

Relief and recovery in Zimbabwe: Food security in the current humanitarian crisis

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1. Background: defining the crisis

No-one working in the public health, education or social sectors in Zimbabwe in the 1980s would have predicted the breadth and depth of the country's current humanitarian crisis. At the time of writing this paper, 7, 2 million people in Zimbabwe, at least 60% of the population, need food aid. Nearly half a million farmworkers need assistance for food needs or displacement and only 30% of national drug needs for treating malaria are available, Child dropouts from schools are increasing and 19-46% of the adult population are estimated to be HIV positive (Zimvac 2002; UNRRU 2002).

Yet it is important that this crisis is not mis-defined as an acute or recent shock on a society otherwise meeting basic economic and social development needs. For certainly by the late 1990s it became a more predictable possibility, as a range of factors pushed more and more households into chronic vulnerability. In the past 18 months changing rainfall, collapsing production, uncontrolled speculation, conflict and displacement have generated acute shocks on top of this chronic vulnerability. If we are to shape appropriate humanitarian response to the current situation, it is critical to properly understand the nature and driving forces of the crisis and the levels at which they can and must be addressed.

We also need to understand the institutional weaknesses in the national and international agencies that are responsible for stewarding that response. In one chronology of the 'famine', Save the Children Fund (UK) noted that early warnings from household surveys in Malawi and Zimbabwe made by non government organisations (NGOs) working in communities in November 2001 led to little response. It took a further 3 months for the situation to trigger UN response in February 2002, when FAO issued a special alert warning of 4 million people at risk of hunger. At national level Malawi declared a state of emergency by end February 2002, but Zimbabwe did not do so until end April 2002, after the Presidential elections (SCF 2002).

At international level, UN agencies operate on triggers: WHO declares a famine when 'the severity of critical malnutrition levels exceed 15% of children aged 6-59.9 months'. FAO define famine as 'an extreme collapse in local availability of and access to food that causes a widespread rise in mortality from outright starvation or hunger related illness' (Patel and Delwiche 2002). These triggers of acute collapse,

leading to mortality, assume acute hunger against a background of general food security. They imply that a time bound input of food or drugs will deal with the acute shock, leaving households pursuing a more self reliant path. They wait for a particular level of acute collapse to trigger this time bound input.

While this makes assistance manageable, it does not reflect the reality of chronic and structural poverty, deepening social deficits, collapsing public infrastructures and services and long term nutritional decline that has occurred in Zimbabwe and other parts of the region. There must be a bridge between the way we understand and manage relief, and the factors producing a need for relief, if real recovery is to be planned. At international level this link between aid and political economy must become cause for concern: The co-existence within the same time period of the UN World Food Programme (WFP) putting 45% of its total relief food spending since its inception into Africa with an increase in Africa of chronic hunger by 30 million more people (1992 -1999), and a turnaround of the continent since 1980 from being a net exporter to a net importer of agricultural products must be food for international thought (FAO 2002).

Organisations closer to community level, such as SCF(UK) and national NGOs in the Zimbabwe National NGO Food Security Network (FOSENET) have identified that old indicators of acute hunger – such as acute malnutrition – are poor predictors of the household collapse that occurs due to chronic hunger. They note the harm that is caused to chronically poor households by waiting for such indicators to intervene and by structuring interventions outside the wider framework of public policy and accountability that defines how states are meeting the social needs of citizens (SCF 2002; Fosenet 2002a).

More recently, HIV/AIDS has been ‘discovered’ as the possible cause of a ‘new variant famine’, attributing the intensity of the current crisis to the impact of the HIV/AIDS epidemic (de Waal 2002). However it would be a mistake to attribute the depth of the current crisis purely to HIV/AIDS, and while mainstreaming HIV/AIDS interventions into current programmes is critical and necessary, it is simply insufficient if the underlying political, economic and social drivers of the level of household vulnerability in this crisis are left unaddressed.

Together with HIV/AIDS in August 2002, SADC Health Ministers noted the impact of reduced productivity related to land access, poor farming, insecure water supplies, high levels of poverty; with an average of 68% of families living below the poverty line in the region; soil degradation, with over 500mn ha affected by soil degradation since 1950, or up to 65% agricultural land and high debt burdens and unequal terms of trade, with market access restricted by price differentials caused by subsidies to US and EU farmers (SADC 2002). Added to these factors are the costs of war, violence and civil conflict, non transparent public policy processes, pressures for wealth redistribution through short term speculative processes and the extent to which current policies shift the burdens of economic growth onto households and poor communities .

This paper therefore seeks to contribute to the analysis of Zimbabwe's relief and recovery in terms of the immediate issues to be addressed, the longer term problems that underlie them, and the processes needed to ensure synergy between the immediacy of relief and the deeper demands of recovery. For inasmuch as Zimbabweans have a *need* for relief, they have a *right* to adequate food, water, sanitation, emergency health care, shelter and security and to public policies and services that provide these in an accountable manner. Relief as a response to need must relate to the public policies and institutions through which recovery addresses these basic rights.

