

FOSENET

NGO Food Security Network

Community Assessment of the Food Situation in Zimbabwe December 2002 / January 2003

"The food situation is deteriorating by the day and GMB depots are empty"

Hurungwe

*Maize meal is never enough for peasants and when they complain they are labelled
opposition"*

Hwange

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Background

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 24 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, viz:

- 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.

FOSENET is conscious of the need to ensure and constantly improve on data quality and validity. Data quality is being improved through training, supervision and verification cross checks. Validity is checked through cross reporting from the same district, through verification from field visits (currently being implemented) and through peer review from those involved with relief work, including the UN and ZIMVAC, to enable feedback on differences found and follow up verification. **Comment and feedback on this report is welcomed – please send to fosenet@mweb.co.zw.**

This fifth round covers NGO and community based monitoring on nationally for the period December 2002 and January 2003. In this time period there was some movement of people due to the end of year shutdowns and reports from some provinces were delayed due to intensified transport difficulties and communication problems. This round of reporting thus has less monitor reports than in previous rounds (103 compared to 166 in November). The NGO and community monitoring were combined which led to more than one report being received from 60% of districts (a slight improvement over previous rounds) and an average of 2,5 reports per district. FOSENET is implementing training to increase the number of monitors and ensure an adequate spread of districts across the country and improving communications to ensure reports are received. Further revision of and training on the form was done in January so that the February round of monitoring will include new information related to food security-poverty links, coping strategies and production outputs. Input to process from UN WFP and ZIMVAC is acknowledged.

On the basis of the cross verification provided by more than one report per district this round of reporting provides evidence by district. While in most areas the cross validation gives confidence in the data, the report indicates where district evidence requires follow up verification and investigation, through both FOSENET and the wider UN, international and national network of organisations working on food security and relief. FOSENET will actively follow these issues up within these frameworks.

This report of community monitoring of food security signals broad issues to be addressed in dealing with food security as monitored from community level. The report provides some selected trend comparison on key indicators across previous rounds of FOSENET monitoring for districts where sufficient data points were available for this.

Coverage of the data

The information is presented in this report by district¹. This report is drawn from **103 monitoring reports** drawn from **43** districts (74% of districts) across all provinces of Zimbabwe. Districts covered within provinces include

¹ The term 'district' refers to an administrative district. Reports by constituency are allocated to districts.

Table 1: Districts covered by the October monitoring

PROVINCE	District covered
Mashonaland East	Chikomba Marondera urban, Goromonzi, Mutoko, Murewa, Seke, Hwedza, UMP, Mudzi
Mashonaland Central	Mazowe, Mt Darwin
Mashonaland West	Chegutu, Chinhoyi, Hurungwe, Zvimba, Makonde, Kariba
Manicaland	Mutare urban, Mutare rural, Makoni, Nyanga, Chipinge , Chimanimani, Mutasa, Nyanga
Masvingo	Mwenezi, Masvingo rural, Chivi, Zaka, Gutu
Midlands	Gweru urban, Chirumanzu, Mberengwa, Kwekwe, Kwekwe rural
Matabeleland North	Binga, Hwange, Lupane,
Matabeleland South	Umzingwane, Gwanda
Cities	Chitungwisa, Harare, Epworth

The data covers the period December 1 to January 30 2002.

Change in the food situation

Food security fell across districts in all provinces in December and January due to noticeable reductions in GMB deliveries and commercial supplies, not adequately compensated for by production, relief or other supplies.

Sentinel sites in 14 districts reported **no** supplies of GMB grain at all in monitoring period (Makoni, Chikomba, Mudzi, Goromonzi, Mt Darwin, Hurungwe, Zvimba, Binga, Lupane, Gwanda, Chirumanzu, Gweru and Epworth), as did some sites in Gutu and Chivi. In 7 districts supplies were said to be erratic or falling (Chinoyi, Hwedza, Seke, Chipinge, Makoni, Harare and Chitungwisa) and in four food needs were reported to have increased. Hence in 27 districts (63% districts in the round) the situation was reported to have worsened, the most marked feature reported being that of absolute falls in GMB supplies. Compared to this in only one district (Nyanga) was it reported that supplies increased.

