

Forum for Food Security



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**Tinker, Tailor, Fisherman, Farmer?
Local Level Impacts of Food Aid in Rural Zambia
and
their Implications for Long-term Food Security**

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Acronyms and Abbreviations

CAP	Consolidated Appeals Process
CF	Conservation farming
CFW	Cash for work
CSO	Central Statistics Office
DEC	Disasters Emergency Committee
DFID	Department for International Development
DMMU	Disaster Management and Mitigation Unit
DMU	Disaster Management Unit
EU	European Union
FANR	Food, Agriculture and Natural Resources
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
FFA	Food for Assets
FFSSA	Forum for Food Security in Southern Africa
FRA	Food Reserve Agency
GM	Genetically modified
HPI	Human Poverty Index
MACO	Ministry of Agriculture and Cooperatives
MMD	Movement for Multiparty Democracy
NGO	Non Governmental Organisation
ODI	Overseas Development Institute
OVC	Orphans and Vulnerable Children
PAM	Programme Against Malnutrition
PRSP	Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper
PWAS	Public Welfare Assistance Scheme
SADC	Southern African Development Community
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNIP	United National Independence Party
VAC	Vulnerability Assessment Committee
WCS	Wildlife Conservation Society
WFP	World Food Programme

Preface and acknowledgements

This paper has been commissioned by the Forum for Food Security in Southern Africa to explore one of the key issues affecting food security in the region in the aftermath of the 2001-03 crisis: the role of food aid. It does this by reference to recent experience in Southern Province, Zambia. Please send comments to foodsecurity@odi.org.uk

The aim of the Forum is to contribute to analytical and strategic thinking on longer term food security options in Southern Africa following the 2001–3 crisis, by providing a platform for improved linkages between food security analysis, policy making and implementation in the Southern Africa region. The Forum is a consortium of international and regional institutions committed to achieving food security for all in Southern Africa.

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This paper and the other information products produced by the Forum for Food Security are intended to stimulate informed debate about issues and options for food security policy in the countries of Southern Africa. They do not necessarily represent the views of all Forum consortium members and funders.

We particularly wish to acknowledge our grateful thanks for the contributions made to the work of the Forum for Food Security in Zambia by HODI, Mano Consultancy Services and Thomas Kalinda and colleagues at the University of Zambia.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Based on a short field study in April 2004 of two areas within the Zambezi Valley, the authors report the case of largely dysfunctional food aid programmes. This forms the basis for a discussion of the wider issues it raises in Zambia, and indeed, in Southern Africa as whole.

The short story here is that a full two years after the food emergency year of 2002 when the Zambian maize harvest failed for the second year running, there was still distribution of relief food to households, at the rate of one 50 kg bag of maize a month seen in Sinazongwe and in Chiyawa Districts.

In the case of Sinazongwe, the maize was given as 'food-for-assets', in return for households planting maize. Maize, however, is not suited to an area of low and variable rainfall. The chances are that in most years the maize crop would yield little if anything to harvest, so food-for-assets perpetuates dependency on relief. Moreover, the donated maize went only went to households that were able to plant; thereby ignoring the needs of those chronically poor and hungry that had not the resources of land and labour to plant.

The relief programme of Sinazongwe implicitly assumed that any drought was disastrous. But this is hardly so: local livelihoods have long been adapted to the vagaries of the local climate. People expect to earn their living from fishing, hunting, herding livestock, tourism, trading, brewing, some seasonal farm work, charcoal burning, and diverse other illicit activities - including prostitution, poaching, and smuggling - in addition to some farming based on sorghum and millet. In this context a failure of the crop harvest may be unwelcome, but it is neither unexpected nor disastrous.

In Chiyawa District, food aid was given to compensate households for any damages they might suffer from the depredations of game from a nearby national park. But the food aid was driven by supply: it came from a failed commercial farm that grew maize under irrigation, at high costs, in the winter. Lacking a market, it was bought up by a donor, and then distributed locally.

Two inter-related themes are drawn out from these observations. One concerns understanding poverty and vulnerability. When the national maize harvest fails in Zambia, large sections of the population are plunged into poverty, albeit temporarily. If they are farmers, their lost harvests are effectively lost income: if they are net buyers of staple foods, the higher prices that almost inevitably follow poor harvests reduce their real incomes. (Imports may be available, but the cost of bringing them to major consumption points such as Lusaka or the Copper Belt, raises their costs well above - by 50% or more - the cost of domestically-produced maize.) When the extent of the problem is assessed by government, donors or NGOS, it becomes difficult to see the difference between households that are temporarily in difficulties, and the chronically poor - those that are in hardship in any year. Up to now, questions about the different needs of different groups, and about effective assistance to them, have tended to be set aside in favour of efforts to deal with the crisis - by bringing in food aid.

Food aid has its uses: in a year when harvests have failed and imports will be costly, food aid can alleviate hardship. But after years of bad harvests, food aid risks becoming an inappropriate hand-out that pushes down prices in local markets, thereby deterring local food production and trading. For many of the poor in Zambia, a more pressing need - outside of the years of national harvest failures - is for cash. Public works programmes for the able-bodied, and grants to those who are unable to work on account of sickness, age or severe disability are probably more suitable.

In this case, we can see another confusion that arises. At national level, drought can lead to harvest failures and food emergencies: but the same does not necessarily apply in particular districts in low rainfall areas. As explained in the paper, livelihoods in such areas are adapted to localised harvest failures.

The other theme that this paper draws out is the inadequacy of recent responses to food crisis. Several failings are reported:

- Co-ordination in Lusaka is ineffective, despite the plethora of overarching bodies charged with food security, nutrition and disaster management. But information from diverse sources is not brought together, the many meetings arranged are not attended. The paper notes that *'The paradox of too much co-ordination - meaning too many co-ordinating agencies- leading to too little co-ordination, needs to be addressed'*;
- External agencies, both official donors and international NGOs, know too little of what is happening in the villages. They do not make enough use of the knowledge of local civil society, such as churches and mission hospitals. With a permanent presence in communities, these often have institutional memories that go back decades. Too little, it seems, has been learned from the response to the very poor harvest of 1992. In that case, Zambian co-ordinating agencies made great use of local information;
- Food aid has been driven by supply, on the part of both the donors and by Zambia's Food Reserve Agency; and,
- The procedures used by Zambia's Vulnerability Assessment Committee to date have been imperfect. The focus is largely on food supply locally, hence any rural area that has not produced enough maize per capita to meet local requirements is likely to be seen as having a deficit to be met by public assistance.

Both these issues arise throughout Southern Africa. Distinguishing the causes and manifestations of poverty and vulnerability, and finding effective responses to them, is proving a major challenge. Similarly, the quality and effectiveness of public responses to food crises is variable. A particularly alarming aspect of this is the extent to which different agencies, be they within government, NGOs national and international, or donors, are likely to take decisions and implement programmes in disparate ways. To some extent this understandable when crises emerge and action needs to be taken.

But it is regrettable that throughout the region there is not a firmer repository of best practice, culled from previous experiences of confronting such crises, that informs relief efforts and social protection in general.

1. Introduction

This paper has been commissioned as part of the Forum for Food Security in Southern Africa (FFSSA) programme of discussion and analysis of policy options in respect of longer term food security in the region. In response to the 2001-03 crisis in Southern Africa, during 2002-04 FFSSA has provided a platform for discussion and analysis of potential policy options for strengthening food security in the region by all relevant stakeholders. Discussions and analysis have focussed on four themes: politics in the policy process; the role of market-based development at national and intra-regional levels; vulnerability and social protection; and the role of evidence in policy design and implementation. Across all four themes, questions about the effectiveness and appropriateness in the region of food aid procured and distributed through the international system have been raised, but there appears to be little available systematic evidence of its impact, positive and negative, in the region.

The Forum for Food Security has therefore funded this short field-based study of food aid impact in rural Zambia to contribute to the debate about policy options for strengthening food security in Zambia and in other countries in Southern Africa and elsewhere facing chronic food insecurity.

