



Assessment of the Food Situation in Zimbabwe

October 2008

Five years ago, in March 2002, a number of National NGOs viewed the growing food crisis with concern, and formed a network to share experience, views and resources on a response. This National NGO Food Security Network (FOSENET) involves 17 organisations that collectively cover ALL districts of Zimbabwe, and all types of communities.

FOSENET members subscribe that food distribution in Zimbabwe must be based on a platform of ethical principles that derive from international humanitarian law:

- The right to life with dignity and the duty not to withhold or frustrate the provision of life saving assistance;
- The obligation of states and other parties to agree to the provision of humanitarian and impartial assistance when the civilian population lacks essential supplies;
- Relief not to bring unintended advantage to one or more parties nor to further any partisan position;
- The management and distribution of food and other relief with based purely on criteria of need and not on partisan grounds, and without adverse distinction of any kind;
- Respect for community values of solidarity, dignity and peace and of community culture.

FOSENET Monitoring

As one of its functions FOSENET is monitoring food needs, availability and access through NGOs based within districts and through community based monitors. Monthly reports from all areas of the country are compiled by FOSENET to provide a monthly situation assessment of food security and access to enhance an ethical, effective and community focused response to the food situation.

This is an assessment of the food security situation and covers NGO and community based monitoring nationally for the period October 2008. This report outlines information drawn from monitoring reports from 35 districts from all provinces of Zimbabwe for October 2008. This round of monitoring includes information related to food access, security-poverty links, coping strategies and production outputs. Input from Fosenet NGOs is acknowledged.

The food situation is critical at the moment food reserves are fast diminishing forcing those who have maize to charge exorbitant prices, which most people cannot afford.
Chirumhanzu

FOSENET welcomes feedback and contributions on these reports. Follow up queries and feedback to FOSENET, fosenet@mweb.co.zw or kathy_manase@yahoo.com or call 263-4-722427 / 0912370542 This report has been produced with the generous support of ACTION AID INTERNATIONAL

Executive Summary

Availability

Seed is still not available commercially and the few retail outlets that are selling are selling in foreign currency at USD\$ 30 for 10kg. Fertilizer is also reported to be unavailable on the commercial market but in the parallel market at USD\$ 56 for 50kg.

Many reports indicated that people want support for seed and fertilizer at this stage as well as for food handouts.

Affordability

Commercial food availability is slightly better than at the same period last year, using maize meal and oil as indicator foods. High prices are reported to be the major obstacle in accessing commercial market food as retail outlets have been licenced to sell in foreign currency. Goods sold in local currency are exorbitantly priced on a cash and carry basis. The parallel market is also preferred to the formal market because people can buy maize meal and sugar in smaller quantities, thus needing less cash to meet requirements for a day's meal. The withdrawal limits of the month, being ZWD 50 000 which was then raised to \$ 500 000 is still insufficient to purchase one daily food requirement on a cash basis.

Access

Insufficient supply and high demand has pushed the prices up. Maize seed prices are reported to have risen by a further 20% in less than thirty days and are now reported to be up to \$60000/10kg in the formal market.

Many reports indicated that people want support for seed and fertilizer at this stage just as much as food handouts.

GMB deliveries are reported to have remained low or fallen in most districts.. The average number of reported deliveries to sentinel wards was 0.1 compared to 0.22 in September and 0.18 in August. Monitoring sites in half of the districts reported no GMB deliveries at all. While grain sales to GMB are reported to have stopped this month, there are some continuing sales reported to the parallel market, particularly as farmers try to secure cash for inputs.

Calls for the increase of food aid was reported from all provinces. Nearly half (40%) of districts reported some relief activities in the sentinel wards. These relief programmes are limited to the elderly above 60, children under 5 years, school child feeding for Grade 1-7 and people living with AIDS.

Reports indicate that relief organizations are operating at a lower scale, with reduced quantities of food and fewer beneficiaries. Fewer wards are being serviced than before. There are reports in some districts of poor people being excluded due to smaller quantities of food distributed and screening methods used. There was some dissatisfaction with people perceived to be eligible being left out of more limited relief efforts.