While this paper focuses on food security, this is inseparable from the wider concerns of social services, social networking, economic security and political accountability. Humanitarian responses at minimum should not draw attention away from the much deeper solutions demanded for meeting the decline across all of these areas. Further, there is a bottom line to be addressed in meeting the basic rights to individual, household and community security that must underlie any form of intervention. Social rights abuses, violence and attack on community groups catalyse insecurity across all areas of essential needs and interfere in processes that aim to address these needs. Violence and insecurity displaces people from normal sources of economic and social support, while impunity creates conditions for speculation and bias in access to essential goods.

2 Food security at national level

Overall national insecurity

Food security has deteriorated in all parts of Zimbabwe. The Zimbabwe Vulnerability Assessment Committee (Zimvac 2002) report a food deficit of 239 000 MT by the end of the March 2003 consumption year if imports of 617 727MT were supplied, (See Table 1). Zimbabwe government and commercial food imports are supposed to comprise 1 164 MT of cereal imports (or 62% total). Failure to meet these levels thus widen food insecurity. In reality, there have been wide gaps between projected and real food imports from national and commercial sources. The shortfall for the four months of December 2002 to March 2003 *alone* is projected to be 222 068MT grain, based on real levels of GMB imports in the period, or 30% of the national requirement.

At a time when the food security situation in other countries in the region has begun to show some improvement, Zimbabwe's crisis has widened. The estimated population in need of food has grown from initial estimates of about 4mn, to 7 182 000 people by December 2002, with about 496 000 large scale farmworkers estimated to be in need of food and other assistance (Zimvac 2002; UNRRU 2002).

Zimbabwe stands out in the regional profile: With over half of our population in need, by September 2002 Zimbabwe had 47% of the regional share of people in need - out of seven SADC countries. Its cereal shortfall April01-March 03 of 1 869 MT stands at 46% of regional needs (SCF 2002).

Table 1. Zimbabwe National Food Balance 1 April 2002 to 31 March 2003.

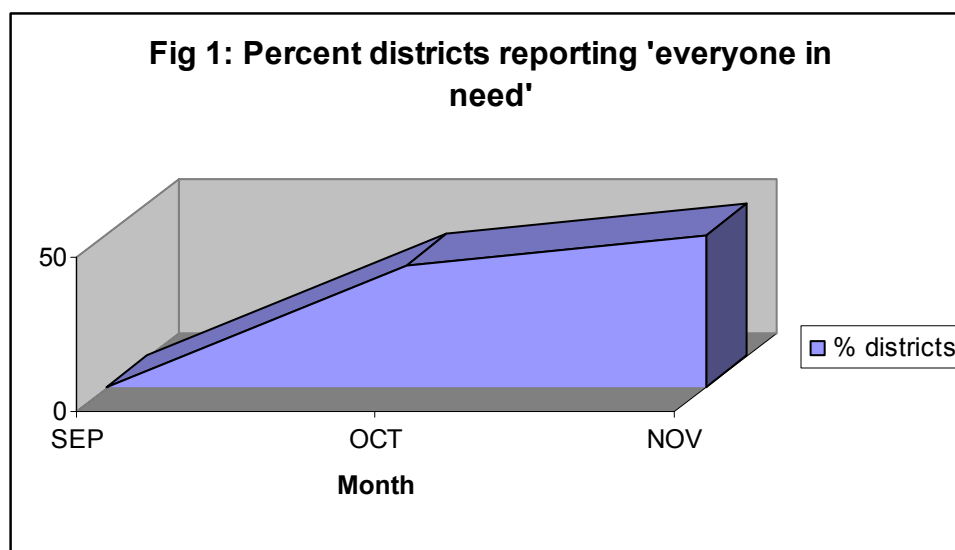
Zimbabwe Cereal Balance Sheet for 2002/2003 (Mt) 1 April 2002 to 31 March 2003

as at 11 December 2002

	Maize	Millets	Wheat	Rice	All Grain
A. Potential Domestic Availability	515,581	38,300	327,232	7,566	888,679
Formal Opening Stocks (April 2002)	5,041	-	167,232	7,566	179,839
Gross Harvest Production (estimate)	498,540	37,300	160,000	-	695,840
Winter maize and early summer maize harvest (Estimate)	10,000	-	-	-	10,000
Unmonitored Stocks : Farmers & other (estimate)	2,000	1,000	-	-	3,000
B. Annual Requirements	1,993,655	178,063	398,312	13,697	2,583,727
Gross Consumption Requirement	1,643,655	178,063	398,312	13,697	2,233,727
Livestock, other uses and losses	350,000	-	-	-	350,000
C. Domestic Balance (DB) (A minus B)	(1,478,074)	(139,763)	(71,080)	(6,131)	(1,695,048)
D. Cross Substitution	(139,763)	139,763	-	-	-
E. Cereal Exports to date (estimate)	-	-	-	-	-
F. Cereal Commercial Imports to date (estimated)	650,000	-	30,000	-	680,000
G. Private Sector maize imports for livestock feed (estimated)	30,000	-	-	-	30,000
H. Cereal Food Aid Imports to date (estimated)	108,389	-	-	-	108,389
Total Imports to date (as at beginning of April 2002)	788,389	-	30,000	-	818,389
I. Forecasted Closing Stocks Before Additional Imports (March 2003)	(829,447)	-	(41,080)	(6,131)	(876,659)
L. Planned Food Aid Imports outstanding	276,508	-	-	-	276,508
M. Planned Commercial Imports outstanding	335,619	-	20,000	5,600	361,219
Total Imports outstanding	612,127	-	20,000	5,600	637,727
O. Forecasted Deficit (Closing Stocks) after Imports (March 2003)	(217,320)	-	(21,080)	(531)	(238,932)
Assumptions					
Est. mid-year population	13,697,122	13,697,122	13,697,122	13,697,122	13,697,122
Est. Human Annual Consumption Requirement. (Kgs/Person)	120	13	29	1	163

Source Zimvac 2003

FOSENET community monitoring of food security confirmed this trend of widening food insecurity across the country and across households. The share of districts reporting that 'everyone' was now in need' rose from no districts in September 2002 to 40% of districts in October and 51% in November 2002.