A study in Zambia is particularly relevant because UN-WFP food aid continues to be distributed in large areas of Zambia in 2003-04, although at national level Zambia's maize harvest was acceptable in 2002-03 and is projected to be good for 2003-04. It will therefore be useful to examine the justification for continued food aid distribution and to document the impacts on markets, livelihoods and vulnerability at local level.

1.1 Study objectives

With respect to impact on markets, livelihoods and vulnerability at local level, the study seeks to assess the merits of food aid, and the negative impacts if any, using evidence from Zambia. Documenting local level impact is useful in contributing to the debate about the appropriate role and modalities for food aid in situations of chronic food insecurity in Southern Africa and elsewhere.

The decision to conduct a field reconnaissance was based upon information that food aid was still continuing in certain areas of Zambia on an 'emergency' basis, despite the fact that normal weather conditions and normal staple food prices had returned to the country as a whole. Enquiries with various Lusaka-based bodies charged with coordination of information gathering and food aid distribution did not elicit a complete or consistent picture of continuing activities. It appeared that many of the purported planners and coordinators of food aid had lost interest in the process, but that the process itself was continuing due to some form of habituation or momentum.

The focus on Southern Province is desirable because this was one of the areas of Zambia of greatest concern in terms of food availability and access to food

during 2001-03. We found the distribution of food aid was proceeding in the Sinazongwe area evidently unbeknownst to 'coordinators' in Lusaka¹.

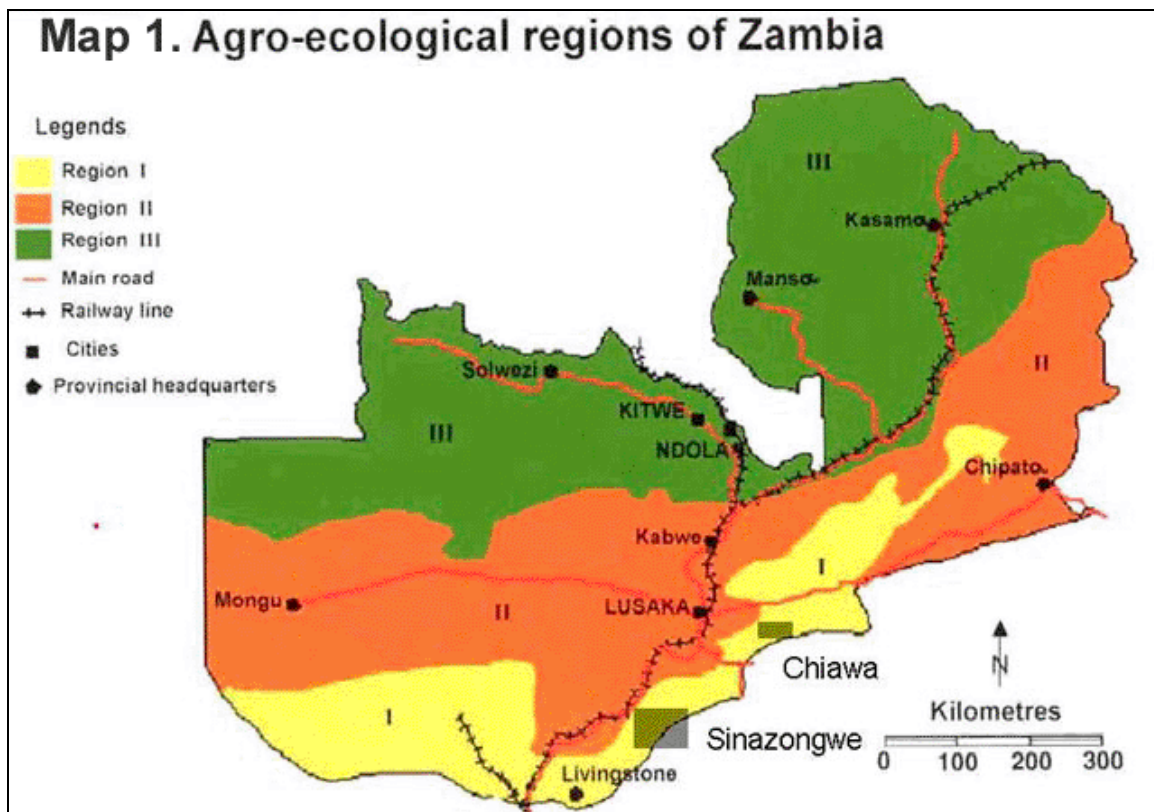
This paper presents data and analysis relating to, and discusses the policy implications for strengthening food security over the longer term of, what is known about food availability, poverty and vulnerability, the justification for food aid, and its impact, with reference to Southern Province. The paper concludes by presenting policy implications *inter alia* relating to the major themes of the Forum for Food Security in Southern Africa: politics in the policy process; vulnerability, social protection and food security; and the role of market-based development in strengthening food security.

¹ Some of whom angrily told us we were reporting 'history' when we presented our findings at a May 2004 seminar on food security and poverty in Zambia (proceedings at <http://www.odi.org.uk/food-security-forum/seminars/Zambia.html>).

2. Background: Agriculture & Food Security in Zambia

2.1 The agricultural sector

Zambia is divided into 3 agro-ecological regions (see Map 1) which are further grouped in 36 main sub-zones, mainly on the basis of rainfall pattern. Region I is characterised by low rainfall, short growing season, high temperatures during the growing season, and a high risk of drought. Region III is characterised by high rainfall, long growing season, low probability of drought, and cooler soil temperatures (due to cloud cover) during the growing season. Region II falls in between Regions I and III for most climatic variables. There are great variations in the agronomic features (rainfall, elevation, mean temperatures, vegetation and soils) of the three regions and within regions themselves. The varied nature of these environmental variables makes it possible to grow a wide range of crops throughout the country.



The Zambezi Valley in Southern Province, together with the Luangwa valley in Eastern Province, forms Zambia's portion of the Great Rift Valley system. The altitude in the rift valley 'lowveld' is about half the mean of the central African plateau 'highveld' (300-600 m. vs. 1000 plus); mean temperatures are correspondingly high and rainfall correspondingly low (typically 500-700 mm/annum vs. 800-1200 mm for the plateau). The Zambezi Valley, the focus of this study, has long been classified by government agronomists as belonging in Region I, an agro-ecological category that defines the area as unsuitable for most forms of rain-fed arable agriculture, and most particularly unsuitable for the cultivation of maize. The climate can support consistent

yields of suitable varieties of drought-resistant cereal such as sorghum and bulrush millet. Traditionally, however, the area is not a surplus producer of carbohydrates, which were rather obtained by trade in exchange for fish or game meat.

Region II runs through the central parts of the country, i.e. Central, Eastern, Lusaka and Southern Provinces and some parts of Western Province. Provided soils are not too unsuitable this is the ideal area for maize cultivation. It also supports the production of soya bean and both Virginia and burley tobacco. Under irrigation, the region is suitable for the production of wheat and a wide range of horticultural products for the domestic market and export. The bulk of the country's cattle are also found in region II.

The northern parts of the country consisting of Northern, Luapula, Copperbelt and Northwestern Provinces lie in Region III. The rainfall here is too high for low-input maize farming (on account of leaching and acidification), although high-input commercial farming can produce good and consistent yields. The main subsistence crop in Region III is cassava, though finger millet, sorghum, sweet potatoes, beans, and groundnuts are all grown. Diversity tends to be maintained due to the essentially rotational custom of slash-and-burn agriculture called *chitemene*. Newly-burned swiddens are first seeded to high value annual crops (e.g. finger millet which is highly prized for beer brewing) and only later 'abandoned' to cassava.

Year-to-year variability in rainfall is important in determining crop output in Region 1. Highly variable yields have been obtained from the droughts of the 1990s and early 2000s, particularly in the southern parts of the country. Recent droughts may be part of long-term climatic change associated with global warming, which may result in more frequent droughts arising from two phenomena. One is the displacement of the rainfall pattern in the southern hemisphere ('El Nino') so that Zambia experiences lower *average* rainfall in years to come. The other is increased instability and variation in rainfall so that years of serious rain shortfall are more frequent, along with years of excessive rainfall – 'average' years becoming less frequent. There are many other factors causing variability in agricultural production, however, and the nature and extent of the impact of global warming upon Zambia remains to be definitively determined.

