

	Assessment of the Food Situation in Zimbabwe December 2008/ January 2009
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Six 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 DECEMBER 2008 to JANUARY 2009. This report outlines information drawn from monitoring reports from monitoring reports from 58 districts from all provinces of Zimbabwe,.

This round of monitoring includes information related to food access, security-poverty links, coping strategies and production outputs. Input from Fosenet NGOs is acknowledged.

Executive Summary

Availability

The pattern of vulnerability has remained the same, viz: The elderly, the unemployed, people living with AIDS, and orphans.

Fertilizer availability has not improved with farmers having planted without basal fertilizers and now requiring top dressing which is unavailable . Maize seed supply also improved as 28% of districts report seed availability but this could be attributed to the decrease in demand as the planting season is over.

Commercial food availability is better than it was at the same period last year, using maize meal and cooking oil as indicator foods. Food is largely available on both the formal market and parallel market

Affordability

Food prices in the formal and parallel market are showing signs of going down due to increase in supply and availability. Most traders, hawkers, retailers are selling in foreign currency with the Zim dollar equivalent being prohibitive

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Access

Access to relief food is reported in most districts to be without major barriers. Districts that are receiving relief have welcomed it as relief food is replenishing their dwindled stocks

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Production

Reports indicate that the southern parts of the country have received good rainfall and communities hope that if the current rainfall pattern continues, many households will be food secure up to the middle of the year.

Coping Strategies

Coping strategies were reported to be primarily individual and household based. As household resources have become stretched, so community and social inputs for vulnerable groups have fallen. Monitor reports indicate the growing squeeze on households to meet

basic needs. This has now extended beyond food, and includes rising costs of health, education and other basic services.

FOOD SECURITY MONITOR

FOOD AVAILABILITY

Change in the food situation

There has been no significant change in the food security situation. A very insignificant increase was a result of NGO food security and cholera interventions from humanitarian organisations.

Migration in and out of districts is reported to be lower. The monitors report that many people in rural areas were in December / January occupied with planting for food, limiting movement.

Table 1: Districts with sites with worsening food situations December – January

Province	District
Manicaland	Buhera, Mutare urban, Mutare rural, Chimanimani
Mashonaland East	Marondera rural, Goromonzi, Mudzi, Mutoko, Murehwa, Hwedza, UMP
Mashonaland Central	Mt Darwin, Mazoe, Guruve
Mashonaland West	Chinhoyi, Kariba, Makonde, Norton
Midlands	Chirumhanzu, Gweru Rural, Gokwe, Zvishavane
Masvingo	Chivi, Chiredzi, Masvingo rural, gutu
Matebeleland North	Binga, Lupane, Hwange, Tsholotsho, Victoria Falls, Nkayi
Matebeleland South	Bulilimangwe, Matobo, Gwanda urban, Gwanda rural, Insiza
Cities	Bulawayo, Harare, Chitungwiza

Food Needs

The pattern of vulnerability to food insecurity has remained constant: People living with aids, orphans and the unemployed are commonly reported as the most vulnerable groups. In this round greater report has been made of Cholera mortality in urban communities than in previous rounds

Seed and fertilizer availability

Production of food in the current growing season is an important input to future food security. This is a major period for agricultural activity. Access to key inputs such as seed, fertilizer, water and land are vital for improved production.

Seed maize was made available quite late and also selling in foreign currency resulting in smallholder farmers who are the main producers being unable to access seed. Diesel was also not available throughout the whole planting season. Fertilizer was totally unavailable and was much more acute than seed and farmers planted without basal fertilizers and those who planted in time and received good rainfall are now badly in need of top dressing fertilizers which is also not available.

Prices of fertilizer have increased on the parallel market due to demand and limited supply, with a 50kg bag of local or imported fertilizer costing from USD \$50- 60.

AFFORDABILITY

Half of the districts reported 50% or more of households unable to afford current maize meal prices.

Sixteen districts (30%) reported that 50 –70% of households can not afford maize meal prices, while a further eleven districts (21%) reported that more than 75% of the households in the district can not afford commercial maize meal prices.

Those who cannot afford these prices are reported to be seeking work on farms where they are paid in food or to be resorting to gold panning.

Table 2 : Price trends for basic commodities for the period December 2008 – January 2009 (prices in Zimbabwe dollars)

DECEMBER 2008

Commodity	Week 1 (1-5)	Week 2 (8-13)	Week 3(15-20)	Week 4 (22-27)	\$USD Retail	USD Informal
Bread	500million	10 bill	75bill	100 billion	1.00	1.50
Maize Meal/10kg	5 bill	100 bill	750 bil	10 trill	7-8	10
Cooking oil/ 2lt	3 bill	60 bill	4.5 trill	600 bill	6-8	6.00
Sugar / 2kg 2.5 kg	1 bill	20 bill	2 trill	2.5 trill	2.00	2.00
		30 bill	2 trill	300 bill	2.50	3.00
Salt / kg	500 mill	10 bill	750 bill	100bill	1.00	1.00
Soap / 1kg	1.5 bill	150 bill	800 bill	150 bill	1.50	1.50

