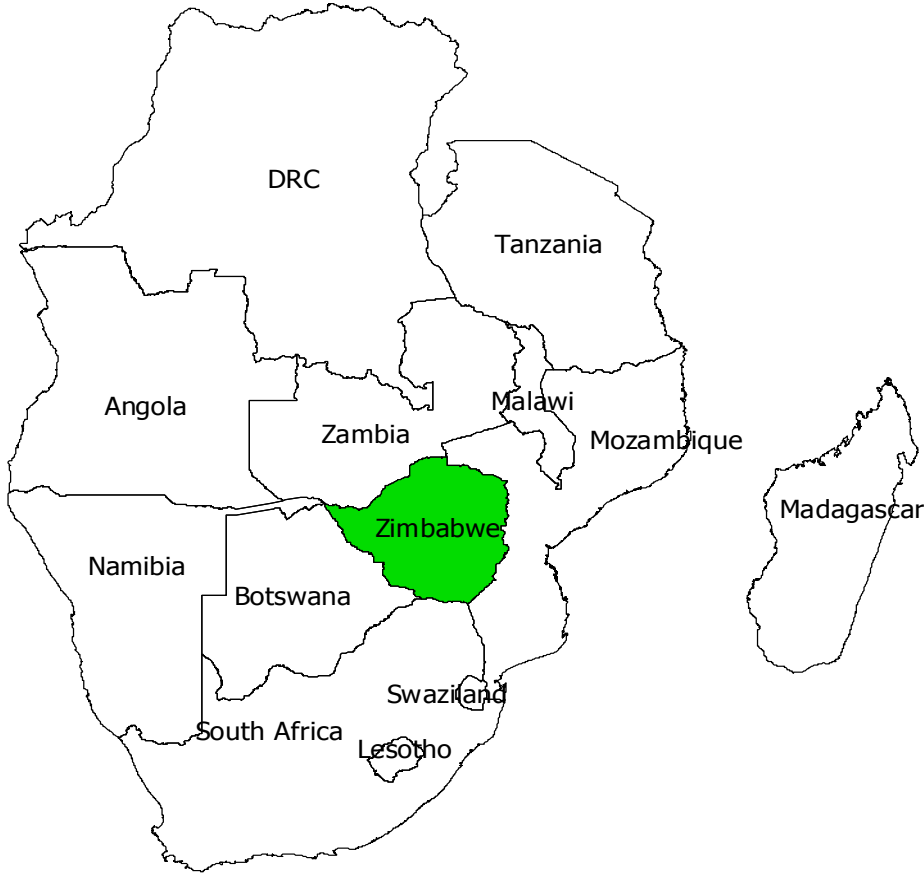


**ZIMBABWE
RURAL FOOD SECURITY AND
VULNERABILITY ASSESSMENTS – MAY 2006
SUMMARY REPORT**



MAY 2006

Background

Food and Nutrition Council has the overall role of coordinating multisectoral activities related to food and nutrition issues in the country. Some of the activities include food security and vulnerability assessments. A subcommittee ZIMVAC (Zimbabwe Vulnerability Assessment Committee) which is being chaired by FNC has been set up to plan and coordinate these assessments. This ZIMVAC is a subcommittee of Poverty Eradication and Social Services Delivery Development Action Committee (PESSDDAC), which is a cabinet action committee.

ZIMVAC conducts food security and vulnerability assessments annually. The assessments started in August 2002 with technical and part funding from SADC-FANR. Part of the funding came from local non governmental organizations and United Nations development agencies. Financial support continued to come from these agencies up to date. In the 2005 budgeting year, the Government made a commitment to fund the process, however the approved budget for 2006 had no allocation to support programme activities such as these assessments.

The information generated from these assessments has provided Government and other stakeholders with vital food and nutrition security information for decision making, programme evaluations and research at both national and sub-national levels.

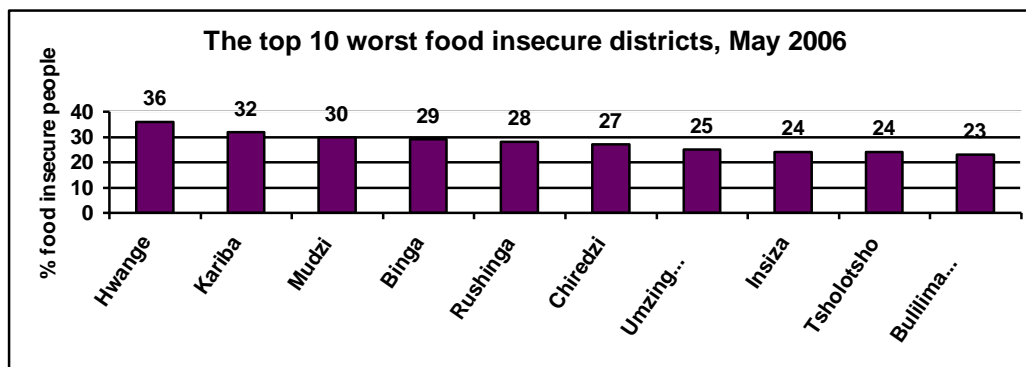
The 2006 assessments were conducted in May with the overall objective of appraising the rural food security situation throughout the country and exploring the rural livelihoods in order to identify short-term and medium term needs and opportunities for sustainable interventions.