Official statistics divide Zambia's agriculture into two main sub-sectors: the commercial and smallholder sub-sectors. Before Independence the first category consisted entirely of European immigrant settler-farmers or European-controlled corporate farms. The latter is composed of Africans native to Zambia or neighbouring countries. This smallholder category is further split into small-scale farmers and medium scale or emergent farmers, the latter arbitrarily defined as cultivating more than 5 hectares. There is a marked tendency for emergent farmers to be immigrants or descendants of immigrants from neighbouring countries, most especially Zimbabwe and Malawi. There are regional differences as well, with the bulk of emergent farmers being in Region II. Most emergent farmers own significant stocks of cattle.

Commercial farms are characterised by extensive mechanisation, high level technology and management whether in crop or animal husbandry. Land is privately owned under 99-year leasehold tenure.

Small-scale farmers depend on hand-hoe cultivation, while the medium-scale farmers use some draught power. Both farm land which they hold under customary tenure mediated by local chiefs. Both also depend on unpaid family labour to a great extent. Where paid help is engaged it is at rates well below commercial farm rates, and below any definition of the minimum wage.

In terms of numbers, commercial farmers are estimated at fewer than 1,500 and farm mostly along the narrow corridor of land following the line of rail and in some parts of Eastern Province. Emergent farmers are estimated to number about 100,000 farm households. These are usually found in Southern, Eastern and Central Provinces. Small-scale farmers number about 600,000 farm households and are naturally more widespread than the other two categories.

Commercial farms are responsible for:

- almost all high-value horticultural production for export;
- all wheat production;
- almost all soya production;
- all Virginia tobacco production;
- the bulk of marketed milk production;
- a varying percentage of maize production but not exceeding 40 percent;
- about half of all meat production (though difficulty assessing subsistence off take makes this uncertain).

The smallholder sector is responsible for:

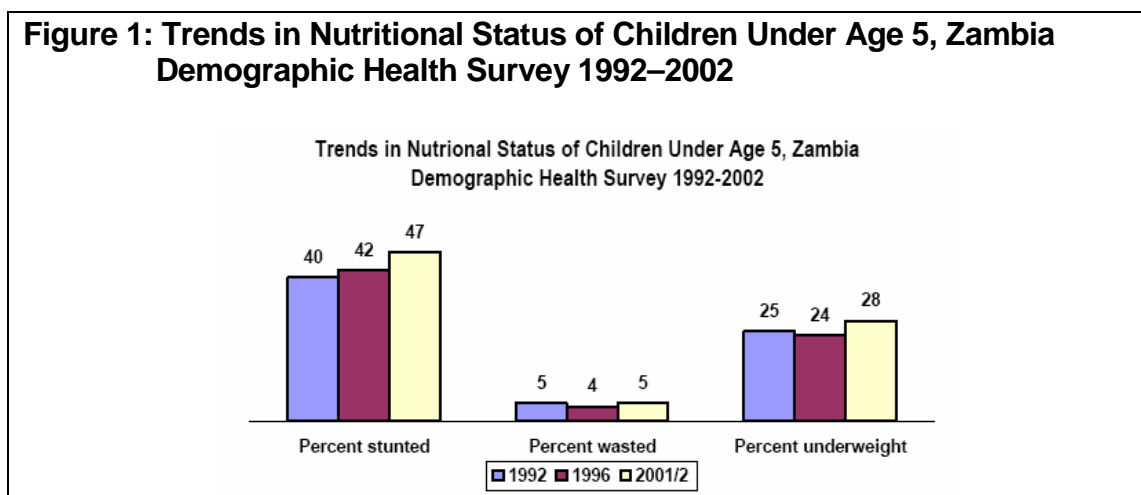
- All cassava production (unknown market value but heavy subsistence consumption);
- All finger millet production;
- All sweet potato production;
- Most fresh vegetable leaf production (e.g. pumpkin, rape, amaranthus leaves);
- All cotton production (over 120,000 tons is produced by 200,000 families contracted by commercial firms);
- More than half of all maize production;
- About half of cattle production.

Statistical data in Zambia is of limited accuracy, though it is better for crops that are produced exclusively by commercial farmers or processed by commercial organisations (e.g. the cotton ginning companies). When it comes to staple foods, not even the national maize crop is known with any certainty and a round figure such as one million tonnes for the average annual maize production is as good as any other. Estimated variations from year to year are correspondingly imprecise. Crops that are very poorly monitored include

cassava, bulrush and finger millet, and sweet potatoes. Inaccurate statistics are a major cause of over- (and under-) reaction to purported food crises.

2.2 Food security

On three indicators widely used to measure the nutritional status of populations (height-for-age (stunting), weight for height (wasting) and weight-for-age (underweight) amongst children under 5) there is deeply concerning evidence of high and increasing malnutrition in Zambia, as shown in Figure 1.



It is becoming increasingly clear that in Zambia, malnutrition and food insecurity are closely related to poverty. Zambia has the highest level of income poverty in the SADC region, and the fourth largest level of human poverty (as measured by the HPI) after Angola, Mozambique and Malawi. Recent figures are shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Overall and extreme poverty² in Zambia, in rural and urban areas, 1991-1998 (Percentage population)

Year	Zambia		Rural Poverty		Urban Poverty	
	Overall	Extreme	Overall	Extreme	Overall	Extreme
1991	69.7	58.2	88	80.6	48.6	32.3
1993	73.8	60.6	92.2	83.5	44.9	24.4
1996	69.2	53.2	82.2	68.4	46	27.3
1998	72.9	57.9	83.1	70.9	56	36.2

Source: CSO quoted in PRSP (2002)

In the context of such severe poverty, people have a range of strategies for coping with vulnerability to food insecurity. In the non food deficit years of 1996 & 1998, the CSO's Living Conditions Survey reports that reducing food intake, eating less nutritious food, reducing other household items and begging from friends, neighbours and relatives are the four predominant methods of coping (PRSP:22). Additionally, the Zambia Vulnerability Assessment Committee report of April 2003

² CSO definitions: Poverty refers to monthly income sufficient to meet calorific requirements of family of six at K47,188; Extreme poverty is set at K32,861

asked rural households how people survive in low production years such as 2003 and found the main sources of cereals and tubers to be:

- production of maize, sorghum, millet, rice from the 2001/2 harvest (after cereal sales and gifts have been deducted) including the winter maize harvest and green maize consumption;
- cereal given in payment for casual labour;
- cereal purchased with money received as remittances;
- gifts of cereal;
- purchases of cereal and cereal/beans received as relief food;
- sweet potato and cassava production/consumption.

As we shall see later, there is considerable variation between locations in the relative importance of different coping strategies.

2.3 Organisation of food crisis responses

Food aid (see Figure 2) has not traditionally made up a significant proportion of Zambia's food balance, and even at times of crisis food aid forms a very small proportion of families' food needs. The 2003 VAC estimated that even in the areas targeted as priority for food aid distribution, it made up less than 15% of calorific intake. For the deficit year of 2001/2, relief was intended to make up 175,000MT (7% of estimated requirements). In the event by late 2002, 75,000 tonnes were actually imported, but by this time, the overestimation of need had become apparent.