Source: Fosenet 2002d

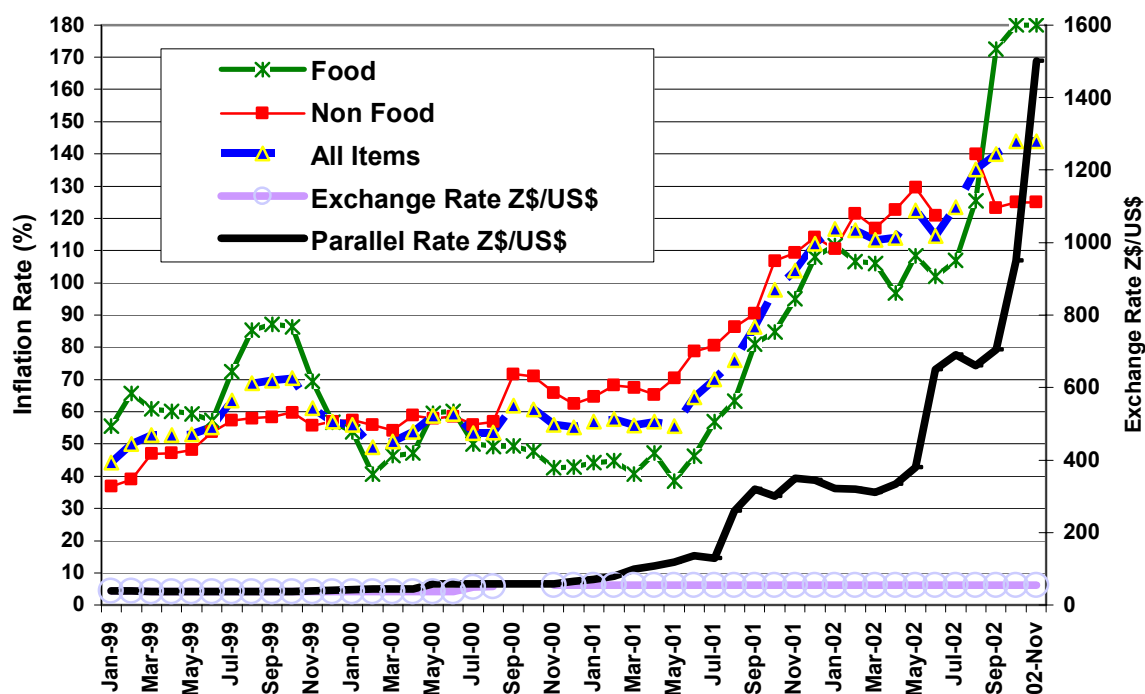
For three months since August / September 2002, FOENET community based monitoring has indicated that households have less than one months food stocks across all provinces of the country. By January 2003 almost all households in Zimbabwe depend on Grain Marketing Board (GMB), commercial or relief supplies (Fosenet 2003).

Gaps in national food security

Public policy to control grain imports through the national GMB and controlled prices on grain from GMB (through public subsidies) at below market prices have made national procurement through the GMB the primary source of food security for the over three quarters of Zimbabweans living below the poverty line.

Inflation on food prices has been marked, fuelled by the falling real value of the Zimbabwe dollar, particularly since May 2001. This has made the impact of public subsidies on grain through the GMB even more critical for poor households (See Figure 2). In its December survey, for example, Zimvac found that while 63% of households said they were able to access food at the controlled prices, only 14% said they were able to afford the uncontrolled and parallel market prices. This also signals that for the poorest third of households, even controlled price grain is not affordable.

