



Assessment of the Food Situation in Zimbabwe

August 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 s an assessment of the food security situation and covers NGO and community based monitoring nationally for the period August 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.

Summary:

- Community reports indicate no improvement in rural and urban food security in August 2008
- In urban and rural areas the situation is reported to have worsened, with increased food needs and reduced supplies due to the ban on NGO operations
- The parallel market has been the only source of scarce commodities available in both foreign currency or local currency
- Some families have resorted to eating roots and wild fruits as coping strategies
- Difficulties accessing cash and food have worsened the situation for all households

Household Vulnerability

In determining household vulnerability, FOSENET uses the Household Vulnerability Index^{*}, . According to the HVI there are 3 levels of household vulnerability:

1.Coping level: these are households in a vulnerable situation but able to cope and about 70% of these households are headed by male adults and 30% adult female-headed households

2. Acute level households: these have been hit so hard that they badly need assistance. With some rapid response type of assistance, the family may be resuscitated. These households are female headed, child headed and elderly headed

3. Emergency level households: this is the equivalent of an intensive care situation: could be resuscitated only with the best possible expertise

Food Needs

Vulnerability to food insecurity is increasing across all divides with the most critical being child headed households, widows and the infected and affected and Internally displaced people. Reports from all 8 provinces indicate Zaka, Chivi, Gwanda, Beitbridge, Matobo, Binga, Buhera, Gokwe and Mberengwa as having acute level households

Food Availability

Parallel markets for basic commodities such as bread maize, mealie meal, cooking oil sugar and flour are available and products are sold in South African Rands, US Dollars or the equivalent in local currency cash. Cash shortages also posed serious problems for people buying food.

As a result of price increases, income-generating activities are diminishing. According to assessment findings, casual labour has declined in about 80% of the villages and 90% report a decrease in the flow of remittances from urban to rural areas

As a result also, rural households in Zimbabwe have resorted to eating wild foods such as vegetables and fruits and wild tubers.

A number of cases have been noted in Masvingo of individuals taking each other to the local headman for eating wild fruit “*muhacha*” growing in ones yard

80% of households reported eating wild fruits do not normally consume, which increases the risk of potential toxins and poisoning.

In parts of Buhera people are reported to be eating roots of trees, which they boil and prepare like cassava. These roots are said to be highly toxic

Food Sources

The most common cereal being consumed in most households is maize meal, which is being sourced from vendors. Other districts like Makonde, Hurungwe, Zvimba and Kadoma report that households are now consuming Bulga wheat. Districts in the drier regions of Mathabelenad have reported increased livestock sales

Coping mechanisms

Gold panning, robbery, prostitution, cross border trading along the borders of South Africa, Mozambique, Zambia and Botswana are also on the increase as households try to find any way they can to make ends meet.

Relief Food

The supply of relief food has largely stopped due to the ban on NGO Operations. The need for relief is however growing especially due to the poor harvests. Many households are reported to be selling household assets to buy food. Livestock sales are on the increase. The food security situation in most rural areas has continued to deteriorate while shortages of basic commodities such as maize, mealie meal sugar and bread are apparent

Food Production

Maize seed and fertiliser are reportedly unavailable on the formal market in all districts. Major crops planted last year were maize, cotton. Soya beans and yields were poor

FOSENET welcomes feedback and contributions on these reports. Follow up queries and feedback to FOSENET,

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ActionAid is an international anti-poverty agency working in over 40 countries, taking sides with poor people to end poverty and injustice together.

^{*} The HVI was designed by FANRPAN and used in Zimbabwe for the first time by FOSENET