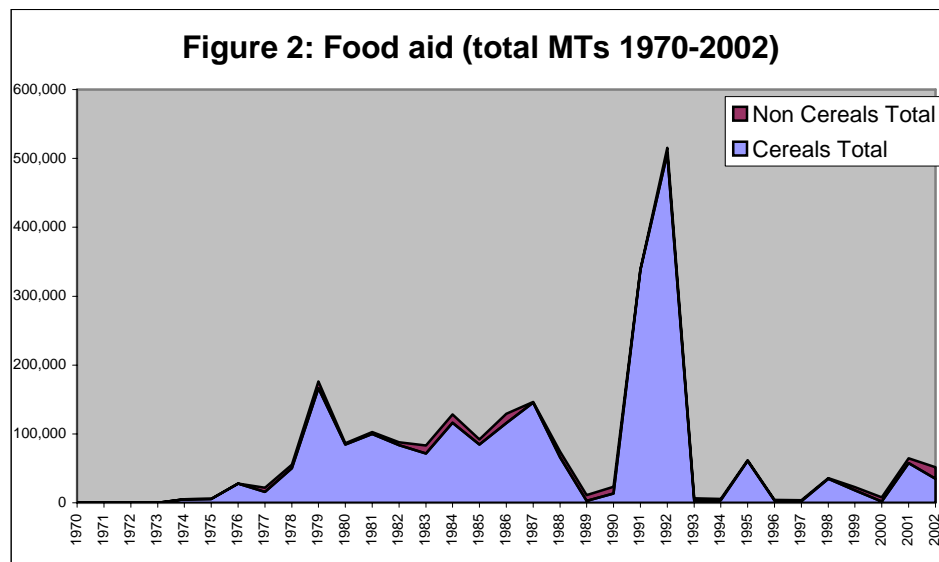


Figure 2: Food Aid (total MTs 1970–2002)

There are many institutional players in the food security and relief industry in Zambia. The two main governmental players are:

The DMU Under the Vice-Presidents office, a Disaster Management Unit (DMU) is tasked with coordination responsibilities for all sectors that deal with food security. It coordinates and networks with all governmental departments, UN organisations, Non-governmental Organisations and private institutions to minimize overlaps and duplication of efforts in the implementation of food security programmes.

The Food Reserve Agency (FRA) was established for the purpose of operating a national food reserve through an Act of parliament (1995). The Food Reserve Act emphasized the building of capacity for the private sector through institutionalised assistance and promotion of joint ventures between the public and private sectors. In addition to maintaining the national strategic food reserve, the FRA is responsible for administration of the government-owned storage facilities; introduction of grades and standards; and the annual registration of traders and processors of designated commodities. It is also responsible for receiving and storage of the food donations meant for alleviating food insecurity.

The **United Nations** is involved through the WFP, the UN agency responsible for food aid. FAO is also involved in the longer term aspects of food security, and UNDP and UNICEF both involve themselves with food aid because it has to do with vulnerability, poverty and social development generally. The UN, and WFP in particular, is probably the major conduit of bilateral emergency aid in Zambia.

There are many consultative and networking groups and structures including:

- Famine Early Warning System Network (FEWSNET);
- The Vulnerability Assessment Committee (VAC);
- The Emergency and Recovery Strategic Group.

All the mentioned organisations are broadly based in the sense that they engage or consult with a very wide range of stakeholders and stakeholder representatives. The VAC for example contains representatives of the Ministry of Agriculture, Central Statistics Office, Meteorological Department, Disaster Management and Mitigation Unit, National Food and Nutrition Commission, civil society and NGOs, NEWU, CARE, World Food Programme, FEWSNET and other donors like UNICEF, OXFAM, and the Red Cross Society. At least in theory, the DMMU is charged with coordinating everyone including the coordinators.

Two points are worth highlighting. First, there appears to be little effective authority in the food aid targeting and distribution business. The DMMU may think itself 'in charge' but there are serious questions about its ability and its legal powers. Secondly, while the consultation / coordination networks are extremely wide, they contain notable gaps. Agricultural producers and traders, the very people who are most likely to get hurt by incompetent food aid distribution, are not represented in the dialogue process.

2.4 Southern Province and the Zambezi Valley region

The most prominent features of the Zambezi Valley are the Victoria Falls at its upper, western end, and Lake Kariba, formed in the 1950s by the building of the Kariba Dam to impound water for the generation of hydroelectricity. The dam had an enormous impact on the local economy, forcing the people of several chiefdoms to migrate ahead of the rising waters. Many people were relocated in areas with very poor climate and soils. Most specifically, the dam eliminated vast areas of alluvial land which were traditionally planted to maize in the dry season to utilise 'recessional' water from the seasonal flooding. These were either inundated directly or, if downstream, rendered useless by the disruption of the seasonal flooding pattern. Many of the displaced people from the valley moved away from it, onto the southern plateau. Many remain, however.

On the positive side the Kariba dam has created a fishing industry of some note, based primarily upon *kapenta*, a small whitebait-sized fish originally seeded in the lake with stock taken from Lake Tanganyika. There is a tourism industry at Siavonga. There have been commercial investments in such hot-weather demanding activities as banana growing and crocodile farming. Recently, cage cultivation in the lake of *tilapia* (along lines that have worked well in Zimbabwe) has been started. Cattle and small-stock herding in the top end of valley have been unaffected by the lake. Herding of cattle is particularly worthwhile in the valley at present, due to the failure of Corridor disease (a form of East Coast fever) to penetrate from the plateau to low altitude.

For all the disruption caused by the Kariba dam, nearly 50 years has passed since its construction and the population has adjusted economically – earning livelihoods from a wide variety of activities, the most significant of which do not involve arable farming. According to our survey in April 2004 these include (in approximate order of decreasing significance):

Box 1 – Principal Sources of Livelihood in the Zambezi Valley

- Trading in groceries - mostly young men
- Trading in fish – mostly women
- Seasonal cane cutting contracts at Nakambala Sugar Estates in Mazabuka - young men.
- Illicit alcohol brewing – exclusively women
- Trading in opaque beer from Livingstone and Choma breweries - mostly young men
- Fishing on Lake Kariba – exclusively men
- Charcoal burning – mostly men
- Prostitution at Sinazeze, Maamba and Sinazongwe - young women
- Cotton growing Sinazeze/ Malima area - all classes/ age groups of people
- Livestock rearing – cattle, sheep and goats - mostly elderly people
- Livestock trading - cattle goats and sheep - mostly young men
- Some sorghum and bulrush millet cultivation for beer brewing – mostly women
- Illegal activities – these include poaching, cannabis cultivation and trading, smuggling, and the informal gemstone trade – significance unquantifiable but non-trivial

Source: Mano/FFSSA food aid impact survey findings, April 2004

3. Study Methodology

The study took the form of a brief field reconnaissance in the Zambezi Valley in southern Zambia in April 2004. This included interviews with a range of key stakeholders including farmers, non-farming rural families, local traders, and locally-based development organisations. The study also drew on national level information from published sources, and supporting literature and interviews. This paper, which reports on the findings of the study, benefited from discussion and comments received at the FFSSA seminar on food security and poverty in Zambia, held in Lusaka in May 2004.

The survey in the Zambezi was conducted over a period of four days in the last week of April 2004 by a team of two. The senior member of the team is an agriculturalist with considerable experience of relief food distribution and vulnerability assessment reaching back to the 1991 drought emergency. As a native of Southern Province he is fluent in Tonga, the major language of the province, as well as the two *lingua Franca* Chinyanja and Bemba that are widely used by fishermen, traders and farm workers.

The Zambian rainy season lasts from approximately mid-November to mid-March, and cropping of most staple crops occurs subsequent to the rains stopping, generally up to the end of June. The survey was thus conducted when the harvest predictions for the main crops for the 2003-04 season had been pretty much determined.

A total of four distinct areas were visited, falling in two Districts as described in Box 2.

Box 2: Survey areas

- | Sinazongwe District | Kafue District |
|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sinazongwe • Boma • Sinazeze • Maamba | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chiyawa (alias Chiawa or Chiyaba) |

The total population of Sinazongwe is slightly in excess of 13,000 households or 80,000 people. Chiyawa is a sub-area of Kafue District and contains fewer than 600 households or just under 3,000 people.³

Box 3 shows the number of respondents interviewed, analysed by area.

³ 2000 Census of Population and Housing. Republic of Zambia. Central Statistical Office.