Figure 2 CPI Inflation and Exchange Rates

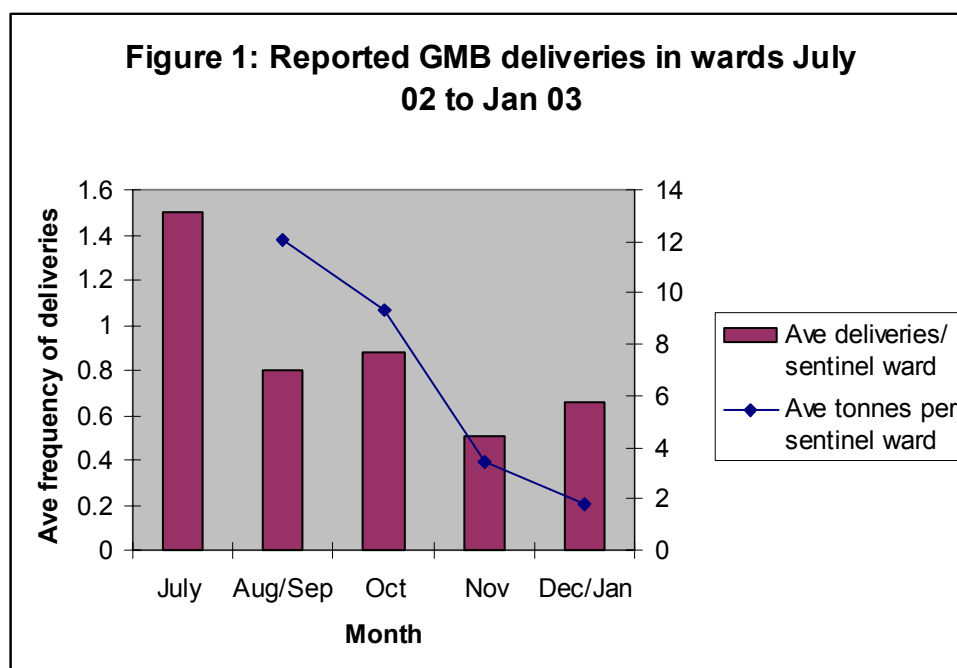


Source Zimvac 2002

Importing adequate supplies and making national food imports accessible to poor households at community level are thus the most important immediate and urgent gaps to address in food security.

Fosenet reports indicate that the opposite has taken place.

GMB deliveries were reported in January 2003 to have fallen, been erratic or not to have been made at all in the month in 49% of districts. Fosenet sites covering the country indicated that the reported volume of deliveries from GMB fell after October 2002, with a continued decline into January (See Figure 3).



With GMB the sole importer of food, Fosenet and SADC FEWSNET surveys have both found that commercial supplies have also fallen, further depressed by price and regulatory factors and by lack of domestic food production (See also Table 3 below) (FEWSNET 2002; Fosenet 2002e).

Table 3: Commercial availability of 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)

Source; Fosenet 2002e

Bottlenecks in formal commercial supplies have led to a situation where the major commercial markets are the parallel black markets. As these now provide one of the only sources for higher income groups to access maize meal, a price incentive has been generated for publicly subsidised food to flow into black markets. This is further discussed in the next section.

Zimvac (2002) attribute the shortfalls in GMB supplies to the inability to ensure adequate transport and fuel and to government lack of access to foreign currency. These factors compounded the problem of low reserves. Unlike in Mozambique, in Zimbabwe GMB strategic grain reserves were not built up, with political denials of the food shortfall as late as April 2002. Overall national maize requirements annually are estimated at 1 993 655 Tonnes, and of all grains at 2 583 727 Tonnes. Building up adequate imports and a new strategic reserve will now take a massive injection of budgetary and logistic support . This level of support is only likely when the political causes to economic isolation have been overcome.

Added to this is the likelihood of a poorer output from domestic production in 2003. As of Dec 2002 only 38% the maize area in the 2002 season was planted due to serious shortages of seed and fertiliser inputs (Zimvac 2002) (See Table 2)

Table 2: Comparison of Area Planted to Crops as of December 2002 to 2001/02 and Average

Crop	2002/03 04-Dec-02	2001/02 Area (Ha)	1994/95 Area (Ha)	1990s Ave Area (Ha)	2002/03 as % of 1990s	2002/03 as % of 01/02
Maize	498,464	1,317,800	1,397,900	1,301,440	38	38
Sorghum	18,955	82,700	130,990	145,723	13	23
Rapoko	35,568	67,000	46,560	71,861	49	53
Mhunga	24,203	65,250	211,550	159,770	15	37
Groundnuts	86,442	259,000	163,500	177,775	49	33
Cotton	146,339	398,600	219,000	260,393	56	37
Sunflower	995	23,550	139,600	107,107	1	4
E/beans	1,555					
Soyabean	835	54,500	71,380	55,418	2	2
All Tobacco	21,354	79,170	81,980	84,661	25	27
Paprika	7,062	17,400	0			41
Total	879,366	2,364,970	2,462,460	2,364,148	37	37

Source: AREX cited in Zimvac 2002

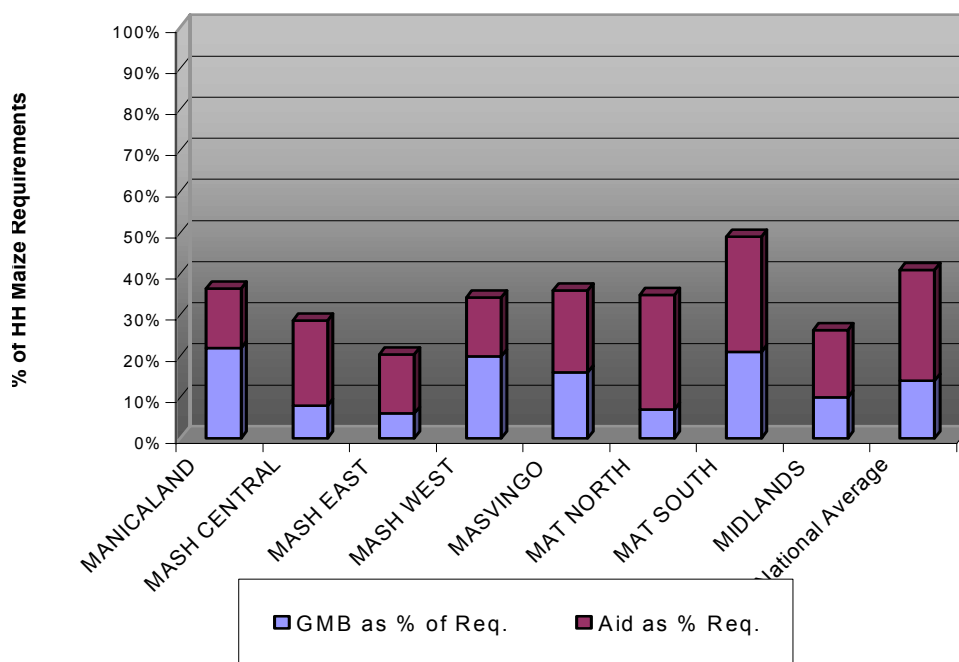
Looking at maize alone, these figures signal a potential shortfall in 2003 / 2004 that could be 2,5 times the 675 000 Mt shortfall estimated after the 2002 harvest . This calls for significant budgetary resources to import food and to meet the differential between the real import costs and a subsidised maize price affordable to the majority poor. The hard reality is that meeting food security as a *national*

