Famine Early Warning Systems Network
SOUTHERN AFRICA FOOD SECURITY BRIEF
September, 2004

SUMMARY

Southern Africa expects a below normal crop harvest this season as a result of the poor crop growing conditions experienced in the first half of the rainy season. The start of season was delayed, with erratic and spotty rainfall characterized by long dry spells that resulted in crop failures in many parts of the region. Although first round forecast figures have not been released, preliminary indications are that the regional maize (the region's main staple food) shortfall in 2004/05 could range between range between 851,000 MT (without stock replenishment) and 2.4 million MT (with stock replenishment). The worst affected countries include Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique, South Africa, Swaziland and Zimbabwe. Prospects of improved harvests in Angola are diminishing mainly because of extensive flood damage in Huambo Province, while Botswana, Namibia, Tanzania and Zambia could see slightly improved outcomes. Acute household food insecurity is likely to rise even further in the affected countries as many of them are going through a third consecutive year of food shortages. With another poor harvest in prospect, food shortages will intensify, prices will continue to rise, and vulnerable households will be forced to intensify already stretched coping capacities. Continuous close monitoring of vulnerability indicators will be necessary to signal the areas, periods and types of interventions that will be required.

CUMULATIVE RAINFALL SINCE START OF SEASON BELOW NORMAL OVER MUCH OF THE REGION…

Seasonal cumulative rainfall for southern Africa from November until 20 February (Figure 1.a) has so far been below normal (orange colors) in much of the eastern half of the sub-region, in areas covering southern Malawi, southern and central Mozambique, much of Tanzania, Swaziland, Lesotho, and the eastern half of South Africa. In particular, large areas in Swaziland, southern Mozambique, and eastern Zimbabwe, have received less than half of their normal rainfall (dark orange colors) since November 2003. This will mean severe water shortages for irrigation, livestock, and domestic use, as well as crop stress and crop failure in many of these areas.

Figure 1a: Percent of Normal Precip for 01 Nov 2003 - 21 Feb 2004

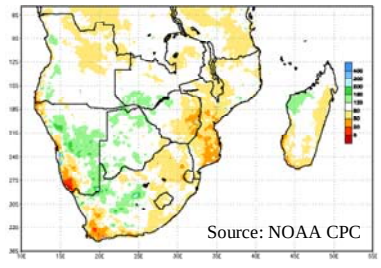


Figure 1a: Percent of Normal Precip for January 2004

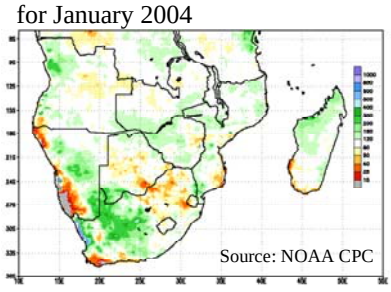
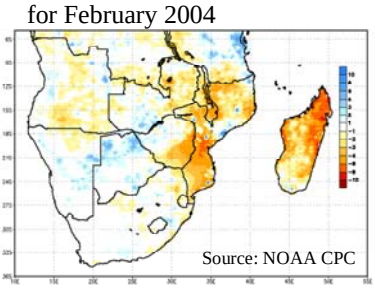


Figure 1c: Per day Precip Anomaly for February 2004



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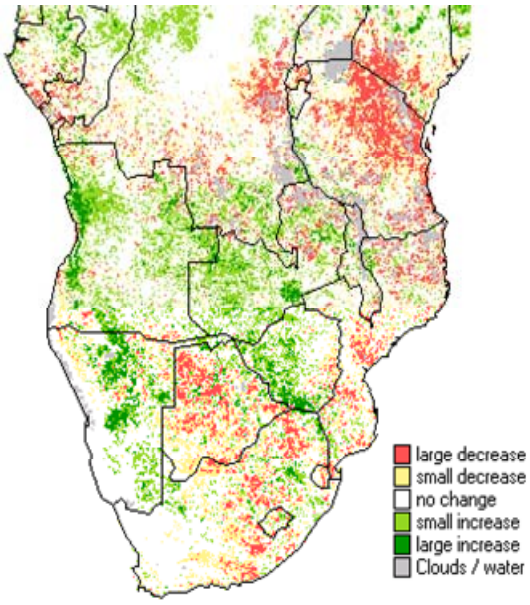
Normal (white colors) and above normal (green colors) rainfall during January (Figure 1.b) in parts of southern Mozambique, southern Malawi, and Zimbabwe, helped to ease the parched conditions, slightly raising stream and reservoir levels in these areas. Nonetheless, in some areas, crops had already wilted during the extended dry spells, and the rain that fell in January could not revive the crop but did serve for replanting for those farmers who still had enough seed for replanting. The productive maize triangle area in South Africa (north of Lesotho) also received below normal rains during January.