In one district (Mutare Rural) people are reported to be moving away from their homes because of hunger. This would need to be followed up as it is the first time an outflow of this nature has been reported and could signal a transition from food insecurity to more extreme famine type responses.

Food needs

The most vulnerable groups in terms of food **needs** have remained relatively constant across all rounds of FOSENET monitoring since July, viz Elderly, orphans, children, ill people, people with disability and unemployed or destitute people. **The share of districts reporting that 'everyone' was in need has remained at around half of districts (47%),** rising from 0% of districts in September to 40% of districts reporting this October to 51% in November.

Vulnerability has in this month as in the previous rounds of monitoring been attributed to poor harvests, poverty, inability to afford inflated food costs, bias in access (political, procedural) and to scarcity of food supplies. **In terms of overall vulnerability, absolute scarcity of supplies was noted to be the most common cause in December/ January and has taken over from cost (the leading barrier in earlier rounds) and selective biases in access.**

Absolute lack of food was now reported in 47% of the 43 districts. Inflated cost of food was reported as the major barrier in 26% of districts, and political or other sources of bias in 6% of districts. As noted in the later discussion on access, these different types of barriers to accessing food are differently distributed across different types of food supply.

This monitoring period covered school holidays so more substantive report on school attendance can be made in the next round. **However 96% of sites reported that schooling had been affected by food insecurity, and 18 of the 43 district sites (42%) observed reduced school enrollments and increased dropout in the new school term.** While hunger was cited as the major cause for children not attending school, in four district sites (in Mazowe, Gutu, Masvingo and Harare) children were also reported to have dropped out of school due to financial constraints, as households diverted money to food.

'Some children are dropping out because their fees are now used to buy food.'

Harare

Food availability and access

For the third month in a row household food stocks were reported at less than one month in all provinces.

Only three districts had any households with food stocks of more than one month (Muatasa, Chirumhanzu and Gutu), generally less than a month's supply of food.

There has thus been little impact in household grain stocks from the production season to date. Production would not, however, be expected to have an impact until later in the season.

GMB Deliveries

GMB deliveries were reported to have fallen, been erratic not to have been made at all in the month in 49% of districts. An improvement in supply was noted in one district (Nyanga) and no change in 5 district sites. The average number of reported deliveries to sentinel wards was 0,66 in the period. This is less than the 0,88 deliveries in the wards monitored for October but higher than the 0,51 deliveries in the wards monitored in November. The average volume of deliveries is also reported to have fallen from an average of 9,3 tonnes reported to have been delivered to the wards monitored in October to 3,44 tonnes in November and 1,79 tonnes in the current round. **As shown in Figure 1 below the reported volume of deliveries from GMB has fallen sharply after**

October 2002, with a continued decline into January. This is despite the marginal increase in frequency of deliveries.

As noted in earlier reports and reinforced by reports from other national monitoring (Zimbabwe Vulnerability Assessment Committee ZIMVAC, December 2002) there is a serious need for improved public reporting on actual GMB deliveries to districts and wards given the obvious scarcity of this supply and the need to ensure greatest equity in its distribution..