The specific objectives of the assessments were;

- To identify geographic areas and socio-economic groups likely to be food insecure in the 2006/07 Marketing year:
- To investigate changes to rural livelihoods over the past four years in order to better understand factors that make rural households vulnerable.
- Examine the minimum sectoral information that affects rural livelihoods.
- Link household food security with the nutritional status of vulnerable groups such as women of reproductive age and pre-school children.
- To identify key variables to be monitored during the marketing year in order to update the food security situation.

Highlights of the Findings

- There has been an improvement in the food security status of the rural population of Zimbabwe. A total of 83% will be able to meet their cereal needs compared to 64% last year.
- A cumulative total population of 1.4million rural people (17%), will not be able to meet their household cereal requirements during the current agriculture year (2006/2007).
 - The 1.4million people are not able to purchase the cereal even if it is made available on the market.
 - This population has a cereal deficit of 91 000 metric tones.
- Overall Matebeleland North province with 24%, had the highest concentration of food insecure people, followed by Masvingo and Matebeleland South provinces each with 20%.
- At district level, Hwange district (36%) which is in Matebeleland North was the worst affected. Graph 1 shows the top ten worst districts



Characteristics of Food Insecure Population

The food insecure are more like likely to be;

- Households with orphans and consisting at least 7 household members
- Households that are headed by people who had reached at most primary education.
- Households who do not have relatives within or outside the country who assist with remittances
- Households with a mentally or physically challenged member
- Households headed by the elderly
- Households with chronically ill head or member

Health

- A total of 23% of the households had at least one household member suffering from HIV/AIDS related illnesses. Most of the chronically ill members were in the economically active age group of 18 – 59 years.

- The top five illnesses mentioned were tuberculosis, meningitis, pneumonia, diarrhea, headaches and malaria.

Nutrition

- The current agricultural season is better than the previous one (2004/2005) as most households (88.5%) had a high dietary diversity compared to last year (40%).
- Although wasting which measures current hunger levels has improved overall, children from rural households headed by females were more likely to be wasted.
- Underweight reflects both current and past nutritional problems experiences has improved comparing to national results of 2003. Underweight (among under-fives) is also an indicator of millennium development goals.
- Stunting which reflects past experiences of a child and also a proxy for socio-economic status has deteriorated comparing with national results of 2003. This could be a reflection of the hard economic situation that the current has experienced.
- Malnutrition among women of child bearing was worst in Matabeleland South Province.

Education

- There was a significant increase in the number of dropouts (33%) among primary school children. Lack of school fees was cited as the major reason of dropping out of school.

Water & Sanitation

- Unsafe water sources, which are identified as unprotected wells, ponds, rivers and dams were being used by 27% of the sampled households. Majority of the households with poor access to safe water sources were in the communal areas.
- At provincial level, Mashonaland West, Matabeleland North, Matabeleland South had the most households, which were using unsafe water sources.
- Households that did not have toilets at their households were mainly in Matabeleland North, Midlands, and Masvingo provinces.

Agriculture

- Shortage of fertilizer was the major problem faced by farmers across all farming sectors, draft power was problem for communal, A1 and small scale farmers
- Lack of dipping chemicals, animal diseases and deaths were the main livestock problems faced by farmers.

Community challenges and priorities

- The major challenges identified by communities in order of severity were: shortages of food, transport, unstable prices, water and sanitation and health problems.
- The main needs in order of priority identified by communities were water, education, agricultural inputs, livestock, transport, health and income generating projects.

Recommendations

Food security

- The results indicate an improved harvest from the 2005/06 cropping season and an increased number of households will depend on their own production. However some households will depend on purchases, therefore grain should be made available and accessible on the market.
- The food security status is dependent on among other things, price and availability of maize as well as rural household's incomes. There is need therefore to monitor these factors in order to update the food security situation and revise interventions appropriately.
- Programmes targeted at vulnerable groups should be continued, eg :
 - Public Works and Targeted Cash Transfers
 - Child Supplementary and School feeding
 - Therapeutic feeding and Home Based Care
 - GMB vulnerable people support programmes

Health, Nutrition and Child Care

- There is need to intensify HIV and AIDS prevention activities and to strengthen mitigation and support programmes for those affected.

- Given the deteriorating stunting levels among children, education programmes focusing on the 12-23 month old child and long term poverty reduction interventions need to be continued and expanded.
- There is need to have an in-depth study of the underlying causes of maternal malnutrition problems in Matabeleland South province in order to recommend appropriate interventions measures.

Education

- ZimVAC surveys have shown growing problems of children dropping out of school at primary level. The main reason cited was lack of school fees. Therefore educational support programmes such as BEAM, District Aids Fund, Education Transitional Reform Programme should continued, expanded and monitored.

Water and Sanitation

- There is low coverage of safe water and sanitation facilities in some of the provinces like Masvingo and Matabeleland North and South, Midlands and Mashonaland West. The Government and other development partners working in the area of water and sanitation should prioritise the worst affected provinces.

Agriculture

Given the challenges and opportunities identified by the communities, the following proposed actions should be considered:

- Support for the re-habilitation of dipping facilities and provision of dipping chemicals to preserve draft power.
- Support livestock restocking programmes
- Monitoring and intensification of animal disease surveillance.
- Fertilizer and seed should be made available on the local market timely (before the onset of the cropping season) and at affordable prices

- Government and development partners at all levels are urged to continue and expand irrigation programmes and the drilling and rehabilitation of boreholes.

Funding for Vulnerability Assessments

ZimVAC is a government programme and as such it is recommended that government should provide core funding for its implementation.