Figure 2: NDVI. Source: NASA



The January rains were immediately followed by much below normal conditions (orange and red colors) from February 1-21 (Figure 1.c) in southern Mozambique, southern Malawi and eastern Zimbabwe compromising the development of the replanted crops. At the same time, the maize triangle in South Africa, Lesotho and parts of Swaziland received near normal rains, a situation which has favoured late crop development and improved production prospects. Elsewhere, the high rainfall amounts received in January and February (green and blue colors respectively) resulted in some flooding along some large rivers in parts of Angola, Namibia, Botswana, South Africa and Zambia leading to water logging and some crops being washed away.

The recent rains have improved vegetation in parts of the region, a positive development for pasture and livestock, although in many areas, this improvement has not been sufficient to return conditions to normal. Satellite-based vegetation images (Figure 2) suggest slightly to significantly worse than normal vegetation conditions (yellow and red colors) in southern Malawi, southern and central Mozambique, Swaziland and Lesotho, much of the eastern half of South Africa, much of Botswana, and eastern Zimbabwe. It should be noted however, that for many of these areas, these poor conditions actually appear to be better than they were a few dekads ago. Tanzania is showing significantly worse than usual vegetation conditions.

Lesotho and Swaziland declare a state of disaster…

Lesotho and Swaziland have respectively declared a state of emergency and appealed for international assistance to mitigate drought related problems that have ravaged both nations for the past three years. Initial estimates by the Lesotho government indicate that up to 700,000 people will need food aid assistance to stave off starvation until the next harvest in 2005. Results of a rapid assessment carried out jointly by the MOA and FAO/WFP confirm widespread incidences of crop failure in both the lowlands and mountain districts. Crop production is estimated to have dropped by as much as 40% below normal.

In Swaziland, which is now facing its fourth consecutive poor production season, the number of people requiring assistance is expected to increase from the 245,000 that are currently receiving assistance. Results of the February Ministry of Agriculture and FAO rapid crop assessment mission confirm below normal harvest expectations in all regions (but especially in the Lowveld and Dry Middleveld)) largely because of the erratic, spotty rains in the first half of the season. Food insecurity and vulnerability have been exacerbated by a convergence of factors including the recurring droughts, rise in poverty, and the impact of HIV/AIDS, all of which have stretched people's capacity to cope and weakened their resiliency.

PRELIMINARY FORECASTS INDICATE LIKELIHOOD OF SEVERE PRODUCTION SHORTFALLS IN MOST COUNTRIES OF THE REGION…

A recent SADC mid-season strategic assessment and disaster preparedness meeting held in Maputo in early February highlighted concerns over the unsatisfactory start of season manifesting as

an early season drought. In a statement, the meeting noted that "erratic rainfall… has led to an overall reduction in area planted and reduced production prospects for the season. The region may not be able to cover its food requirements for the 2004/05 marketing season". Affected areas include southern and central Mozambique, northeastern South Africa, Swaziland, Lesotho, eastern Zimbabwe, southern Malawi, Botswana and Tanzania. The meeting also noted that even the near-normal rains forecast for February – April period might not improve crop conditions in most countries except perhaps in central Mozambique, Namibia and Zimbabwe.

The good soaking rains that have been received in the weeks following the SADC forum have however brought relief over much of the region. In **Tanzania**, although crop production in the northern bimodal rainfall areas is estimated to decline by 40 – 50 %, crop performance in the unimodal areas, is quite good, and could be further enhanced by the favourable (above normal) rainfall forecast for the March – May period. Overall, total crop production could be slightly below normal because of poor yield expectations in the bimodal areas. Similarly, in **Zambia** crop condition is generally fair to good over most parts of the country including the southern provinces where the start of season was unsatisfactory. A normal to slightly above normal harvest is in prospect, particularly if favorable rains continue into early April. Production prospects in **Angola**, **Botswana** and **Namibia** are mixed (though expected to improve slightly over last year) largely because of extensive flooding along the main rivers in some of the crop growing areas. In Angola, flood damage in Huambo Province is expected to have reduced crop production by as much as 60 per cent.