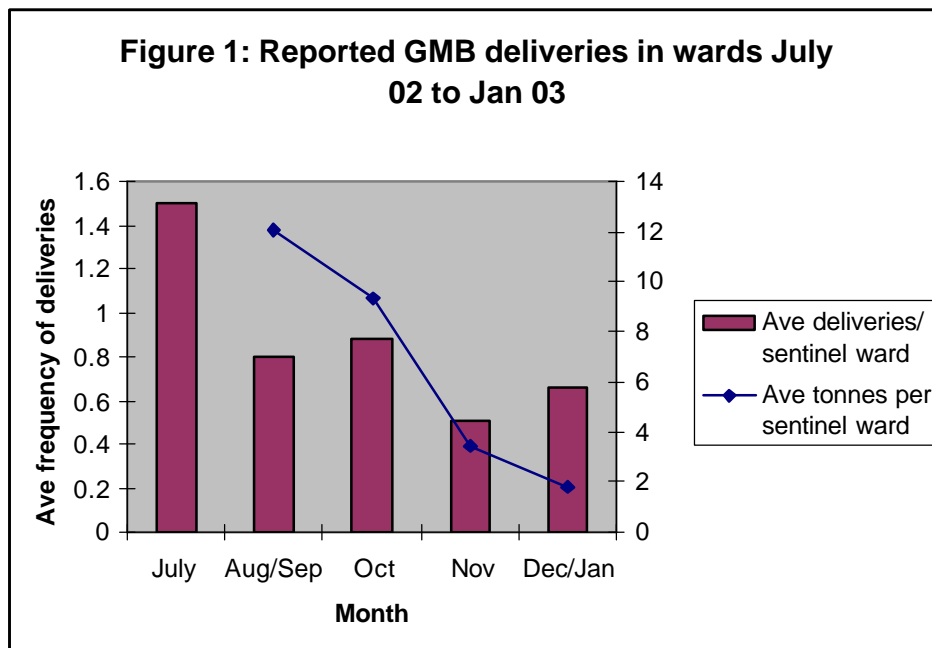


Table 2 shows districts with NO wards reporting ANY grain deliveries in the period reviewed, compared with information from previous months.

Table 2: Districts with NO sentinel wards reporting any GMB deliveries in the month

PROVINCE	December/ January	Nov	Oct	Aug/Sep
Mashonaland East	Chikomba, Mudzi, Goromonzi, Mutoko	Nil	Nil	Marondera Rural
Mashonaland Central	Nil	Rushinga	Nil	Mount Darwin
Mashonaland West	Mhondoro, Hurungwe, Zvimba	Hurungwe	Chinhoyi	n.a
Manicaland	Nil	Buhera, Chimanimani	Buhera	Mutasa
Masvingo	Nil	Nil	Gutu	Masvingo urban
Midlands	Chirumanzu	Nil	Nil	Gokwe, Chirumanzu

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Matabeleland North	Binga, Lupane	Nkayi, Lupane	Tsholotsho, Lupane, Binga, Bubi, Hwange Urban,	Tsholotsho, Lupane, Binga, Umgua
Matabeleland South	Gwanda	Umzingwane	Beitbridge, Umzingwane, Matobo,	Bulilimamangwe, Matobo, Gwanda

The table indicates that for most provinces the districts reporting NO grain deliveries in sentinel wards have varied across time so that there seems to be some degree of spread in this burden. However within this:

- Matabeleland North and South, Mashonaland East and Mashonaland West have had consistent reporting of no deliveries
- Hurungwe has reported wards with two consecutive months of no deliveries and **Lupane four consecutive months** of no deliveries.

This would seem to merit a more focused attention on access to GMB maize in these specific areas. Notably Buhera and Tsholotsho with several consecutive months of no delivery by November round did not report in this round of monitoring so their food security situation cannot be commented on.

The lower range grain price at GMB has remained constant. Given the high rate of inflation in Zimbabwe over the period this implies a fall in the real price of grain, as this is a controlled price. **As this control price reflects a growing subsidy (taking inflation into account) it is extremely important that it preferentially reach the poor.**

The upper range prices varied rather widely, with extremely high prices from three districts. This would need to be investigated, verified and explained and follow up is being made by Fosenet on this. However, there seems to be some consistency on this as provinces reporting high upper range prices in November were the same as in December/January.

The upper price range in December/ January of Z\$260 /10kg is 124% above the controlled price. There are more districts reporting prices significantly higher than the control price than in previous months, and there appears to have been an upward movement in GMB prices over the period. Districts with inflated reported prices of over Z\$150/10kg in December/January are shown in Table 3. There are more districts reporting this than in previous months.