Box 3 : Number of respondents by study area					
Category of Respondents	Sinazeze (Sinazongwe District)	Sinazongwe Central	Maamba	Chiyawa Area, Kafue district	Siansowa Fishing Camp (part of Chiyawa)
Grocery traders	5	4	4		
Seasonal cane-cutters	6				
Charcoal burners	4				
Smallholder cotton growers	5				
Smallholder farmers				4	
Livestock rearing	5				
Livestock trading	4		5		
Fishermen					8
Fish traders			6		6
Wildlife hunter/poacher				1	
Trading in opaque beer	3				
Illicit alcohol brewing	3				
Sex workers			4		
Village headmen	2				
Council officials		2			
Government officials (Veterinary department, DA)		2			
Zambia Wildlife Authority employee				1	
Chiefs (Royal establishments)		2			
NGOs	1		2		
Total	38	10	21	6	14

Respondents were approached at random and those who agreed were interviewed. Interviews were conducted one-on-one on the basis of a checklist of questions and issues. The exceptions were:

- Focus groups of 2 to 4 in the case of fishermen
- Two chiefs were interviewed together for protocol reasons since one was visiting the other. They are: Chief Sinazongwe of Sinazongwe District in Zambia, and Chief Siachilaba of Bbinga District in Zimbabwe.

All categories of respondent readily availed themselves for interview with the exception of sex workers, of whom many were approached to achieve the total of four interviewed.

However, certain respondents would not give information unless we guaranteed confidentiality. We have accordingly not named or identified such individuals, nor have we identified the organisations for which they work. We have, for instance, not named the NGOs currently involved in food distribution in the Zambezi Valley.

4. Study results

4.1 Official justification for food aid in the survey areas

The only food aid distribution we encountered in the study area was in the form of 'Food for Assets'. There appeared to be no school feeding programmes active in the area (though there are in other parts of Zambia), and we could not find instances of the distribution of food aid as general rations.

4.1.1 *Sinazongwe District*

Food aid in Sinazongwe takes the form of maize with some sorghum and beans. Some 1,800 families are recipients, according to our informants. The quantum of maize distributed is notionally one 50 kg bag per family per month. There was disagreement amongst informants regarding the target rate of sorghum and beans.

The source of the maize was evidently the DMMU (working with the FRA as its handling agent). For some months before our visit DMMU nationally had been attempting to persuade NGOs to take off its hands, and distribute as relief, some 18,000 tonnes of maize that had been procured in excess of requirements during the actual crisis period ending in the middle of 2003. Most NGOs refused, on the grounds that the crisis was over, but evidently not all. Pressure on the DMMU's partners to distribute the maize as drought relief has attenuated somewhat (in May 2004) since the unusually heavy seasonal inundation of the Barotse floodplain in Western Zambia has created an alternative food crisis. The sorghum and beans being distributed in Sinazongwe are USAID provided.

According to our informants in Sinazongwe there was no likelihood of the programme ending before the end of June (well after the maize harvest in that area). Indeed, new stocks of relief maize were seen being offloaded in the area at the time of our visit. The NGO also distributed, earlier in the season and in line with the Food For Assets philosophy (see below), fertiliser and seed, predominantly for maize.

According to workers of the Sinazongwe NGO, the justification for continued food distribution in the Zambezi Valley is that it forms an integral part of a 'Food for Assets' programme that will, in the long term, enhance household food security.

'Food for Assets' (FFA)⁴ is an attempt to address the criticism that food aid undermines food production. It seeks to link the giving of food aid to undertakings by the recipients that they will increase their own production, for

⁴ For a description of the Food For Assets programme in Zambia, see PAM's Powerpoint presentation on the Forum for Food Security Zambia seminar proceedings page <http://www.odi.org.uk/food-security-forum/seminars/Zambia.html>

example by adopting ‘conservation farming’ (CF) techniques⁵. Inputs (fertiliser and seed) to enable the increase are also provided. FFA can accordingly be advertised as a pro-self sufficiency variety of handout. Much of the more recent, and the ongoing food aid programmes, use this justification. Nobody seriously proposes that there is a threat of famine, and thus an urgent humanitarian reason for food distribution, in any part of Zambia at the moment.

4.1.2 *Chiawa District*

In the special case of the Lower Zambezi area, in which there is a national park and considerable populations of animals outside it, the justification for giving food aid to everyone is that it is a form of compensation for the damage wrought to riverside gardens by wild animals which makes people more accepting of those animals. It can thus be described as ‘food for conservation’. This reasoning can justifiably be regarded as opportunistic. The Chiawa area is the site of a commercial irrigated winter maize scheme based upon a collapsed mixed farm that used to belong to the international farming group Masstock. The growing of winter maize, which started in 2002, was highly politicised as a self-sufficiency measure taken by the new government (which took office on the last day of 2001). It is not economic to grow maize under irrigation given normal market prices and the question of how to economically sustain the scheme quickly arose. The answer has been to persuade a bilateral donor (Italy) to purchase it as ‘food aid’ for free distribution to all households in the area as a conservationist measure. This is not only happening in Chiawa – it is also happening in the Luangwa Valley under the auspices of the Wildlife Conservation Society WCS.

Interestingly, in neither District was the justification of poverty alleviation / social protection for the truly impoverished and vulnerable much in current use (save in the case of routine food distribution to hospitals and hospices).

It should be clear from – or at least suggested by – the foregoing that food aid, particularly in unexceptional circumstances such as those that currently prevail, is to an extent ‘supply driven’. There are surpluses of commodities such as maize arising from such factors as over procurement by the DMMU, from politically inspired irrigated production, from excess supply generated by US or EU farm support programmes. The pressure to dispose of these surpluses in what appears a worthwhile way manifests in rationalisations such as Food for Assets or Food for Conservation that otherwise would be unlikely to arise and give birth to food distribution programmes.

Also in surplus are the human and material resources to distribute food. It is commonly reported by NGOs and consultancy groups seeking funding for social protection or development projects that food aid is far more readily available than money. One reports that USAID officials advised that ‘creative

⁵ Conservation farming is essentially a minimum tillage system that allows early planting and thus higher yields by reducing the labour burden. It also contains elements of good organic farming practice such as preservation of crop residues and use of manure. It works well in some common soil types but is not a universal panacea for the problems faced by small farmers in obtaining high yields.

use' of food aid was a preferred option in the design of an HIV/AIDS and OVC programme being considered for support.

Another major reason for relief food surpluses arising is bureaucratic delay. In the case of the 1992 Zambia food crisis some food aid supplied by the European Commission arrived after the bumper harvest season of 1993 (depressing already weak market conditions). Currently there are reports of the distribution in the Iteshi Teshi district (in Southern Province) of free maize labelled as a gift from the people of Australia and dated April 2004!

There are many critics who have voiced the suspicion that food aid is largely supply driven even in times of acknowledged crisis (see, for example, Clay and Stokke, 2000, but it can be difficult to determine the extent of the 'hype' when there are lives or livelihoods at risk. In the current situation in Zambia, however, there is no obvious crisis⁶ and the extent of supply-drive can be more easily demonstrated at local level.

4.2 Workings and impact of food aid programmes in survey areas

It is difficult to find any merit in the food aid programmes observed and described here, and the general view of the population, even as they are 'beneficiaries', concurs with this harsh judgement. A range of opinions from survey respondents is given in Box 4.

Because food aid recipients must plausibly undertake to produce crops, they tend to be young, fit and generally self-sufficient people. How strict the criteria are is open to doubt, but our informants state that those without evident productive capacity tend to be excluded, while even those in paid employment seem to be eligible, for one of those individuals receiving the free food (and undertaking to expand production) was actually a full-time employee of the NGO.

So the genuinely needy, the physically incapacitated, the widowed etc. are not eligible for food aid under the FFA programme. If there are any households that, as per the 'new variant famine' theory⁷, are unable to farm effectively because of the ravages of AIDS amongst its formerly productive members then these are not eligible for food aid under the FFA philosophy!

⁶ This assertion is based upon estimates by the Ministry of Agriculture of a national maize yield well in excess of domestic consumption. Nationally, prices have fallen to close to normal levels of around US\$120 per tonne and it would seem they would drop further were it not for the failure of Zimbabwe to produce a surplus this year.

⁷ This holds that HIV/Aids, through its direct and indirect impacts upon rural families, is a significant factor in creating chronic household food insecurity in parts of Africa (see de Waal, 2003). Very little evidence has been found for this scenario in the Zambian case, and New Variant Famine is regarded by some as a story used to justify the disposal of food surpluses rather than a description of any observed facts.