FAO/WFP pre-assessment meetings discuss modalities for coordinated assessments and monitoring…

A pre-assessment meeting, organized by FAO and WFP was held in Johannesburg on February 27 to prepare for the upcoming crop and food supply assessment missions (CFSAMs) to be conducted in the region. This comes amidst growing concern and realization that a below normal cereal harvest is anticipated for the 2003/04 growing season. The meeting brought together representatives from SADC Food Agriculture and Natural Resources directorate, National Vulnerability Committees from Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique, Namibia, Swaziland, Zambia and Zimbabwe; representatives from EU, DfID and USAID, and from SC (UK), FEWS NET, and C-SAFE.

The outcome of this meeting was consensus on the scheduling and timing of the vulnerability assessments to be conducted by the national VACs and the joint FAO/WFP CFSAMs as well as on roles and responsibilities of all mission participants. There was general agreement that the CFSAMs would draw upon the results of the national vulnerability assessments. Apart from the Government of Mozambique, no other government among the countries represented at the meeting had as yet formally requested FAO to field a CFSAM. However, it was expected that most of them, except Namibia and Zambia would be making formal requests. VAC assessments will be conducted in March and results made available before the end of April. The CFSAMs are tentatively scheduled to begin from mid April up till the third week of May in Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique, Swaziland and Zimbabwe.

Despite an improvement in crop production prospects because of improved rainfall conditions since mid January, the southern States of **Lesotho, Malawi, South Africa, Swaziland** and **Zimbabwe** are all still expecting below normal harvests this season. Prospects in the drought prone areas of southern Mozambique remain poor, but overall, production in **Mozambique** is still expected to improve (or remain the same) as most grain produced comes from the northern region which has had a good cropping season.

Current assessments indicate that the southern Africa region will experience severe food production shortfalls over the 2004/05 marketing year. February maize production estimates for South Africa range between 6.799 million MT (National Department of Agriculture's Crop Estimation Committee (CEC), February 19) and 7.5 million MT (US Department of Agriculture, March 9). While waiting for the CEC to update its forecast, scheduled for March 20, FEWS NET believes that the higher estimate is more likely, in view of favorable rains in January and February. The higher production scenario thus represents a 23% decrease from the 2002/03 level and a 16% decrease from the recent 5-year average. Regional maize production in the last 5 years has averaged 17.274 million MT, and of this, RSA production makes up just over 50%.

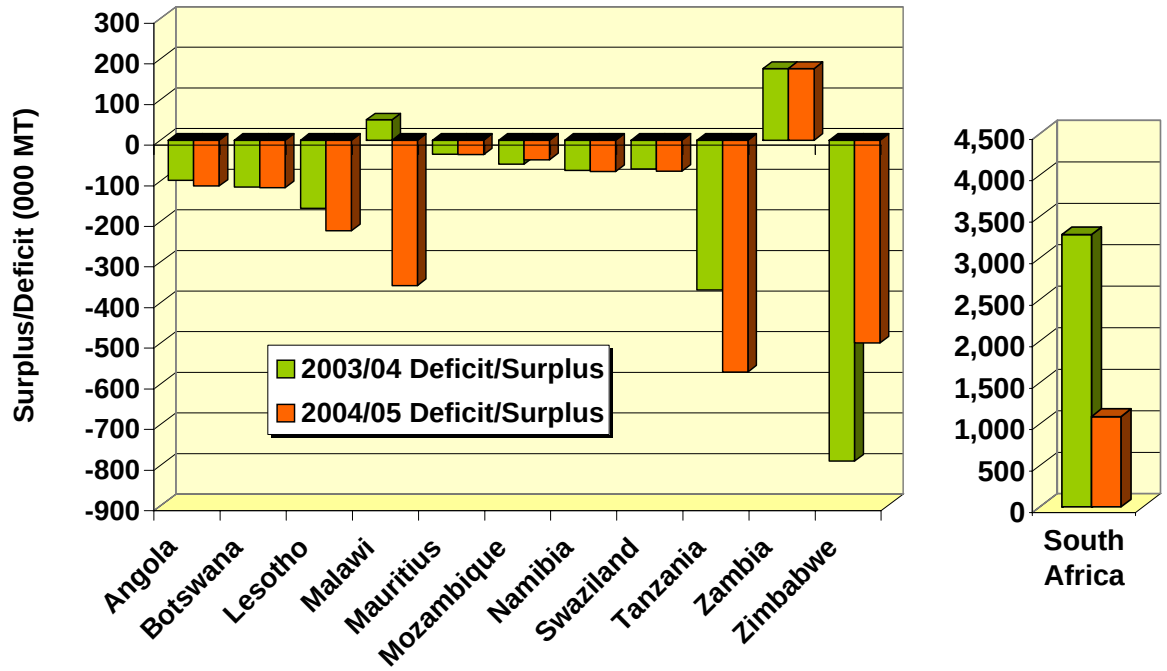
The 23% reduction in the RSA production has wider implications for regional maize availability. In contrast to last year when RSA opening stocks for 2003/04 (on May 1, 2003), were at a healthy level of 2.4 million