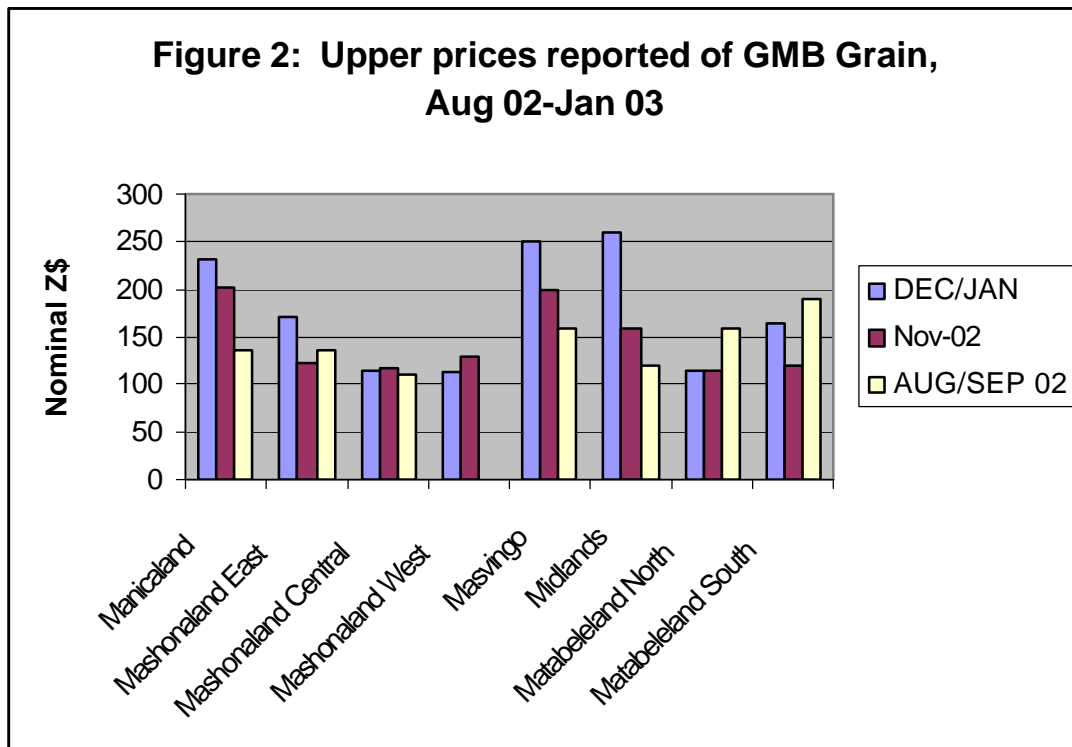
Table 3: Reported costs of GMB maize, Z\$/10kg

Provinces	Price range in Z\$ / 10kg DEC/JAN 03	Price range in Z\$ / 10kg NOV	Price range in Z\$ / 10kg AUG/SEP	Districts reporting GMB prices above \$150/10kg in Dec/ January
Manicaland	110-232	116-202	110-135	Chipinge
Mashonaland East	112-170	95-122	110-136	Hwedza
Mashonaland Central	116	109-118	110-110	Nil
Mashonaland West	110-112	112-130	N.A	Nil
Masvingo	100-250	116-200	110-160	Masvingo Rural,

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				Zaka
Midlands	110-260	112-160	110-119	Gweru
Matabeleland North	116	116	110-160	Nil
Matabeleland South	112-165	116-120	110-190	Umzingwane

Nominal Zimbabwe dollars



From Figure 2 it would appear that upper limits of prices have declined in Matabeleland North and South in January 03 compared to August 02, have remained constant in Mashonaland Central and West, and have increased in Masvingo, Midlands, Mashonaland East and Manicaland. **Reports indicate that Mashonaland Central and West and Matabeleland North provinces have been better able to maintain official price controls on GMB sales than other provinces.**

The combination of scarcity in supply and increase in reported prices indicates that there will be competition for available stocks. Given the public subsidies applied it is important that these are fairly distributed.

Access to GMB food was noted to be a problem in 67% of districts. Cost as a barrier has fallen from 38% of reporting districts in October, to 22% in November, to 10% in December/January. Reported barriers due to absolute shortfalls in supply have increased from 17% of districts reporting constraints in access in November to 28% in December / January. **Procedural barriers and political bias have risen markedly as a constraint to accessing GMB grain, and were reported as the most common barrier to**

accessing GMB grains. These barriers increased from 15% of districts reporting access problems in August, to 33% in October, 38% in November up to 62% in December/ January.

The major form of this bias is reported to be the requirement to produce a political party card. The procedural requirement of production of a letter from the councilor or headman to certify residence is reported in appears to have been linked to party membership or participation in party activities, so that opposition party supporters are denied access. The scale of this bias in an environment of scarcity in December/January merits follow up, given that it represents a potential breach of ethical principles of non partisan access to food. Beyond this the elderly and child headed households are also reported to face barriers to access due to poverty and inability to meet requirements to travel, queue and other such barriers.