obligation is thus now inseparable from the political and economic measures that need to be taken to secure the external budget support and the transport and logistic inputs to import this massive grain shortfall.

Increased reliance on relief for national food security

As the deficit grows on these national measures, an increasing share of national food requirements is coming from relief. Fosenet reports in December/ January 2003 and Zimvac reports in December 2002 (See figure 4 below) provide a disturbing profile of the extent to which relief has taken over from GMB as a leading source of grain supply at national and local level. In some areas food security is increasingly viewed as synonymous with access to relief. During the first fifteen days of February 2003, WFP distributed 27,500MT of food to 2.4 million beneficiaries. The distributions are about 51% of the planned tonnage for the month, or 58 000 MT planned for the month. This compares with the monthly estimate made by Zimvac of 56 000MT from GMB.

Figure 4: Maize from GMB and Food Aid as a % of Total Requirements, September-December 2002



Source Zimvac 2002

Taking over national food security is clearly *not* the role for relief - it is an obligation of the state. For relief thus to become the primary or equal grain supplier signals the growing incoherence between wider food security policies and relief, as the state fails to meet this national role. A de facto shared role has emerged between GMB and relief for national food security. This situation is not, however, explicitly recognised in policy, signalled for example by the lack of information shared on the levels and distribution of GMB imports to facilitate the complementarity of these two food sources.

This shift from GMB to relief as the primary source of food imports carries its own risks. Relief funding is insecure and current funding levels are reported to only enable WFP to meet its programme needs through to the end of June 2003 (UNRRU 2002). This would leave several hundred thousand households extremely vulnerable.

The collapse of national food insecurity also has wider implications for public policy choice on food security and raises a number of problems transiting out of relief. One of these debates has surfaced early during the process, that on use of genetically modified food in relief. Concern over genetic contamination of seed maize varieties in Zimbabwe has led to a public policy of avoiding GM maize. Zimbabwe's seed maize industry exports hybrid maize adapted to the African environment widely throughout the region, and does not want to lose this market to regional dependency on US genetically-modified seed. Zimbabwe as a regional seed producer thus faces direct policy conflict with the US, whose development agency, USAID, stated its role in June 2002 as to "integrate GM into local food systems" (<http://usinfo.state.gov/topical/global/develop/02061207.htm>). Widening use of GM maize in Africa provides alternative channels for declining US maize sales to the EU. USAID has thus been an active protagonist of GM technology and its uptake in Africa, including through legal, research, policy, production and food aid support, with funding support reported from companies that actively promote GM technologies, including Monsanto and Cargill (Greenpeace 2002).

Hence while other agencies funding relief (DFID, EU) have provided finances for relief to WFP to procure foods, preferably from local sources to support production in the region, USAID provides grains. USAID has not responded positively to the public policy requirement of Zimbabwe and Zambia that the 500 000 MTs of food aid pledged by USAID (about 50% of all relief grain in the region) be from non GM stock, even though such stocks are available in the region (See Table 3) or even from the 50% of US elevators (first stage grain handling facilities) that segregate non GM from GM grains.

Table 3: Non GM maize sources in Africa according to the FAO Food Crop Prospects Report 2002.

COUNTRY	Exportable Maize (MT)
Kenya	10 000
Tanzania	50 000
South Africa	1 020 000
Uganda	30 000
Total	1 160 000

Source: <http://www.fao.org/giews/english/eaf/eaf0208/af0208e00.htm>

USAID has also indicated that providing milled or heat treated GM maize is not an option, as the UN does not require this. The WFP has itself indicated that milling of seed maize is too expensive (Greenpeace 2002). The WFP too has not been able to ensure freedom from contamination of GM foods in deliveries, noting that they have 'no obligation to alert authorities and have made no attempt to distinguish between GM and conventional cereals' (New Scientist 19 September 2002) and that they would have difficulties in avoiding GM maize (WFP Executive Director. 23 August 2002)

A high dependency on relief supplies raises national vulnerability to such policy pressures. On the one hand relief sources should be pressurised to respect national public policy on food standards and to support local (regional) markets by purchasing non GM foods, preferably from within the region. However Zimbabwe would better regain its sovereignty over food policy by ensuring the effective functioning of its national food security mechanisms, including the GMB.