Far from bringing about self-sufficiency in the medium- or long-run, the programme in Sinazongwe District would thus appear to be creating dependency. Villagers in Region 1 areas like Sinazongwe only plant maize when it is virtually cost free for them to do so, since it would be uneconomic for them to spend anything close to the real cost of establishing a field of maize in such a dubious climatic environment. But by making the cost each beneficiary negligible⁸ the FFA scheme, as it works in non-maize areas, encourages them to undertake an unsustainable form of arable agriculture. In fact, despite rainfall being fairly normal for the area in the current season the maize crop had to be replanted twice, leading to a late and inevitably low-yielding crop. The people of Sinazongwe will only be able to continue attempting to grow maize if the handouts continue.

⁸ In fact negative since inputs are provided free of charge and the beneficiary is given free food that would not be otherwise available. The incentive structure is irresistible, even if the induced behaviour is totally absurd in real economic terms.

Box 4 : Survey respondents' views on food aid impact

Specific comments on the impact of food aid were made by some prominent figures in the areas that were visited. Such people tend to be thoughtful on the longer term consequences of food aid. A selection of comments received are transcribed below.

'What we need in Sinazongwe is not a careless distribution of free maize; we need a better market for our cattle, goats and sheep and above all, we want water for irrigation so that we can grow enough food. Free maize should be given to the very few needy in our communities only while, the bulk of the relief maize should be sold to the general public.' *Chief Sinazongwe*

'45 years ago when we were being moved from the bank of the Zambezi river, we were told that the water was going to follow us but, up to this day, the water hasn't followed us into the hills where we were dumped.' *Chief Siachilaba of Zimbabwe*

'Free food undermines peoples minds especially young men who are now made to believe that receiving free food is a right and therefore if one does not have enough food to last the entire season, all he has to do is mobilise the community and send an SOS message to the Government and the donors will send food. Our young men have stopped to think and plan for their future because the Government and the donors have introduced a mind polluting system which does not encourage self reliance.' *Mr. Mabolobolo*, a prominent smallholder farmer (and former District Education Officer)

'Rainfall was generally fair this season but not everybody has enough food because some people have become dependent upon receiving relief food while others opt for short time employment commonly known as piecework while waiting for relief maize'. *Mr Changalala Sibalwi*, a smallholder farmer of Sinakoba village

'Distribution of free maize in the villages has turned young men into helpless individuals, undependable people and people without a future. Young men do not think of going to look for work in order to feed their families or, do something that helps them to earn a living, as was the case in the past. This free food program has gone too far'. *Mr Masempela* a prominent smallholder farmer and former Police officer.

At the time of the visit the free handouts of maize to residents of Chiawa District were at a standstill, stocks having run out, although a limited tonnage (2.5 MT) was being held for 'Food for Work' to build school buildings. From what could be gathered the distribution was expected to recommence with the 2004 crop of 'winter maize' from the former Masstock farm.

The quantitative level of food aid that we observed in the valley areas is probably not sufficient to have a major impact upon market prices of maize, though there may be some negative substitution effect on the sales of other carbohydrates such as sorghum. In terms of promoting sustainable livelihoods, however, the impact is strongly negative, since it is actively encouraging cropping patterns that can be sustained only by free inputs. In terms of any humanitarian objectives, the current programme could cease forthwith without any life being lost.

5. Issues for Long-term Food Security

5.1 The 'special' status of maize in Zambia

It is tempting for Zambians to attribute the ills emanating from food aid in the country to foreign influences. Certainly, the international community have to shoulder a good amount of blame for the supply-push that we have demonstrated. However, Zambians are also parties to the over-simplifications (even outright fictions) that affect the food aid system. Nothing illustrates this better than the special political and psychological status that has been acquired by maize, whose cultivation and consumption are regarded almost as basic human rights in the Zambian context. A full history of the crop in Zambia would occupy a book, but it is worth outlining some of the salient features.

In the post-Independence era Government (for much of the period indistinguishable from the ruling party UNIP) was engaged in a pact or social contract with urban workers to provide heavily subsidised maize meal. Whenever Government attempted to revoke or moderate this arrangement, riots would break out on the Copperbelt and/or in Lusaka and the status quo was reinstated in order to restore peace. The last maize meal-price induced riots in 1990 led to the downfall of Kenneth Kaunda, his party UNIP, and the One Party State. Interestingly, the urban population quickly accepted an end to the subsidisation of maize meal once the UNIP Government fell in 1991. It seems the contract was specifically between the people and Kaunda himself or his Party, and that once the Movement for Multiparty Democracy MMD refused to renew it there was an end to the matter.

The other food-related social contract of the Kaunda days was between the Government and the rural people, and it was likewise centred upon maize, alone amongst crops. The 'deal' was that inputs to small farmers (chemical fertiliser and hybrid seed) would be provided by Government, subsidised and on credit, and that Government was obliged to purchase any of the crop that was offered for sale, at a pan-territorial price that was generally uneconomic because of transport costs and a tendency to overproduction. Highly inappropriate cropping decisions came to be made as a result of the maize-focused subsidies. The haemorrhage of resources implied by this policy led to the collapse of many elements of the State marketing and credit system well before the fall of the UNIP Government, although many people mistakenly believe that it was the free market oriented MMD that deliberately dismantled it.

Another aspect of Government's social contract with the rural community was the obligation of Government, in times of perceived hunger, to provide affected villagers with 'real food' – i.e. maize. This obligation was taken and discharged seriously even in areas whose staple crop was not maize. People of the West bank of the Zambezi, for example, often received maize as food aid despite having an excellent crop of rice. Rice was regarded as a cash crop for sale, not as potential food. Similarly the military has frequently been called upon to fly relief maize into the rift valley, particularly to Nabwalya, in the corridor between

the North and South Luangwa National Parks. Nabwalya is a meat- and fish-rich area of low population, which traditionally grows sorghum as its rain-fed staple crop. However, the implications of the government's social contract are that the people there have a right to eat maize if they wish (the sorghum then being turned into beer).

Although maize production and marketing has been ostensibly liberalised for the past 12 years or so in Zambia, the fact is that covert subsidies and distortions persist, even in normal years. An atavistic desire to regulate the price of the commodity results to this day in Government announcing a maize 'floor price' for producers. The floor price lacks any force in law and its impact, such as it is, tends to be negative (if it is set low, canny traders may use it to bargain prices down) but it probably does not disturb the workings of supply and demand excessively. Perhaps it exists only to show that the Government cares about the small producers! In contemplating this distortion in the thinking of an otherwise market-savvy society, it is worth bearing in mind that less than one third of the country is actually suitable in soil and climatic terms for the growing of maize. It is also a crop in which small non-mechanised producers (especially those far from markets) have no comparative advantage over commercial ones.

The Government's ability to interfere in agricultural markets has been curtailed by structural adjustment and budgetary stringencies. But it can be argued that the donors – aid agencies, international NGOs, the UN system – are responsible for a continued subsidising and distorting of agricultural markets, through their giving away free food and inputs, even as they construe themselves to be acting out of humanitarian motives. Zambian rural people and their representatives do not generally perceive the flow of food aid as being a life-saving response to an emergency, but rather as a flow of patronage from the urban to the rural, from the rich to the poor, even if the actual recipients are the more privileged members of rural society.

As illustrated by our findings on livelihoods in the field reconnaissance, Zambian rural people have a very wide range of survival strategies to fall back upon.

To a great extent it is the view of maize that construes it as a vehicle for patronage that is responsible for the failure of Zambian authorities (and NGOs) to close down relief operations when it is appropriate to do so in economic and humanitarian terms.