Market supplies

Commercial maize meal supplies are reported as having fallen during the two months.

Commercial supplies maize meal supplies were extremely low across all provinces, and 56% of district sites reported a fall in commercial supplies, or no supplies at all. Other foods also appear to have become more scarce during the month, with Mat North most affected.

Table 4: Availability of basic foods, December / January 2003

% Total districts reporting food type present during December / January	Maize	Oil	Bread	Sugar
Manicaland	0	66	50	50
Masvingo	38	75	38	12
Matabeleland North	0	0	33	33
Midlands	50	25	50	50

(NB: Excluding provinces with 2 or less districts reporting)

Table 5 indicates that commercial maize meal availability has fallen in Manicaland and Mashonaland West, and remained at extremely low levels in Matabeleland North throughout the period.

Table 5: Availability of basic maize meal August 2002-January 2003

% Total districts reporting maize meal present	January 03	November	October	August / Sep
Manicaland	0	30	80	80
Mashonaland East	n.a	50	13	13
Mashonaland West	0	0	50	50
Masvingo	38	25	0	0
Matabeleland North	0	0	0	0
Matabeleland South	n.a	40	20	20

(NB: Excluding provinces with < 3 districts reporting)

Reduced supply and political barriers were the most commonly cited problems in access to commercial foods, followed by cost. The absolute decline in supply appears to have taken over from cost as a major reported barrier compared to the November reports. **Reported political interference in commercial sales has also increased compared to November reports**, with reports of youth militias and police controlling food queues also making decisions on access or claiming preferential access for some. The reported control by police of food queues for commercial supplies appears to have been a response to the tensions generated by scarcities, but has also brought increased report of political bias through militias. Political barriers have superseded cost as the major reported barrier to accessing commercial supplies.

The long queues now controlled by the militia, soldiers and the police have resulted in some people being denied access to buy food'.

Chinoyi

'When food is delivered youths should not control the queues they are causing a lot of confusion'

Seke

Maize meal prices in formal markets (supermarkets etc) were reported to follow similar price ranges per 10kg as GMB sales (although with higher upper limits of up to \$1400 per 10kg). Prices in informal and black markets were reported to be much higher.

Table 6: Maize meal costs reported in informal markets November 2002

District	Cost Z\$/10kg
Manicaland	
Mutare urban	1600
Makoni	1250
Nyanga	2000
Mash East	
Chikomba	1500- 1800
Goromonzi	1 800
Mudzi	1800
Mutoko	1500-2250
Murewa	1250
UMP	1200
Hwedza	2000
Mash Central	
Mazowe	1500
Mt Darwin	2000
Mash West	
Mhondoro	1000
Chinhoyi	2500
Zvimba	2000

makonde	2000
Hurungwe	1250-1500

District	Cost Z\$/10kg
Masvingo	
Mwenezi	1250-2500
Masvingo rural	1250-1750
Zaka	1250-1500
Gutu	1250-1500

Mat. North	
Hwange	3000
Lupane	1000

Midlands	
chirumanzu	1750
Gweru urban	1000-3000
Mberengwa	1200

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Kwekwe	2000	Epworth	1500
Chitungwiza	1500-2500	Harare	1000-3000

The reported price in the informal market / 10kg maize meal ranged in December / January from Z\$1000 -Z\$3 000 / 10kg, with a marked increase on prices reported in November 2002 (of 50% in the upper ranges), and with highest reported prices twenty five times the controlled price. It appears therefore that scarcities have generally been associated with a marked rise in reported informal market prices.

Contrasting patterns, such as Nyanga where GMB supplies were reported to have increased but high informal market prices were also reported would need to be further investigated. Compared to the upper limit on informal market prices in the July 2002 FOSENET of Z\$600 / 10kg, over the 6 month period July 2002 to January 2003 there has been an increase of 400% in the informal market price. The real value of the Z\$ has fallen in the period so this price increase in real terms is not as high, but it represents a significant cost escalation for poor people. It also represents a growing profit margin if informal markets are applying such markups to grain leaking from controlled price GMB sales. **The price differences between GMB sales and informal market sales has widened from \$490 /10 kg in July to \$2 800 / 10kg in January 03.**

District sites with highest reported informal market prices were Chitungwisa, Harare, Chinoyi, Gweru, Hwange and Mwenezi. Notably all but one of these are urban areas, where purchasing power may be greater. This price differential may drive the sale of informal market foods into urban areas, which would be a problem if it drew in food sources that were intended for rural areas.