From relief to recovery

While relief agencies are drawn by the widening crisis into de facto national food security roles, the concern at national level must be on regaining food sovereignty. Relief policies should avoid intensifying the loss of sovereignty, or using the crisis to further foreign policy or market objectives. They should thus give preference for economic aid (cash) over food donations to enable preferential local purchase of food, value for money and provide flexibility in food sources. Article XII of the 1999 Food Aid Convention recommends this local purchasing and stipulate that food aid should be given in such a way as to 'avoid harm to normal patterns of production'. As an international convention, greater focus should be given internationally and regionally to securing this and it should not be left to vulnerable states to defend.

But humanitarian assistance cannot meet and should thus not mask the reality of the political and economic steps needed to deal with the crisis at national level.

At national level, unless the political and economic conditions are achieved to negotiate the level of budget support required to secure grain imports, subsidise maize sales to ensure affordability to the poor, meet costs of fertiliser and seed to support production in low income households and improve the infrastructure for procuring and distributing food, this crisis will widen.

Further, until we do this, neither can we begin to address the wider set of pro-poor policies and programmes needed to reduce the risks from weather, environmental and economic risks, nor build the institutions and governance reforms needed to consolidate political participation in these programmes. This includes investments needed in wider agrarian reforms to extend the area under sustainable land management and reliable water control systems, in rural infrastructures and trade related capacities for market access, and in improving access to land, seed, fertiliser, water and technology for improved food production. Such investments

cannot prevent shocks, but can boost yields, reduce unit costs and contain the cost of storage, transport and marketing.

Nor should humanitarian assistance mask the wider international policy shifts that are needed for food security. The average costs to the public sector of the investments needed to ensure food security to a small farm household have been estimated by FAO at US\$500. Under the current context of increasing import costs, declining terms of trade for local agricultural products, barriers to market access arising from trade and agricultural market policies in the north, public sectors in the south will not find these resources. The sooner such skewed and protectionist market policies are addressed the sooner meaningful forms of trade will replace relief.

3 Community and household food security

National shortfalls and weaknesses in the public management of national food security account for only a part of the current crisis in Zimbabwe with respect to food. A second part of the picture is in the distribution of available foods to household level.

Barriers to household access

There are several barriers to households accessing foods even when they reach national level:

Fosenet (2003) have reported cost, absolute shortfalls in supply and procedural and political barriers as constraints in access to GMB supplies. Fosenet reported variation in the upper range GMB prices of 124% above the controlled price, with a trend towards more districts reporting prices significantly higher than the control price (Fosenet 2003). Procedural barriers and political bias have risen markedly as a constraint from 15% of districts in August 2002 to 33%, 38% and 62% in October, November 2002 and January 2003 respectively, when they were reported as the most common barrier to accessing GMB grains. The major form of this bias is reported to be the requirement to produce documentation such as party cards or letters from political structures. Procedural barriers include requirements such as proof of residence, reported to be difficult for migrants, new settlers, orphan headed households or displaced people to produce. Beyond this the elderly and child headed households are reported to face barriers to access due to poverty and to their inability to travel or queue for food.

Backdoor sales, requirements for proof of party membership, increasing distances to travel to access food, required attendance at local meetings for inclusion on lists all add costs to food access and act as barriers for poor people. In July 2002, these indirect costs were found to add between \$1 400 and \$4 300 monthly to the costs of food (Loewenson et al 2002). This is not affordable for the poorest .

Biased access, scarce supplies and huge price differentials between GMB and parallel black markets have themselves provided a strong price incentive for black market trading of controlled price food. Fosenet report an informal market price of maize meal in December / January of Z\$1000 -Z\$3 000 / 10kg, with highest reported prices twenty five times the controlled price (Zimvac 2002; Fosenet 2003). Differences between controlled GMB grain prices and reported black market maize meal prices have widened from \$490 /10 kg in July 2002 to \$2 800 / 10kg in January 2003. This significant black market premium on grain has created an incentive for misappropriation of GMB supplies, with potential superprofits for those involved of over a quarter of a million Zimbabwe dollars for every metric tonne of maize. Zimvac in their December 2002 report highlighted inconsistencies in GMB national import figures and supplies to community level, with about 200 000MT of national import figures not reflected in community data. The possibility of leakages of GMB grain outside the formal GMB distribution network is now reported to be under investigation.

Recent court cases indicate that political and other paths to preferential access are being used to unfairly appropriate GMB supplies, often with impunity. Communities have widely criticised the involvement of youth militias in food queues for unfairly controlling access, by checking for party cards or giving preferential access to selected groups of people in queues. Struggles around access to GMB and commercial foods have sometimes broken into violent conflict, particularly where abuse is suspected. There have also been reports of people being crushed or injured in stampeding food queues.

There have been a number of reports of interference in relief supplies, stopping relief deliveries or pressures to exclude groups from relief supplies. Other reports indicate weaknesses in relief processes, with households being excluded from beneficiary lists, particularly orphan or elderly households not able to attend meetings, or of schools or school children not being reached. This is not unusual – similar problems of preferentially accessing the poorest were noted in the child supplementary feeding programme in 1995/6 (Munro 2002). This was attributed to the poor social networking of such groups and the weakness of institutions in reaching them.

