these challenges was paramount to foster mechanisms with which similar challenges could be circumvented in future. The fact that Zimbabwe is vulnerable to climate change-induced disasters aggravated by the government’s poor disaster management policy planning means every disaster stance a chance of becoming a humanitarian crisis. This also implies that reliance on non-governmental actors to fill the void in the country’s disaster management remains acute. As such, the setbacks that are created by the government towards the non-governmental actors such as rigorous vetting processes require a meticulous attention and systematic review. That being said, the logistical glitches encountered by humanitarian organisation bears testimony on the importance of periodic review of disaster management programs among humanitarian organizations that respond to the contemporary manifestations of natural disasters.

7. Recommendations
- The Government of Zimbabwe should shift toward civilian control (both of planning and implementation) of disaster response, especially during large-scale humanitarian emergencies. The country’s Civil Protection Act should provide guidelines for citizen participation especially at grassroots level. The reliance on armed forces to oversee disaster response trails some gaps that may amplify the disaster risks.

- The government of Zimbabwe should not always view humanitarians’ organizations as enemies of the state but as partners who can foster sustainable disaster management mechanisms in the wake of natural disasters. This is because most humanitarians organizations are primarily involved in enhancing livelihood portfolios for most communities and they are well versed with community resource base and needs.

- Humanitarian organizations should develop and periodically update their disaster risk reduction strategies to avoid ambush of roles and responsibilities in the wake of disasters. This should be complemented by equipping staff with disaster response preparedness skills.

- Both the government and humanitarian organizations should dedicate adequate funding towards environmental awareness and protection programmes.

- There is need for broad-based awareness raising on the purpose of humanitarian aid in the wake of disasters to do away with patronage and politicisation of aid.

- There is need to scale up horizontal and vertical coordination of interventions in disaster preparedness and response to avoid duplication of interventions.
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Author details
Louis Nyahunda
ORCID ID: http://orcid.org/0000-0002-9352-4115
Happy Mathew Tirivangasi
E-mail: mathewtirivangasi@gmail.com
ORCID ID: http://orcid.org/0000-0002-1353-6635
Thembinkosi E Mabila
ORCID ID: http://orcid.org/0000-0003-1635-5219
1 Unit of Institutional Change and Social Justice, University of Limpopo - Turfloop Campus, University of Limpopo, South Africa.
2 University of Limpopo, Department of Research Administration and Development, P. Bag X1106, Sovenga, Polokwane, 0727, South Africa.
3 University of Limpopo - Turfloop Campus, University of Limpopo, South Africa.

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