The scale of black markets, falling supply of all food sources, reported leakages from controlled price maize sales into these markets and increased profit margins on food sales from black markets (of up to Z\$2 800 per 10kg) indicate that **profits from selling controlled price maize have increased. This is likely to drive further black market activity unless these markets are controlled (potentially very difficult to do) or unless formal supplies are increased. Given that this flow of public funds to private profits is at the cost of poor households' access to food there is need to address the factors driving the problem.**

It would appear from the trends reported that opening options for and increasing supplies of formal commercial maize sales in urban areas where purchasing power is greater (and the risk of black markets growing thus greater) would be one option for cutting a cycle of speculation on food.

Relief food

In the absence of household stocks and other supplies, the demand for relief food has grown.

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"More Aid from NGOs is needed because the GMB alone has failed to supply"

Masvingo

"It is better for relief agencies to chip in and save the starving masses"

Midlands

There are some reports that indicate that people view relief as an option for dealing with the failures of market and public systems:

"Relief agencies should consider covering urban areas even for a fee because people will buy and survive"

Midlands

While this is not a role for relief it signals the need for coherence between relief and wider food security policies to avoid relief having to fill gaps in food access that could be dealt with through public policy shifts.

Reports indicate an increase in relief supplies in six district sites, no change in 10, a fall in supplies in 2 district sites and no supplies in 9 district sites. Supply side constraints in access to relief are reported to a far lesser extent than in the case of other sources of food. The World Food Programme WFP report that in January over 42,400 tons of food were distributed to over 3.3 million beneficiaries in 47 districts, more than double the previous highest monthly distribution achieved since the relief programme began last year (WFP Emergency Report No. 06 of 2003, 7.2.03). Given this overall increase reported there is need to follow up falling supplies noted in Zvimba and Chivi, and the absence of supplies noted in sites in Hwedza, Seke, Murewa, Goromonzi, Chikomba, Chinoyi, Hurungwe and Makonde. Vulnerable groups in Harare were also noted to lack access to relief.

Table 7: Relief agencies and targets within provinces

PROVINCE	Relief Agencies in province	Relief targets (#districts)
Mashonaland West	Christian Care, World Vision, Save the Children, CADEC 4 districts have no relief reported <i>Relief supplies reported to be insufficient in Zvimba sites</i>	Orphans; Elderly; Households
Mashonaland East	Christian Care, Plan Int, WFP, World Vision 6 districts have no relief reported <i>Sites reporting indicate distribution of food to all households in the ward In Chikomba some poor households absent during interviews were reported to be left off the beneficiary list Donors reported to be blocked from giving food in UMP</i>	Households
Harare	Churches, Mashambanzou, National Aids Council, Zanu PF	H/holds, Orphans, Elderly; widows; patients
Mashonaland Central	Church 1 district has no relief reported <i>Church reported in Mazowe to distribute only to its members</i>	Church members
Manicaland	Mayors Cheer Fund, WFP, CADEC, PLAN Int, Christian Care, Zvinoda Kushinga, CONCERN 2 districts have no relief reported <i>Sites in Makoni report some councillors to be politicising</i>	<5s, Gr 1-7s, Households, orphans, elderly

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	<i>relief. (This is the second month such report has been made)</i>	
Masvingo	CARE, Cadec. Rudo, Red Cross 4 districts have no relief reported <i>In Gutu political interference is reported in relief</i> <i>In Mwenezi and Chivi some households are reported to be omitted from the relief list by their village heads</i>	<5s; Households, orphans, elderly, patients
Midlands	Care International, Lutheran World Fed; CADEC 0 districts have no relief reported <i>In Chirumanzu children not going to school are reported to be having problems accessing relief;</i> <i>In Gweru some schools are reported to be excluded and one site reports political bias in making up beneficiary lists</i>	<5s, Gr 1-7s, pregnant women, Households
Matabeleland North	ORAP, Catholic Mission 0 districts with no relief reported	<5s, Pregnant women, elderly
Matabeleland South	No reports	

NB: <5s = children under 5, Gr 1-7s = primary school age children

There are fewer barriers to accessing relief reported than to access in other sources of food (GMB, Commercial market). **The primary barriers to relief are procedural and, as indicated in Table 7, relate to households being excluded from beneficiary lists or schools or school children not being reached.** The table indicates reported political bias or interference in four districts. These barriers would need to be further investigated.

