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## ***Food Security in SADC***

by  
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### **Introduction – What is food security?**

Food security denotes access by all people at all times to sufficient food in terms of quality, quantity and diversity for an active and healthy life without risk of loss of such access. Access to food is the capacity of households to obtain food either by producing it or purchasing it in a market transaction or acquiring it through gifts and transfers. Food security has also been defined as the extent to which people are able to obtain and consume enough food of the right quality and nutritional mix in an environment, which ensures that they can remain healthy and productive. The abundance of food reserves in a country does not necessarily mean food access by the majority of the population; organisations like the Food and Agricultural Organisation (FAO) have reported cases of hunger in countries with food surpluses. In a broad overview of food insecurity in 58 developing countries, researchers found that the group of countries that exhibited the highest severity of food insecurity were those that had high poverty and food surpluses.

In this article, food availability is the other working definition, which is important. Food availability refers to the amount of food available in a locality and may include food that is made available through production, trade and other types of exchange. At the national level food availability depends upon domestic production, distribution networks, the quality and quantity of storage available and the level of trade.

### **Factors Impacting on Food Security**

There are several factors that need to be in place for food security to occur and these include access to resources such as land, inputs, water, access to information, extension services, appropriate technology and climatic conditions. According to the FAO, poverty, illiteracy, malnutrition and environmental degradation can be direct causes and can have direct effects on food security. However, food production

and food security are not possible unless there is political will and financial support for agricultural development. Socio-cultural issues such as gender inequalities and the gap between the rich and the poor also do have a bearing on food security.

### **Conditions Necessary for Food Security**

Food security depends to a large extent on sustainable agriculture which in turn depends on access to resources including land inputs, technical and extension services, favourable economic policy and political will and support. Rukuni contends that sustainable agricultural development depends on five basic prime movers that have to be developed and co-ordinated. They are:

- technology development including research;
- human capital – skills and training;
- biological capital – improved crop and animal husbandry, water and road networks;
- improved institutions such as markets, credit facilities and research and extension; and
- favourable economic environment, effective policies and political will.

Rukuni contends that Zimbabwe's success story in agricultural development until the recent crisis took place over a century underpinned by political will and state intervention in agricultural production. Some of the policies of various colonial governments included the Land Apportionment Act of 1930 which witnessed the massive movement of black people into communal lands, the Animal Husbandry Act of 1951 and the Maize Control Act of 1934. With regard to research it took 28 years of 'local research to develop Zimbabwe's Green Revolution maize variety SR52'.

Smallholder agriculture contributes to food access and availability at household level and could also boost national reserves. At national level, sustainable agriculture depends on the participation and involvement of smallholder rural or communal farmers. During the first decade of Zimbabwe's political independence in 1980, political will and support for communal farmers led to the 'agricultural revolution that was fuelled by a rapid increase in maize and cotton production' from 1980 to 1990. It was during this period that Zimbabwe achieved sustained agricultural development with real improvement in social indicators and was declared the breadbasket of Southern Africa. By the mid 1980s the country was able to meet almost all the maize requirements of Zambia, Malawi and Tanzania as well of the food needs of the thousands of Mozambican refugee camps inside Zimbabwe.

### **Food Security — the Continental Context**

Africa moved from a position of food self-sufficiency to a hungry, undernourished, impoverished continent in the space of 30 years from 1960 to 1990. The proportion of undernourished in the total populations of most countries of sub-Saharan Africa was very high between 1990 and 1992. In Chad, Mozambique, Malawi and Angola the proportion remained high from 1997 to 1999.

Although more food is being produced worldwide than ever before, some 800 million people are chronically undernourished. The main causes of food insecurity are poverty and inequalities. In 1998 about a third of the SADC region's population of 180 million people were living in poverty. Angola and Mozambique were the worst deprived in terms of survival, knowledge and basic services necessary for human life and dignity.

### **Agricultural Production and Food Security in the SADC Region**

The nature and structure of agricultural production in southern Africa arises out of the political economy of the colonial era. Beginning in the 1880s, the economy was based on the exploitation and export of natural

resources such as gold in South Africa, copper in Zambia and the Democratic Republic of Congo, diamonds in Namibia and beef in Botswana. Zimbabwe concentrated on the production of maize and tobacco, Malawi produced tea and later tobacco, while in Angola and Mozambique estate farming concentrated on coffee and sugar, respectively, and Tanzania's main export was sisal.

However, access to resources and agricultural production was predicated on extreme inequalities based on racial lines. In Zimbabwe commercial agriculture was the preserve of white settlers, while in South Africa and Namibia exploitation of the mineral wealth mainly benefited Europeans. African societies in these countries were characterised by poverty, illiteracy and exclusion from participating in economic development. The inequalities that existed during the colonial period have continued into the 1990s and the 21<sup>st</sup> century. For example, with a Gini<sup>1</sup> coefficient of 0,7, Namibia exhibits extreme income inequality with 11 per cent of the population earning 51,5 per cent of total income. In South Africa the richest 10 per cent earn 47 per cent of national income, while in Zimbabwe 41 per cent of the people live below the national poverty line and the richest 10 per cent earn 47 per cent of national income.