JANUARY 2009

Commodity	Week 1 (5-10)	Week 2 (12-17)	Week 3(19-24)	Week 4 (26-31)	\$USD Retail	USD Informal
Bread	800 bill	1 trill	1.5trill	2 trill	1.00	50.c
Maize Meal/10kg	8 trill	10 trill	USD	USD	6-8	10
Cooking oil/ 2lt	3.5 trill	4 trill			3.00	4.00
Sugar / 2kg 2.5 kg	1.5 trill	2 trill			2.25	2.00
					2.20-2.50	3.00
Salt / kg	800 bill	1 trill			1.00	1.00
Soap / 1kg	1.2 trill	1.5 trill			90c-1.00	1.50

The prices of basic commodities in foreign currency are going down as indicated in the table above. After the introduction of the Ten trillion dollar note, both formal and informal traders refused to accept the local currency and began trading in foreign currency (This includes the main vegetable market – Mbare Musika, small traders, sweet and vegetable vendors and retail shops). During the last two weeks of Januray virtually no goods were being sold in the local currency save for bread in some shops.

Reports also indicate that goods and services are now largely in foreign currency with Harare being the main user of the local currency. Major cities and towns no longer use the Zim- dollar with the United States dollar being the major currency alternate currencies are being used depending on location of town to the next bordering country (see table 3 below).

Table 3: Currencies used in Zimbabwe

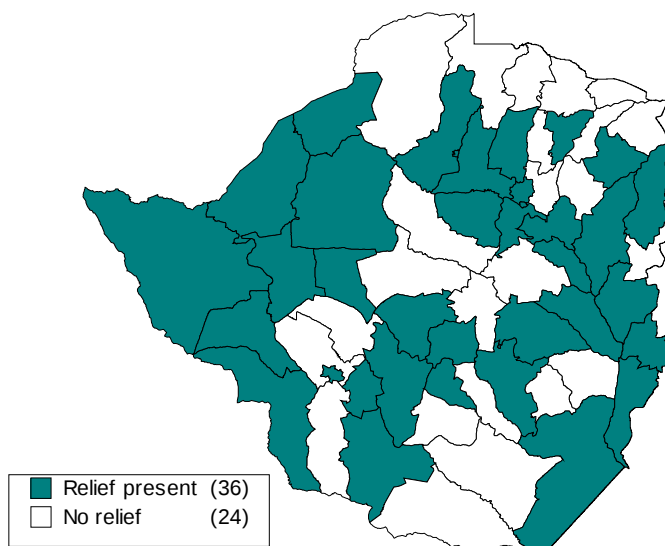
Town	Neighboring country	Currency used
Bulawayo	Botswana	USD, Botswana Pula
Mutare	Mozambique	USD, Metical
Masvingo	South Africa	UDD , Rand

ACCESS

Relief food

Access to relief food is reported in most districts to be without major barriers. Districts that are receiving relief have welcomed it as relief food is replenishing their dwindled stocks

Figure 3: Districts reporting relief activities



FOOD PRODUCTION

The rainfall situation as of the beginning of January is that the southern parts of the country have received good rainfall (Masvingo, Midlands, Mat North and South). Most communities note that if the current rainfall pattern continues, many households will be food secure up to the middle of the year.

However, farmers in districts like Marondera and Wedza in Manicaland who received their first rainfall during Christmas say they can only hope that if the rains persist they may yield something

The main maize producing districts in Mash West and Central have been affected by lack of fuel, seed and fertilizer.

COMMUNITY COPING STRATEGIES

Monitor reports indicate the growing squeeze on households to meet basic needs. This has now extended beyond food, and includes rising costs of health, education and other basic services. Coping strategies are primarily individual and household based. People are reported to be working for food on nearby farms or for other local people who might have stocks of maize and are being paid with mealie meal and potatoes. Districts reporting people working for food are: Rusape, Chikomba, Goromonzi, Mudzi, UMP, Hwedza, Bindura Rural, Centenary, Mazowe, Chegutu, Gokwe, Masvingo rural.

People have foregone most basic needs and just doing with little or nothing at all. Basic foods are expensive these days and some families are now having one meal a day so as to try and manage the current situation. Some households have taken advantage of the rains to increase supplies of vegetables.

Reports of asset sales to raise money to buy food were made from twenty six districts (45%), equal to that reported in October. Asset sales include household goods, particularly electrical goods, furniture, clothes and livestock.

There were almost no reports of community inputs to help the local destitute and orphans, beyond a few churches giving donations in urban areas. As household resources have become stretched, so community and social inputs for vulnerable groups have fallen.

CHOLERA ALERT !!!!

The cholera emergency continues to be a key challenge and major humanitarian crisis in Zimbabwe. At the end of December 2008, 29131 cases had been recorded with **1564 deaths**. Harare recorded the highest number of deaths with Mash West and Masvingo being the 3 hardest hit areas. The outbreak continues to expand geographically and in terms of numbers. The health cluster is responding through provision of drugs and overall coordination of health response in collaboration 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 FRUIT AND VEGETABLES BEFORE CONSUMPTION!!!! AVOID SHAKING HANDS AT MASS GATHERINGS, PARTICULARLY WEDDINGS, CHURCH MEETINGS AND FUNERALS.