Impact on deepening poverty

More recent evidence indicates however that these barriers to access are significantly widening deep structural poverty. There have been real falls of up to 47% in livestock prices in relation to the price of grain. Selling one cow in 1996 secured 717kg maize – in August 2002 it secured 472kg at uncontrolled prices and by December 2002 only 259kg maize. An increase has been reported of child dropout from schooling, while 'coping' measures of food insecurity include prostitution, including child prostitution. SCF(2002) observed problems of food related sexual abuse of young women and adolescents, child headed households not accessing relief, child sex workers at Beitbridge crossing and Zimbabwean children working in maize factories in Limpopo province of South Africa late at

night to receive maize or money. Fosenet have reported wide use of ‘coping’ strategies with potentially negative effects, including consuming ‘famine’ foods that could be toxic, selling household assets, prostitution, or out-migration (Fosenet 2002d; 2002e). 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.

There is no doubt that HIV/AIDS is also intensifying this insecurity and will complicate recovery in Zimbabwe. Zimbabwe has amongst the highest rates of HIV/AIDS in the region (see Table 4 below).

Table 4: HIV Prevalence Rates by Province (women 15-49 years in ante-natal clinics)

Province	HIV %
Mashonaland Central	19.1
Mashonaland East	34.7
Mashonaland West	25.6
Midlands	46.2
Masvingo	42.7
Manicaland	17.7
Matabeleland South	33.6
Matabeleland North	28.2

Source: Ministry of Health 2002, based on data from 2000 in Zimvac 2002

Current forms of relief have begun to pay attention to ‘mainstreaming’ HIV/AIDS prevention, such as through choosing low labour intensity crop types, ensuring inclusion or orphans in skills exchange, integrating information and prevention programmes into relief work, diversifying diet, providing nutritional supplements to people with HIV/AIDS and Tuberculosis, reducing gender barriers to land, credit, employment, education and information (UNRIACSO 2002). The challenge will be to move from mainstreaming HIV/AIDS in relief to ensuring a pro-poor recovery that confronts the environments of economic and social insecurity that generate risk of HIV/AIDS.

From relief to recovery

Access to food at household level is thus as critical a focus of attention as national aggregate supplies. Household food security in Zimbabwe now demands investment in both public infrastructures and social networks to redress the negative impacts of exclusion, extreme poverty, politicisation of food and profiteering around food at community level. Technical efforts to deliver and distribute food are necessary but insufficient. They must be accompanied by social measures that strengthen community capacities to protect their rights to food, to

protect rights of access in the poorest and to monitor and ensure ethical practice in private and public food sources.

The design of interventions to improve food access therefore calls for both efficient means to ensure that inputs reach those in need, and effective means to build social inclusion, strengthen community protection of the vulnerable and provide social support to those that have been affected by mortality due to AIDS, violence, displacement and conflict.

There is experience in Zimbabwe of programmes that build community networking, reinforce primary health care services, stimulate school enrollment, and enhance social control over food production and distribution. Some of these are now deeply compromised by the decline in social services, social disruption, violence and various forms of bias and exclusion that have affected communities. The current barriers to food access at community level found in Zimbabwe also imply that food security measures must strengthen public accountability around food, to ensure that powerful or partisan groups do not unfairly access public or relief foods and to prevent speculation around food as a scarce commodity.

These are not simple issues to address, particularly in the politically polarized, conflictual and impoverished community environment in Zimbabwe. National and community based non government organizations in FOSENET have rooted efforts to do this in the principles of ethical conduct found in international humanitarian law and the humanitarian organisations' Humanitarian Charter (SPHERE)¹. Since July 2002 FOSENET has been monitoring the application of these principles through a network of over 150 community based monitors in sentinel sites across nearly all districts of Zimbabwe. Fosenet reports monthly to the public, to national and to international authorities on food security conditions at community level. FOSENET has also linked with national and UN food co-ordination mechanisms (UN and Zimvac) to strengthen its monitoring, enhance validation of information and strengthen input to public policy.