To eradicate poverty and reduce inequalities in the region SADC governments should ensure that government departments maximise the use of the relevant units of the Community to achieve the region's food security objectives. The SADC food security objectives are:

- 6) increasing agricultural production and productivity and enhancing food security at household, national and regional levels; and
- 7) improving the welfare of the region's populations, especially those in rural areas, by promoting increases in employment and income generation derived from the efficient and sustainable use of agriculture.

### **Natural Disasters and Food Security**

Besides poverty and inequalities at household, national and international levels, food insecurity in Africa is partly and sometimes mainly due to climatic conditions such as droughts and floods. However, climatic conditions such as drought and flooding are a normal occurrence; some parts of the world and the region experience flooding caused by cyclones or hurricanes. In the 2001/2002 cropping season, most countries in southern Africa were hit by drought and about 10 million people in Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique, Swaziland, Zambia and Zimbabwe were, by June 2002, experiencing famine.

SADC countries have early warning units but there is also a regional early warning unit (REWU) based at the SADC Food Security office in Harare, Zimbabwe. Despite the existence of such units, countries in the region were unprepared and ill equipped to deal with food insecurity and the threat of famine affecting the whole region in 2001/ 2002.

Drought and flooding in southern Africa is not a climatic aberration but an inherent characteristic of the region. However, the negative aspect of changes in climatic conditions is a direct result of the conflict between industrialisation and the composition of the atmosphere. The last two centuries have witnessed more modification of the composition of the atmosphere than the last two million years. Modification of the atmosphere is due to pollution caused by developments such as building of cities and factories; hence industrialisation has, during the past 200 years, depleted the ozone layer resulting in global warming.

An analysis of the above narrative on drought and flooding suggests that governments have not utilised the skills and resources available in their countries. Most countries have established early warning units, meteorological departments or geography departments at local universities, which could be useful sources of information on drought patterns and trends in their countries. The existence of these facilities imposes an obligation on them to provide information for relevant government departments for the purposes of planning for disasters such as drought and flooding.

The information could also be useful for programme design of drought recovery schemes including research in drought resistant crops and livestock development.

Governments in SADC could also regulate industries whose operations lead to pollution of the

atmosphere and tax such operations for the benefit and development of the early warning units. Funds derived from such levies could also be used for research and for the lobbying of ozone-friendly industrialisation on the international level. However, the key to overcoming human tragedies such as extreme poverty, undernourishment and famine is appropriate and effective policies. Environmental shocks like drought bring collapse only to systems that are already weak because of poor policies and governance.

## Conclusion

The discussion above has demonstrated that food security is dependent on sustainable agriculture and effective natural resources management, effective policy-making, political will and support. This article also highlights the fact that sustainable agriculture is a process and therefore programmatic, which means that it takes place over time, there are no quick fixes to sustainable development.

It is also clear that there is a link between food security, human development, and poverty and income inequalities. The challenge is for governments in the region to be more creative in stamping out corruption in their countries, ensuring maximisation of resources and promoting effective and beneficial regional co-operation.

## Policy Considerations

From the above narrative of food security in Africa and the region five points emerge as critical for the achievement of food security and these are:

- The nature of poverty in SADC is situated within the national arena. Therefore the primary responsibility for dealing with poverty eradication lies with national governments. National governments must *put in place policies and practices to address poverty*. These would include employment creation and the expansion of formal economic activities. The national poverty reduction strategy should also be prioritised whilst ensuring that regional and international frameworks play supportive and complementary roles.
- With regard to the status of women, SADC governments should develop policies that would lead to the reduction of inequalities in economic, political and decision-making processes and enact *legislation that mitigates the low status of women*. The issue of customary laws that militate against women should also be addressed.
- SADC needs to have a *regional plan for food security*. Such a plan would be fed by surpluses from member countries for the benefit of those that need food in times of emergencies. This implies that the relationship between SADC countries and the funding partners from the North has to move from a reactive to a developmental one in which SADC presents a project proposal for the development of permanent infrastructure which would facilitate food security reserves for the region.
- SADC governments should regulate industries whose operations lead to pollution of the atmosphere and tax such operations for the benefit and *development of early warning units*. Funds derived from such levies could also be used for research into, and lobbying for ozone-friendly industrialisation.
- National governments should *manage and monitor the importation of genetically modified foods* insofar as it impacts negatively on the local production and consumption of food. At national levels, political will and financial support is essential for sustainable agriculture, but there is a need to facilitate both large-scale commercial production and smallholder agriculture.

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**Suggested Reading:**

Rukuni, M. 1994. "The Prime Movers of Zimbabwe's Agricultural Revolution". *Zimbabwe's Agricultural Revolution*. Edited by Mandivamba Rukuni and Carl K Eicher. University of Zimbabwe Publications, Harare, Zimbabwe.

Unganai, L. S. 1993. "Chronology of Droughts in Southern Africa: The Impacts and Future Management Options"

<sup>1</sup> An aggregate numerical measure of income inequality ranging from 0 (perfect equality) to 1 (perfect inequality). The higher the value of the coefficient, the higher the inequality: the lower the value, the more equitable the distribution of income.