MT, this year's opening stock (on May 1, 2004) is likely to be below 2 million MT, leaving just enough supplies to cover domestic requirements estimated at 8.3 million MT as well as the export requirements of the BLNS countries, which could be as high as 500,000 MT. Despite the poor harvest expectations, RSA grain traders are already positioning themselves to import internationally in order to fulfill current export commitments as well as new orders which may be placed by grain deficient member States.

Table 1 and Figure 3 below have been generated using very preliminary maize production predictions; and are only indicative. First round forecast figures are expected at the end of March. Available information indicates that the regional maize gap, *without* reserve stock replenishment, may be as high as 851,000 MT, compared with an overall maize surplus of 1.7 million MT last year. *With* stock replenishment, the deficit could be as high as 2.4 million MT, compared with a deficit of 152,000 MT last year.

It is important to note however that maize gaps/deficits do not necessarily translate to import requirements as they are covered in part through cross substitution with other cereal and non-cereal crops such as tubers and bananas. FAO/WFP crop and food supply assessment missions scheduled for April/May will determine to the extent possible, how much of the projected food deficits can realistically be covered through commercial imports, private sector imports (formal and informal), and how much through program and emergency food aid. With many of the affected countries now going through a third consecutive food deficit season, it is critical that grain trade volumes and prices be monitored very closely to enable markets to fulfill a critical role in ensuring household food security for market dependent households – both poor and better off. Vulnerability indicators will also need continuous close monitoring to signal the areas, periods and types of interventions that will need to be put in place.

Figure 3: MAIZE DOMESTIC DEFICIT/SURPLUS: 2003/04 COMPARED TO 2004/05 PROJECTIONS (Note the different scales)



Source: SADC Food Security Early Warning Unit; National Early Warning Units; FEWS NET Malawi, Mozambique, Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe. Gap deficit/ surplus calculated without stock replenishment.