Coping Strategies

More frequent report is being made from both rural and urban monitoring sites of residents disposing of assets to raise money for food. The sale of livestock reported in most (45%) districts to buy food or inputs represents significant levels of asset loss for rural households. A goat can be exchanged for two buckets of grain (10kg)

In and out migration continues to increase, with over half of the districts affected as people move primarily to hunt for maize and jobs, to avoid the escalating urban cost of living and for rural youth, to do gold panning as the only way to raise money to buy food.

FOOD SECURITY MONITOR

FOOD AVAILABILITY

Change in the food situation

Three quarters of the districts continue to report a deteriorating food supply situation. Food stocks from last season's harvest are now widely reported to have run out. Staple food prices are widely reported to be unaffordable in both formal and informal markets. Relief supplies have not yet had a strong impact on food availability.

The number of districts reporting improvements in food supplies in October 2008 has further fallen to 7% , from 9% of districts in September and 14% of districts in August.

The few districts that reported improvements in food supplies noted that this was a result of relief food and some increase in the frequency of GMB deliveries, but this was very limited. Three quarters (75%) of districts report a worsening food supply situation, compared to 74% in September and 59 % in August. The districts reporting a worsening situation are evenly spread across the country.

Table 1: Districts with sites with worsening food situations, October 2008

Province	District
Manicaland	Buhera, Chipinge, Makoni, Mutare rural, Nyanga
Mashonaland East	Chikomba, Hwedza, UMP, Marondera urban, Marondera rural, Murehwa, Goromonzi
Mashonaland Central	Guruve , Mount Darwin, Shamva, Mazoe, Bindura urban
Mashonaland West	Chinhoyi , Kariba, Norton
Midlands	Chirumhanzu, Shurugwi, Gweru rural, Gokwe, Redcliff, Mberengwa, Zvishavane
Masvingo	Bikita, Chiredzi, Masvingo rural
Matebeleland North	Lupane , Hwange, Binga, Tsholotsho
Matebeleland South	Gwanda, Bulilimamangwe, Umzingwane
Cities	Bulawayo, Harare, Chitungwiza

Food Needs

Groups reported to be in most need are those that have always been noted as vulnerable: The elderly, orphans, the unemployed, people living with AIDS

In and out migration has increased. In over half of the districts (53%) there has been in or out migration compared to 41% in September. People move from rural to urban areas to hunt for jobs and are leave urban areas to rural because of company closures. Households are reported to be leaving towns permanently as they fail to cope with the escalating urban cost of living. Urban residents go to rural areas in search of maize, while rural youths are reported to have resorted to gold panning as the only way to raise money to buy food

Seed and fertilizer availability

Communities continue to report that seed and fertilizer is widely unavailable across all provinces, only one month before the beginning of the planting season. Shortages of seed and fertilizer compounded by massive price increases make access to farm inputs a likely critical constraint to future food security that needs to be addressed as a matter of urgency. While draught power is a constraint (See Table 2) it does not match the severity of shortfall in inputs. Communities themselves repeatedly warn that food shortages will persist well into 2009 and beyond even with adequate rains unless an input support scheme is urgently introduced.

Table 2: Household access to tillage /draught power, seed, fertilizer**September 2008**

Province	Average % households with access to tillage/draught power	% Districts reporting NO availability of seed	% Districts reporting NO availability of fertilizer
Manicaland	30	50	100
Mashonaland East	50	75	75
Mashonaland Central	70	86	43
Mashonaland West	n.a	67	67
Midlands	46	90	100
Masvingo	40	100	63
Matebeleland North	37	100	100
Matebeleland South	n.a	n.a	n.a

n.a = less than two reports per district

Given the findings reported in previous monitoring rounds, household asset sales for food and the poverty induced by HIV/AIDS, the rising cost of farm inputs presents a significant threat to food security in these households. Given the increased poverty induced by food insecurity, this threatens to drive such households out of production completely. Aggregate production data masks this effect in the poorest households.

AFFORDABILITY

Commercial food availability is reported to be better this year than the same time last year, using maize meal and oil as indicator foods. Commercial market foods are unavailable with most basic commodities being sold on the parallel market.