An integral part of the special status of maize is the unwritten understanding that the crop is the responsibility of the President himself personally. This is a neo-patrimonialist phenomenon: the President as the 'father' of the nation has by analogy the responsibility to feed his 'children'. He thus must have a range of powers to enable him to guarantee affordable food (maize) for all. If there is a failure of maize availability (or inputs to produce it) that failure is laid at the president's door by his critics and by large sections of the population. Zambians three Presidents – Kaunda, Chiluba and Mwanawasa – have applied different styles and emphases to their intervention in the maize business, but

they have none of them espoused a hands-off approach. Kaunda controlled prices and gave away inputs; Chiluba personally checked millers' costings and ordered the importation of food to keep supplies up and prices low. Mwanawasa is famous the world over for enforcing his personal judgement that GM maize was potentially dangerous to his people. This intimate link between the presidency and all aspects of maize production and marketing, makes rational consultative policy making impossible.⁹

Despite donor involvement, the food distribution programmes we have described in Sinazongwe and Chiyawa Districts are being carried out with the active approval and involvement of Zambians in both the public sector and in the NGOs concerned. This is probably for a range of reasons, including the need to secure employment, and perhaps a belief that 'hand outs' are the right of those in non-maize producing areas. Certainly, if the Zambian participants were representative of producers or traders they would be more circumspect. But there is a gulf in understanding between the commercial and the humanitarian sectors.

In summary, the economic irrationality that tends to prevail in the food security business has deep roots. These roots are partly localised, lying within Zambia and its unique social, political and economic history. Partly they lie in the international domain, with the 'supply push' arising from over-production in Northern countries, and with the myth of an Africa in constant crisis. Corrective or curative measures are not easy to identify and implement!

5.2 Continuing food aid nationwide

There are several centres of information collection and coordination in the food security and relief industry in Zambia, as was described earlier in this paper. There is considerable cross-membership and adequate secretarial services but it is remarkably difficult to obtain a single comprehensive picture of the recent past or of the present. The situation seems to be that there is no all encompassing network; institutions (such as NGOs) align themselves according to their own priorities and even act completely independently. An example of the latter are churches, some of which engage in their own procurement and distribution activities without requesting or receiving approval from anyone. Figures are also not compiled or shared in a timely fashion; for example FEWSNET appears to be two years behind on the national food balance statistics judging by what they availed to us.

Another feature of the coordinating institutions at present is that many of those that are supposed to be participating have lost interest. Policy on food aid, such as it is, is being made by a small subset of those who ought to be responsible, as people fail to turn up at meetings or to submit information on time.

⁹ For a more extended discussion of policy making in relation to maize see Farrington and Saasa (2002).

What follows is an attempt to assess the national situation from what figures are available.

The WFP-led food distribution has attenuated considerably since the crisis period. It is distributing only 300 or so tonnes weekly. It has also shifted focus somewhat, with refugee camps, school feeding and provisioning of hospitals and hospices becoming more prominent as so-called emergency distributions of general rations such as we have described have abated. Protein, in the form of dried milk and soya meal, is accordingly more significant as a proportion of the total. However, the 'Food for Assets' programme continues amongst village farmers, with a current total of 22,500 beneficiary families receiving on average 50 kg of maize monthly (to give a total of just over 1,000 tonnes monthly). Most of these are in Region 1, where we have already argued that FFA focused on maize is highly inappropriate. But some 6,000 are in Eastern Province, in Region 2, in the same areas that maize cultivation has reduced due to market interference by the WFP, as will be described below.

But WFP is not the only organisation pushing food into the distribution network. In fact the FFA programme in Sinazongwe that we have examined is not part of the total it is reporting. As mentioned earlier, the Zambian Government, through its agencies such as the DMMU and the FRA, has about 18,000 tons of maize that it failed to distribute during the crisis and now wishes to dispose of. It has been offering this, and continues to offer it, to various agencies including its 'daughter' District Disaster Management Committees. These are responsible for targeting food aid at district level and have, at least in theory, oversight of the activities of the implementing local NGOs.

5.3 Vulnerability and targeting

The November 2003 VAC report for Zambia is sharply different from its predecessors in sounding notes of caution, as well as airing doubts about the effectiveness of its own methodology for assessing vulnerability and that of the relief organisations that follow in its footsteps. Its main conclusions (verbatim) are as follows.

- The current relief operation must cease by 30th April 2004. Any continuation of relief food distribution may impact negatively on the market price of food in some areas. This assumption is premised on a favourable national harvest for 2004. The CSO and MACO are set to conduct the Crop Forecasting Survey to determine national production;¹⁰

¹⁰ CSO and MACO now predict a bumper crop and yield figures are being revised upwards constantly. The crop will certainly be in excess of Zambian requirements by at least 50 percent. However, the severe reduction in Zimbabwean production due to political factors means that the regional supply situation will continue to underpin a seller's market, with prices unlikely to fall below US\$100 per tonne.

- It has been noted that the targeting mechanism in areas requiring food relief assistance and at community level is generally very poor¹¹. All previous findings show that the level of contention with the listing of beneficiaries is very high. The report strongly recommends that targeting procedures are well established and defined. The DMMU is also encouraged to constantly monitor the distribution and carry out independent audits of the beneficiaries' lists at community level;
- Political interference with the distribution exercise, especially at district level has been noted. This impacts negatively on intervention programmes and must be stopped;
- The collection of monitoring indicators at district level must be well articulated. The indicators collected at district level are not currently standardized and in some cases not collected at all. This makes reporting and comparison difficult. It is recommended that the VAC comes up with a district framework which will contain all the indicators that need to be collected, the frequency of collection and how this information is to be gathered;
- The growing dependence on relief food is a worrying problem. Whilst there are households that truly require relief assistance, it has been noted that communities can easily become prone to receiving relief food on a long-term basis. It is important that a serious review of the proposed interventions is carried out. The distribution of relief food must be considered a last resort. Communities must be encouraged to explore options to help them be self reliant¹².

In assessing actual needs for the period February to May 2004 the November 2003 VAC report estimated the total number of people needing food relief in Zambia at only 157,000 people. This is very small by the standards of an organisation that predicted over three million needy people at the end of 2002¹³. However, the VAC has failed to observe that most of its 'needy', small as the number may be, live in low-rainfall high-temperature parts of Zambia where arable farming (certainly of maize) is not generally a livelihood option and cash grants might be a better option.

The VAC report also fails to notice suggestive evidence of the deleterious effects of its own earlier misguided enthusiasm.

¹¹ The estimation of need on a district basis is done by the VAC, while the actual targeting on a household-by-household basis is done by the district disaster committee in conjunction with the implementing NGO. It might be fairly said that both processes are very poor, being founded upon poor theory (e.g. that low production automatically results in food insecurity) and being susceptible to political influence of all sorts. When food has been distributed some communities 'pool' it again, obliging recipients to surrender what they have received, and redistribute according to home-grown criteria.

¹² This can be taken to mean two things: production of more drought tolerant crops; or non-food production economic activities that provide income that can be used to buy food. The second is the aim of development in general, whilst the first is difficult if food deficits are 'rewarded' with excessive food aid.

¹³ See Scott & Harland (2003) for a brief review of VAC methodology.

‘Despite the improved cereal and cassava production situation in the country, some areas were identified as having experienced an overall reduction in cereal and tuber availability ranging between 20% and 40% reduction, but still produced sufficient to meet their basic energy requirements. However, it was worth noting that the situation in Chama, Katete and Petauke was mainly attributed to diversification to cotton and tobacco contract farming (high value crops) whereas the situation in Mwense was attributed to the move from crop production to fishing.’

This first three Districts mentioned are in Eastern Province, where commentators had criticised the WFP (and the food relief system generally) of ‘dumping’ relief food that was not needed during the latter part of 2002 and the early part of 2003¹⁴. Many of the critics were from the Zambian trading community in the Province who had bought up maize at harvest in the expectation that the price would rise; but now they saw prices depressed by UN free maize. The response of the WFP and other agencies was to see the businessmen as exploiters of an emergency situation; whereas it would be fairer to say that, in the absence of humanitarian intervention, the actions of the business community could have contributed significantly to food security in the province. Certainly there would have been no critical shortage of maize and prices would have been well within the regional bounds.

The disappearance of the market for maize in Eastern province (who is going to offer maize contracts to growers if the WFP or other agencies distributing food relief might turn up unannounced at any moment?) is the most likely cause of the switch to cotton and other commodities that are not given away as emergency assistance. This story sharply points up the need for the donor community to address the conflicts between the free market ideology that it preaches to countries like Zambia, and its tendency to undermine free markets in the name of human kindness.