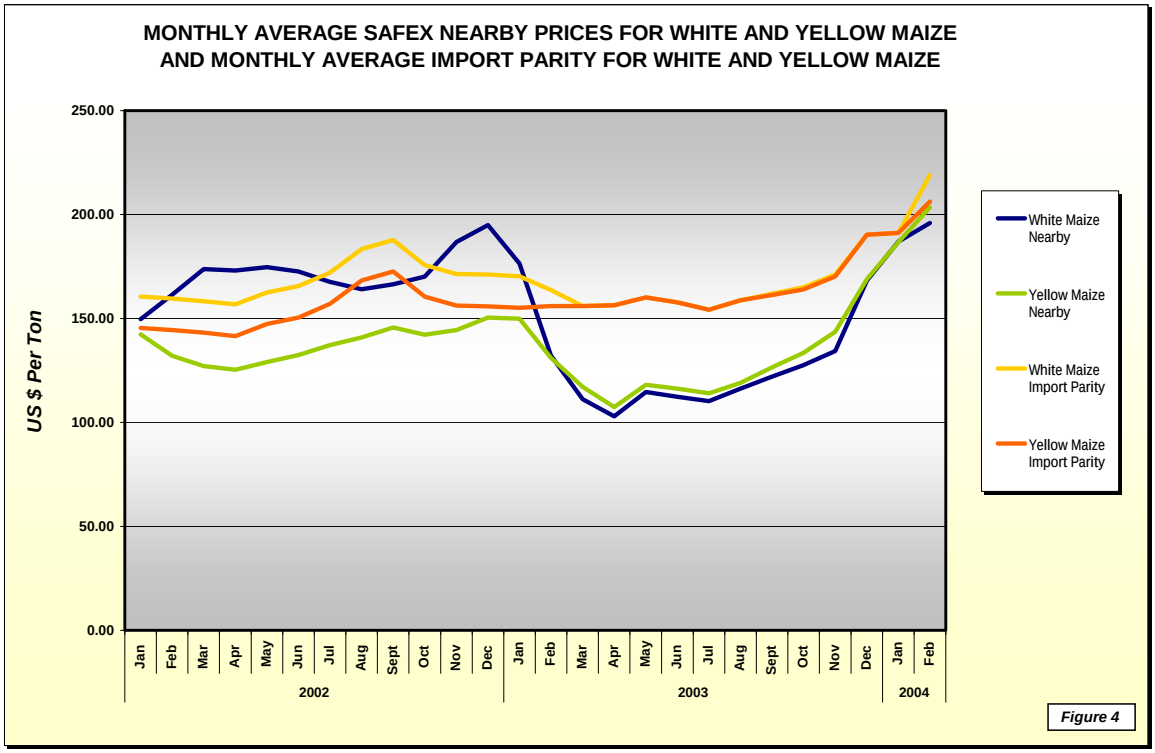
POOR HARVEST EXPECTATIONS DRIVE UP SOUTH AFRICA MAIZE PRICES

Table 1: Preliminary Maize Production Forecasts ('000 MT)

	2002/03 Estimate	2003/04 Indicative Forecast*	FORECAST COMPARED TO: 2002/03	5 Year Average	10 Year Average
Angola	619	619	0	32	53
Botswana	2	2.6	43	-37	-64
Lesotho	75	35	-53	-64	-69
Malawi	1983	1850	-7	-9	3
Mauritius	2	2	0	0	0
Mozambique	1250	1288	3	10	26
Namibia	33	33	0	3	11
RSA	9714	7500	-23	-16	-15
Swaziland	73	70	-3	-12	-23
Tanzania	2526	2526	0	0	3
Zambia	1207	1230	2	29	29
Zimbabwe	945	1100	16	-15	-31
SADC	**18429**	**16256**	**-12**	**-8**	**-6**

Source: SADC Food Security Early Warning Unit; National Early Warning Units, FEWS NET Malawi, Mozambique, Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe, USDA.

South African Futures Exchange (SAFEX) nearby prices for white and yellow maize rose dramatically in December 2003 amid speculations on poor harvests, as the conditions persisted in the major grain growing regions of the South Africa. White maize prices jumped from US$134 per ton in November to US$168 per ton in December, and by February had climbed as high as US$ 196 per ton. Price levels and variations reflect to some extent the strong South African rand, which in February averaged R6.78 to the US Dollar. From January 2004, both white and yellow maize prices moved toward import parity; but prices for white maize import have moved above parity and rising quite steeply. Further pressure on white maize prices is likely, as neighboring states begin to place new orders in a bid to cover their