'The donors giving food aid should also interview those households not covered as some of them will die of hunger'

Chikomba

In this round for the first time there seems to be greater reported inclusion of the elderly, child headed households and ill people, and less reports of their exclusion from relief.

The cash for work programme was reported to be operating in 40% of districts (consistent with levels reported in the November round). The amounts earned remained constant at an average of Z\$1500 per month. The programme was noted in one district to exclude disabled and pregnant women who may not be able to send other household members to work, reducing access to the benefit in these groups.

A general comment on access

As supplies, and thus food availability has fallen, opportunities to access food have become a more important issue. Table 8 below shows the extent of community reporting of constraints to access and the major factors reported. **Absolute scarcities are the primary overall obstacle to accessing food. Barriers are more frequently reported to GMB food, with the frequency of reported barriers falling for commercial market food and lowest in relief food. Political barriers are commonly reported in**

access to GMB and commercial food, while procedural barriers are reported as barriers to access in relief supplies.

Table 8: Reported constraints from district sites to accessing food

% Total districts reporting Constraint to food access reported in sites	All food	GMB maize	Commercial market maize	Relief food
Absolute shortfalls in supply	47%	19%	19%	7%
Cost of food	26%	7%	16%	0%
Political barriers	9%	26%	19%	9%
Procedural and other barriers	7%	16%	5%	14%
Total	89%	68%	59%	30%

How are households surviving?

Households appear to be using a range of coping strategies to deal with the absolute food scarcities and the different barriers to access.

Some survival strategies signal coping linked to local market options or shifting food patterns, ie

- Farmers with irrigation have grown wheat and are selling this to communities in two districts (Kwekwe urban and rural)
- Shifting to different staples, more fruit and vegetables (12 districts)
- Buying from black markets (7 districts)

Some survival strategies carry potential negative effects and may thus not be classified as coping

- Cutting meals (3 districts)
- Eating insects, roots and wild Fruits (could be harmful if foods are toxic) (7 districts)
- Leaving the district (1 district)

'Some people go to the farms to pick wheat grains but people are now really suffering'
Chinoyi

Other districts note that households are not coping, or are totally dependent on relief

- Not coping (3 districts)
- Dependent on relief (5 districts)

Hence while 21 districts (49%) have survival strategies that could be called coping, a further 19 (44%) are reported to be using strategies that may have negative effects, are not coping or are dependent on relief. Where households are already impoverished by economic decline, unemployment, land hunger, HIV/AIDS and other factors, they have significantly less resources to apply to survival strategies. Households may also be pushed into deeper structural poverty by survival strategies that place too heavy a cost or opportunity cost burden on them.

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In the next round these survival strategies will be monitored in more detail, including their impact on household assets.

The December / January round indicates marked reported declines in national food sources, from the state (GMB) and commercial markets. Although relief supplies are reported to have increased or remained constant, they do not appear to have compensated for this decline (nor can they). The monitors report a significant decline in GMB deliveries after October 2002 in terms of quantities of grain delivered to communities. Maize meal availability in commercial markets is also reported to have fallen.

The decline in overall national food supplies reported in this round has produced burdens on vulnerable households, indicated through school dropout, increased costs to households of black market food costs, increased time sourcing food reported, and through increased reported dependency on relief.

Falling supply also appears to have increased pressures for private speculation over scarce food resources. Prices have escalated on GMB, informal and black market sales. With constant controlled prices profit margins have increased on informal and black market sales of controlled price foods leading, particularly in urban areas.

These pressures draw attention to the need for stronger implementation and public reporting on measures to ensuring equitable use of available publicly funded (GMB) food supplies, including eliminating the barriers and unfair preferential access reported with increased frequency in this round and improving availability of commercial supplies for those with purchasing power. Reports of political barriers to GMB and commercial food supplies at a time when households are very vulnerable due to absolute shortfalls contradicts ethical principles of rights to life with dignity and of non partisan access to food.