The parallel market, although very expensive, is the commonly reported source of maize meal and sugar in urban areas. The parallel market is also preferred to the formal market because people can buy maize meal and sugar in smaller quantities, thus needing less cash to meet requirements for a day's meal. However prices of basic goods fluctuate according to prevailing exchange rates (see table 3)

With the opening and licensing of foreign currency retail outlets, more goods are now available commercially albeit in foreign currency

Table 3 : Price trends for basic commodities for the month of October 2008 beginning 28 September to 31 October. (prices in Zimbabwe dollars)

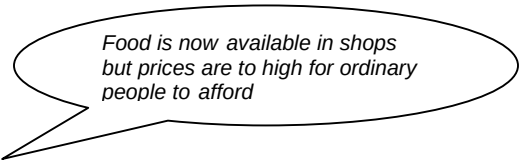
Commodity	Week 1 (28-4)	Week 2 (6-10)	Week 3(13-18)	Week 4 (20-25)	Week 5 (27-31)	\$USD
Bread	6 000	15 000	20 000	60 000	100 000	1
Mealie Meal/10kg	25 000	90 000	225 000	650 000	850 000	10
Cooking oil/ 2lt	10 000	140 000	225 000	450 000	450 000	6-8
Sugar / 2kg	8 000	30 000	40 000	120 000	300 000	3.15
Salt / kg	3 000	7 000	11 000	30 000	100	1.00
Soap / 2kg	5 000	22 000	22 000	85 000	150 000	2.00

ACCESS

GMB Deliveries

GMB deliveries are generally reported to have remained low or fallen in the provinces. No districts reported grain sales to GMB this month. Reports of grain sales on the parallel market continue. In these markets farmers get higher prices and receive immediate cash payments, now desperately needed to purchase inputs.

Market Supplies.

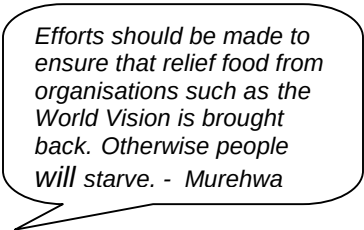


Food is now available in shops but prices are too high for ordinary people to afford

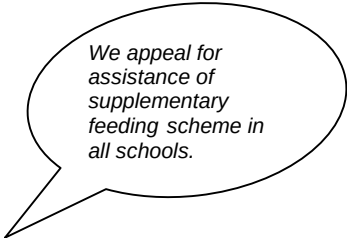
The parallel market, although very expensive, is the commonly reported source of maize meal, bread, salt and sugar in urban areas. The parallel market is also preferred to the formal market because people can buy maize meal and sugar in smaller quantities, thus needing less cash to meet requirements for a day's meal.

Relief food

Calls for the resumption of food aid were reported from all provinces. Nearly half (40%) of districts reported some relief activities in the sentinel wards. These relief programmes are limited to the elderly above 60, children under 5 years, school child feeding for Grade 1-7 and people living with AIDS. There are reports in some districts of poor people being excluded, reported to be due to smaller quantities of food distributed and screening methods.



Efforts should be made to ensure that relief food from organisations such as the World Vision is brought back. Otherwise people will starve. - Murehwa



We appeal for assistance of supplementary feeding scheme in all schools.

Reports indicate that relief organizations are operating at a lower scale, with reduced quantities of food and fewer beneficiaries.

COMMUNITY COPING STRATEGIES

More frequent reports are being made from both rural and urban monitoring sites of residents disposing of assets to raise money for food. Nearly half (45%) of districts reported asset sales which include: livestock, furniture, clothes, TVs, radios and cellphones. The sale of livestock reported in eight districts to buy food or inputs represents significant levels of asset loss for rural households.

CHOLERA ALERT !!!!

The Cholera outbreak has and continues to claim the lives of many people both in urban and rural. The pandemic is spreading , with cases and deaths being reported in Harare: Budiriro, Chitungwiza, Kambuzuma, Glenorah, Mabvuku and Mbare. Chinhoyi has also recorded deaths as well as Mudzi and Bindura-Madziva.

The NGO community has come together to address this crisis by distributing jerry cans, soap, and buckets with taps and Aquatabs (water purification tablets). Among the many NGOS responding are German Agro-Action, ACF, UNICEF, MSF, Oxfam, and Red Cross in conjunction with the Ministry of Health

DRINK WATER FROM SAFE SOURCES, TAP BOREHOLE, PROTECTED WELL OR SPRING. TREAT ALL WATER BY BOILING OR USING AQUATAB. WASH ALL FRIUT AND VEGETABLES BEFORE CONSUMPTION!!!!