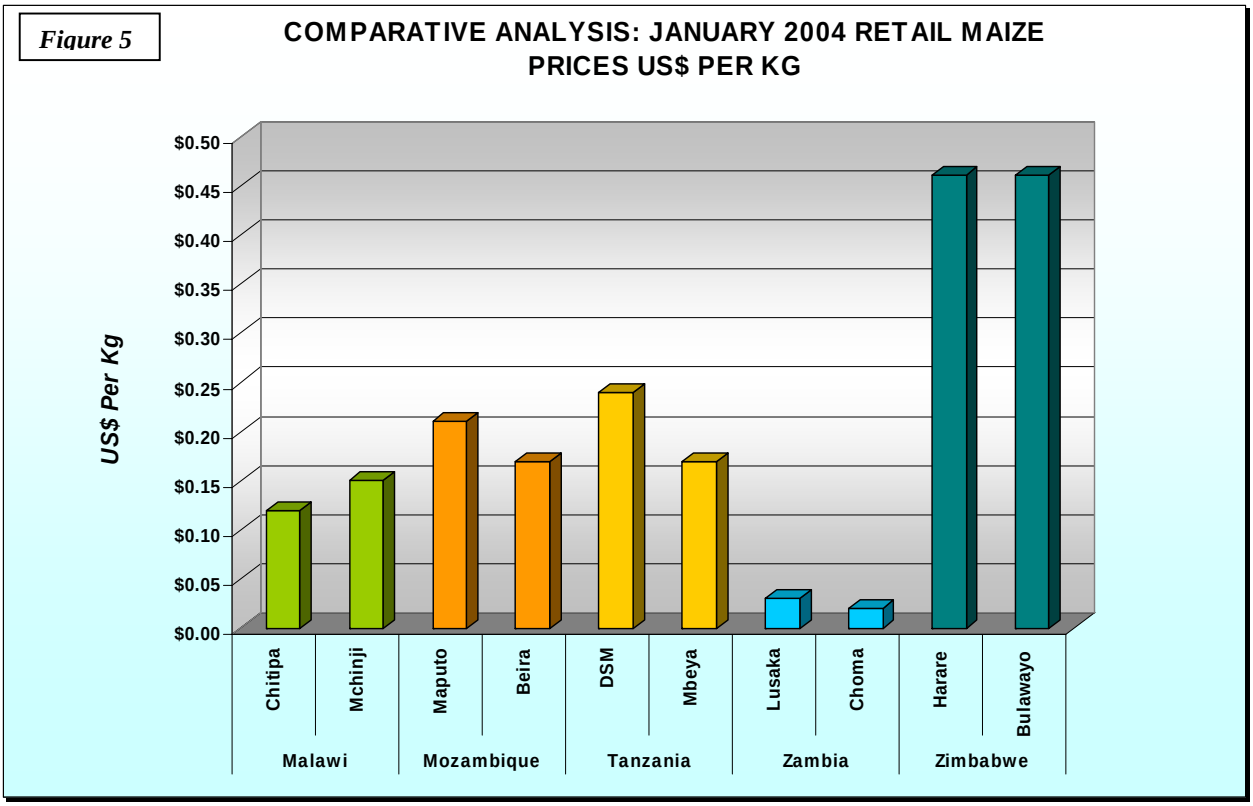
Source: GrainSA

import requirements. Additional surplus maize may be available from Zambia which is currently the only southern Africa country indicating an improved harvest this year. Last year, Zambia had an exportable maize surplus of some 120,000 MT – which could have been readily available to neighbouring states, had conducive export policies been put in place by Zambia in a timely manner.

MAIZE RETAIL PRICES VARY ACROSS THE REGION…

As most countries in the region go through the lean season, retail prices at major markets across the region are reported to be increasing significantly in both urban and rural markets. Figure 5 below provides a graphical comparison of January 2004 retail maize prices across five countries in southern Africa. Prices in January were highest in Zimbabwe, retailing at US$0.46 per kilogram in both major towns of Harare and Bulawayo. Zambia has the lowest retail prices at below US$0.05 per kilogram in both the urban (Lusaka) and rural markets (Choma). Reports from Northern Mozambique (Zambezia) indicate that Malawian traders are driving up local prices as supplies in Malawi dwindle, and traders offer competitive prices for available supplies; as yet, prices in Malawi are still lower than Mozambican prices.

Figure 5



Source: FEWS NET Malawi, Mozambique, Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe

ZAMBIA UNDERTAKES STUDY TO IMPROVE THE NATIONAL FOOD BALANCE SHEET ANALYSIS…

FEWSNET Zambia has undertaken a collaborative study to review the Zambia National Food Balance Sheet with the Ministry of Agriculture and Cooperatives, Zambia National Farmers' Union, and Food Reserve Agency. Field survey work was done in November and December 2003 and the final draft report has been compiled and was disseminated through the Agricultural Consultative Forum, a private / public sector dialogue forum, on February 26 officiated by the Hon Deputy Minister of Agriculture and Cooperatives.

The aim of the study was to update the demand side variables of the national food balance sheet to improve current analysis. The specific objectives were to better determine the current cereal demand for stock feed,

brewing and seed industries; to review assumptions on human consumption needs; to examine and update information related to on-farm and industrial losses; and to recommend a system of periodically updating the national FBS during the year.

The study recommends a range of improvements including (a) the need to update the figures and assumptions used in the current food balance sheet, (b) the need for specialized studies, such as the cassava consumption and Hammer mill study; (c) how to improve data collection techniques in the crop forecast and post harvest surveys; (d) how to develop a responsive and useable Food Balance Sheet that can be updated periodically; and (e) the need for subsequent food balance sheets to incorporate livelihood information and analysis to enable validation of estimates.