Relief supplies are reported to have increased (and state food for work coverage been sustained) but relief dependency has grown. In nearly half of districts households are reported to be using 'coping' strategies that may have negative effects. These include consuming 'famine' foods that could be potentially toxic, leaving the area they live in, or not coping at all. The cost of these strategies in households already impoverished by economic decline, unemployment, land hunger, HIV/AIDS and other factors may be excessive and may trigger deeper structural poverty or collapse if not responded to.

Summary

Reports from 103 reports from 43 districts of Zimbabwe for December 2002 / January 2003 indicate that:

- Reduced food security across districts in all provinces in December 02/ January 03 is reported to come mainly from marked reductions in volumes of GMB deliveries and in commercial maize meal supplies.
- Absolute scarcity of food supplies has taken over from cost factors as the most common cause of vulnerability

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- The share of districts reporting that 'everyone' was in need has risen monthly from 0% in September 2002 to the current level of around half of districts (47%). For the third month in a row household food stocks were reported at less than one month in all provinces.
- Scarcity has been associated with price escalation in both GMB and market supplies. Reported upper prices of GMB grain of Z\$200 / 10kg and above are 75% above the controlled price, and more districts have reported inflated GMB prices in this round. GMB price controls are reported to have been better maintained in Mashonaland Central and West and Matabeleland North provinces since August 2002.
- Informal and black market maize meal prices reported in December / January ranged from Z\$1000 -Z\$3000 / 10kg, highest in urban areas. This is a marked increase on prices reported in November 2002. Differences between reported GMB grain prices and informal market maize meal prices have widened from \$490 /10 kg in July 02 to \$2 800 / 10kg in January 03. This is likely to drive black market activity and leakages of control price grain unless these markets are controlled or unless formal commercial supplies are increased. Leakages from controlled price foods into black markets represent a flow of public funds to private profits at the cost of poor households' access to food.
- In the absence of household stocks and other supplies, the demand for relief food has grown. New relief supplies were reported in six districts and a fall in supply in two districts. The state cash for work programme coverage appears to have remained constant. This round reports improvements in the inclusion of the elderly, child headed households and ill people in relief.
- Absolute scarcities are the primary overall obstacle to accessing food. Barriers are more frequently reported to GMB food, less for commercial market food and lowest in relief food. Political barriers are the most commonly reported bias in access to GMB and commercial food, increasing over previous months, while procedural barriers are reported in relief supplies.
- The decline in overall national food supplies reported in this round has produced burdens on vulnerable households, indicated through school dropout, increased costs to households of black market food costs, increased time sourcing food reported, and through increased reported dependency on relief.
- In nearly half of districts households are reported to be using 'coping' strategies that may have negative effects. These include consuming 'famine' foods that could be potentially toxic, leaving the area they live in, or not coping at all.
- In one district (Mutare Rural) people are reported to be moving away from their homes because of hunger. This would need to be followed up as it is the first time an outflow of this nature has been reported and could signal a transition from food insecurity to more extreme famine type responses.

The falling supply from GMB and commercial food sources, increased barriers to food access and increased dependency on relief observed in this round has raised the profile of equity and

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ethical issues. The trends reported draw attention to the need for stronger implementation and public reporting on measures to ensuring equitable use of available publicly funded (GMB) food supplies, including eliminating the barriers and unfair preferential access reported with increased frequency in this round, and improving availability of commercial supplies for those with purchasing power. Reports of political barriers to GMB and commercial food supplies at a time when households are very vulnerable due to absolute shortfalls contradicts ethical principles of rights to life with dignity and of non partisan access to food.

Relief supplies are reported to have increased, but relief dependency has also reportedly grown. Many households are reported to be using 'coping' strategies, including asset sales, school dropout, leaving home areas, and consumption of potentially toxic 'famine foods' that may have long term negative effects on households already impoverished by economic decline, unemployment, land hunger and HIV/AIDS.

FOSENET welcomes feedback on these reports. Follow up queries and feedback to FOSENET, fosenet@mweb.co.zw