The tone of retrospective sobriety in the November 2003 VAC report is echoed by the Valid International report on the conduct of the relief operation (Valid International, 2004). This essentially supports the observations about the extent of the Zambian crisis being overestimated. It notes what is perhaps the key aspect of a mismatch between perceptions of the givers and the reality on the ground in Southern Africa:

‘The current debate about whether the crisis was overstated or not seems to reflect an underlying lack of knowledge about the communities with whom the DEC (and other agencies) have been working. There seems to be a real lack of underlying data and understanding about what is going on in areas where agencies may have had ongoing development programmes for years.

¹⁴ The main author was in the area at the time and received numerous verbal complaints from traders and farmers concerning WFP food, which was also flowing across the border from Mozambique, depressing prices unfairly.

'This not only raises doubts about the appropriateness of some of these long-term programmes, but also means that agencies find it difficult to objectively assess the impact of shocks on the communities involved. They are, therefore, at risk of over (or under-) stating the impact of events on people's ability to cope. Both under and over-stating crises are dangerous, the latter because there is a danger of donors and public regarding the agencies as 'crying wolf', which could lead to less support in the future¹⁵.'

But the new sober tone is not universal. The Southern Africa 2004 Consolidated Appeal, produced by UN agencies in the middle of 2003 after it had become clear that the rains had returned to normal, states:

'The recovery [in Zambia] is however fragile, as by December 2003 there were already 18 districts in the Southern and Western provinces, in which over one million people will require emergency food assistance during the period January-March 2004'.

This is making the same mistake as the VAC in confounding residence in a low-rainfall area with vulnerability; but amplifying this error by assuming that virtually every single person in low-rainfall areas needs 'emergency' feeding.

The CAP points up the real problem of 'agencies' which the Valid report raises. There are agencies and agencies; there are agencies that are well-embedded in the communities they are trying to serve, and there are agencies that are to all intents and purposes external. The latter are easily misled by wild claims coming from interested parties, as well as by their own enthusiasm to tackle a problem. The UN agencies are the prime exemplars of the 'external' variety; their staff are shunted from country to country and if they can form a balanced picture of the situation in the rural areas of a country like Zambia they are exceptionally gifted. Some international NGOs operating in Zambia can also be classified as predominantly external.

At the opposite extreme, the 'internal' variety, are the deeply embedded rural organisations like established churches, church missions and rural hospitals. The institutional knowledge and memory of such organisations is intimate and typically very balanced. Many churches, especially in the south of the country, operate their own food assistance programmes, buying up crops locally during the harvest season and targeting food at the needy. They do this on a regular basis, not just during 'emergencies'. This type of organisation can lean on networks of outpatient clinics and church activities to establish exactly what and where the need is, but – as pointed out earlier - is not linked into the nationally coordinated relief system.

It was 'internal' organisations that were co-opted to assess needs and target the needy during the 1992 drought emergency in Zambia and their performance was exemplary. At the same time a national NGO with close links to Government was formed to administer food relief, drought recovery and

¹⁵ Valid International report cited, page 23.

long-term food security programmes. This is PAM, the Programme Against Malnutrition. The original intention was that the organisation would take over most of the 'secretariat' functions of WFP. In practice, WFP has grown in terms of staffing and (donor) funding, while PAM has focused on applying Government funds to the distribution of seed and fertiliser on an annual basis to support the vulnerable.

Has our present understanding of chronic or acute food security problems been advanced by the experience of the last two years? The continuation of inappropriate food distribution schemes, as has been documented through this study, indicates that not everyone has learned the lessons. Has anyone?

6. Conclusions and Policy Implications

6.1 Political economy of food security

Activities in the general area of food relief and drought 'recovery' are driven as much by a complex of social and political factors, as by economic and humanitarian ones. Even basic data is distorted by an incentive structure that gives little weight to prudence and sober judgement. No improvements are likely to occur without a sophisticated understanding of the political economy of food security, from the level of the household to the level of international transactions.

6.2 Food aid and livelihoods

There are many rural people who do not normally attempt to grow all the basic food they require throughout the year. Some do not grow at all, being engaged in a variety of economic activities that generate money with which they buy food. Even those who do grow enough food to feed themselves for a year often sell most of it shortly after harvest and buy it back during the 'hungry period' around January and February. Food aid is really only justified in the case of subsistence farmers who have lost their crops, or the very poor who cannot cope with the elevated prices that prevail during shortages.

The previous point concerning rural people who do not grow their own food is particularly relevant in the case of areas where people *cannot* grow all their own staple food with any reliability. On the basis of the work reported above, food aid in Region I of Zambia, the low-rainfall high-temperature region, is singularly questionable.

The attempt to form linkages, in the form of unenforceable undertakings, between the receipt of food aid and the adoption of more productive agricultural methods, as with FFA, strikes us as spurious in such regions. It is more a sop to the conscience of the givers than an effective way of procuring adoption of sound agricultural and food security practices, the former depending more on availability of effective appropriate agricultural technologies and practices, and the latter on a wide range of livelihood and coping strategies, beyond own-account food production.

6.3 Inter-agency coordination

The paradox of too much coordination – meaning too many coordinating agencies – leading to too little coordination, needs to be addressed. This can probably only happen given a strong government with a good grasp of the issues, coupled to an understanding on the part of donor and UN agencies that it is government's function to set policies in all fields.

6.4 Food aid and markets

Despite much nostalgia for the days of Humanism, Kenneth Kaunda's version of African socialism, Zambia is attempting to put its economy on a market-led basis. There are private traders who purchase maize in all corners of the country; they supply commodities that are in demand (including maize during shortages) as well. Food relief is accordingly not justified on the basis that it enables the *physical* movement of food to where it is needed – the evidence from all parts of Zambia is that the market will do that provided the demand is there. A huge if unknown number of Zambians are in the business of long-range trading and there is nowhere that is no-go for reasons of poor security or impossible communications.

6.5 Alternatives to food aid

Physical food relief reduces the benefit to producers and traders since it brings local prices down – making future crises more likely. But our argument against food aid is not an argument against all forms of humanitarian intervention. Zambia has had very positive experiences with cash-based relief in times of food shortage. These include a Dutch 'cash for work' (CFW) programme in the Western Province in the mid-1990s and a recent programme conducted by the Zambian NGO HODI (which acts as an agent for Action Aid). Far from depressing local food prices, aid in the form of cash actually boosts them, to the benefit of producers and traders, since it increases demand in the locality in which the cash is distributed.

There are many ways of 'giving cash' to the needy. These include the selective removal of social charges such as clinic and school fees in rural areas. The provision of inputs, even for maize, is another way of helping poor villagers, but extreme care is needed to avoid subsidising the cultivation of maize in areas in which it is not sustainable. Attention also needs to be paid to the fact that unpredictable levels of Government and NGO handouts of inputs have contributed to the problems with the establishment of a viable private sector input supply industry in Zambia.

Cash or cash-like benefits can be targeted in some self-selecting way such as 'for work' (which generally means 'for time' since the quality of work performed is often low). Benefits can also be targeted via community committees such as those established under the Public Welfare Assistance Scheme (PWAS). Community committees use a certain protocol, combined most importantly with knowledge of who really is and is not in trouble, to target most forms of welfare (bursaries and health charge exemptions, for example). PWAS is an attempted response to what we believe to be the reality – that there is a chronic problem of poverty in rural Zambia which needs to be addressed effectively. It may become exacerbated by a crop failure, or by individual household problems such as HIV/AIDS. But there is no stand-alone food availability problem (or disease problem) to justify intermittent interventions designed to address these problems in isolation from Zambia's wider development goals.

What is needed is a working and permanent social protection policy based upon solid theory. From the time of Adam Smith it has been evident that social protection is not only compatible with an efficient market economy but actually essential to it. Desperation distorts markets – whether by virtue of desperate sellers parting with their property at unsustainably low prices, or desperate buyers paying over the odds for means of survival.

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