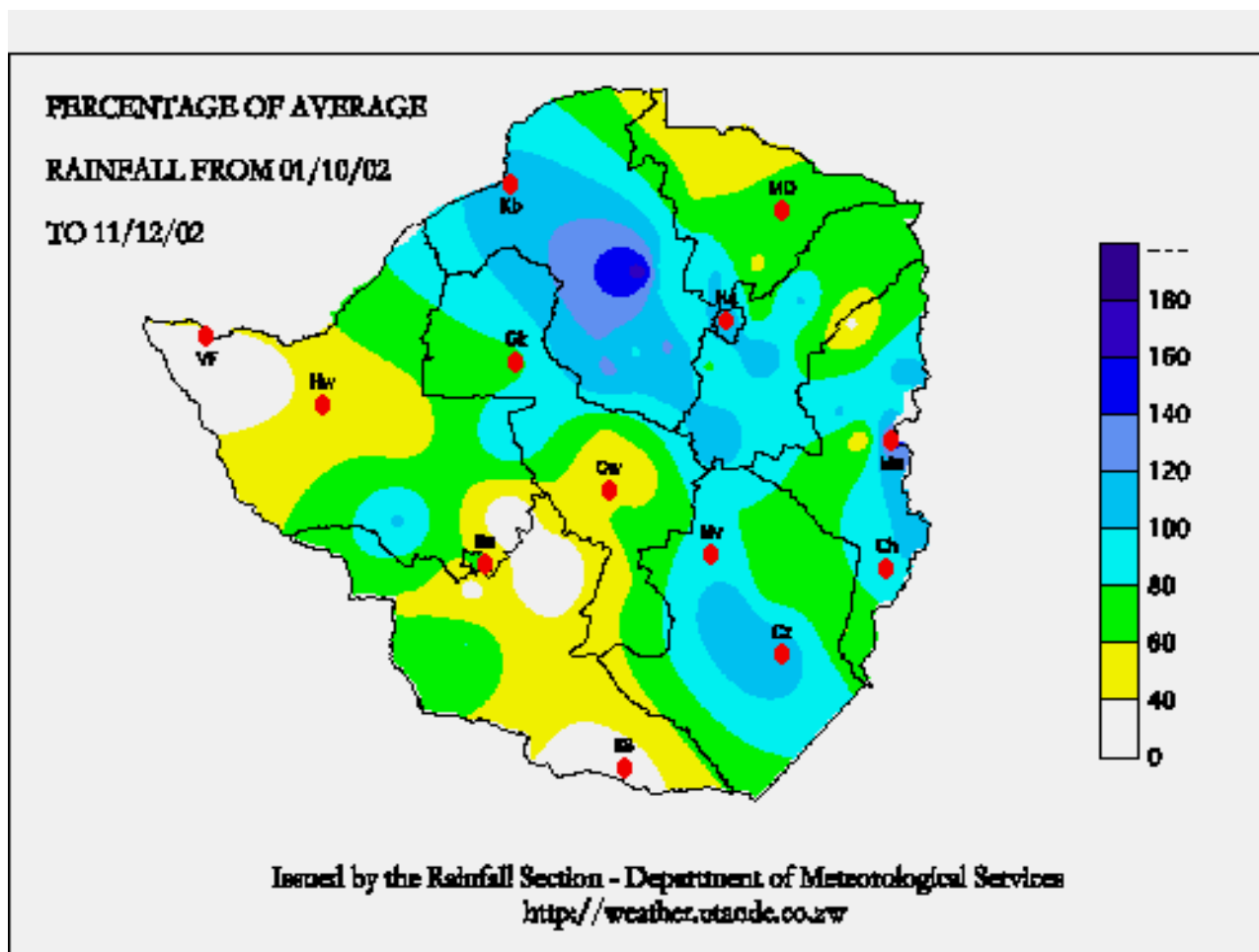
¹ The proposed **principles** call for inclusion into relief of:

- 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;
- Linkages between humanitarian relief and longer term strategies for reducing vulnerability and increasing economic and food security.

Such monitoring offers one vehicle for strengthening community voice and public accountability. This is important under conditions where poverty, dependency and conflict can make the poor 'disappear', except in the fundraising advertisements of relief agencies.

3 The immediate future and the underlying challenges

FEWSNET (2002) note that above average October rains (as occurred in October 2002) are usually associated with a drier than average January period. On the basis of climate predictions maize yields in 2002 are predicted to be normal to slightly above normal in most of Mashonaland and normal to below normal in other parts. (See Figure 5 below).



Source: Zimvac 2002

Immediately ahead of us are the post rains malaria with inadequate drugs, a 907 000 MT cereal gap, a recorded area of maize planted at 38% of the previous year and populations displaced or threatened by unemployment and conflict. Urban and rural households impoverished by economic reforms of the 1990s, and by reduced household assets from deaths and caring for ill people with HIV/AIDS

have had to confront massive escalation in prices of basic goods and demoralising processes to access food.

The humanitarian crisis in Zimbabwe is lodged on a foundation of chronic economic decline for over a decade that has weakened public infrastructures, household incomes, employment opportunities, living standards and community environments. It has also restructured relationships between citizens and state and made what was once essential services that were citizens rights, like water, energy, health, education, now services of very variable quality, based on ability to pay. These conditions have made households even more vulnerable to HIV/AIDS. They are themselves a source of political tension, now worsened by the violence, displacement, political conflict and polarisation of the past few years. They remain largely unresolved, particularly where speculative wealth has been allowed to grow with impunity.

For the response to the current humanitarian crisis to transit from relief to recovery, this underlying economic decline in households (even during periods of growth), inequity of economic opportunity, speculative individual accumulation of wealth and public sector collapse must be confronted.

This paper argues that it must be confronted in a manner that avoids further loss of sovereignty of national choice through economic collapse. At national level, unless the political and economic conditions are put in place to negotiate the level of budget support required to secure food and support production, the crisis will widen. At international level, relief is not a palliative for the changes in international food and trade policies that undermine the possibilities of national food security.

At household and community level, the drivers of food insecurity are poverty, social marginalisation, disease and institutional weaknesses, exacerbated by unfair political bias, impunity, conflict and speculation over food. While immediate food inputs provide relief, improving household food security must address these underlying drivers. One of the measures for this is to strengthen and support the voice and agency of poor people to ensure fair access to public services and publicly subsidised goods and to prevent market excesses.

The bandage of relief is not a cover, but a marker for a gangrenous wound- unless we address the underlying and persistent political, economic and social drivers of household vulnerability to hunger, there is no relief fund that can meet the scale of insecurity that these damaging processes, unchecked, will generate.

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