



Food Security EMERGENCY

The Famine Early Warning Systems Network (FEWS NET) issues periodic **emergency** alerts when population groups are now, or will soon become, **extremely food insecure**, unable to meet their consumption needs. These groups have already exhausted their strategies for acquiring food and face imminent famine.

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Zimbabwe: Food crisis to persist through 2003

Pre-famine conditions continue to tighten their grip on Zimbabwe, where people in two-thirds of the country will continue to be food insecure in 2003 and one-third of the adults are infected with the AIDS virus, a potentially lethal combination whose consequences stretch far beyond the current food emergency. Maize imports lag behind consumption requirements and supplies on rural markets are erratic, inadequate and expensive. Annual inflation as of January reached 208 percent as food staples and other necessities are increasingly scarce or out of reach of poor consumers. Urban Zimbabweans face rising unemployment and/or wage freezes. Rural Zimbabweans are engaging in extreme income-generating activities to cope. Looking ahead, the 2002/03 grain harvest could fall as much as 20 percent below last year's low level and 77 percent below the recent 5-year average, leaving a million-ton deficit during a period of economic deterioration. Planning must get started now to fill this gap as well as augment household incomes and access to food.

Household ability to cope with hunger is weakening

In a normal year, crop production contributes 40-75 percent of the food (or income to purchase food) that rural households require. The dramatic drop in crop production last year cut this contribution considerably.

According to Zimbabwe

Vulnerability Assessment Committee

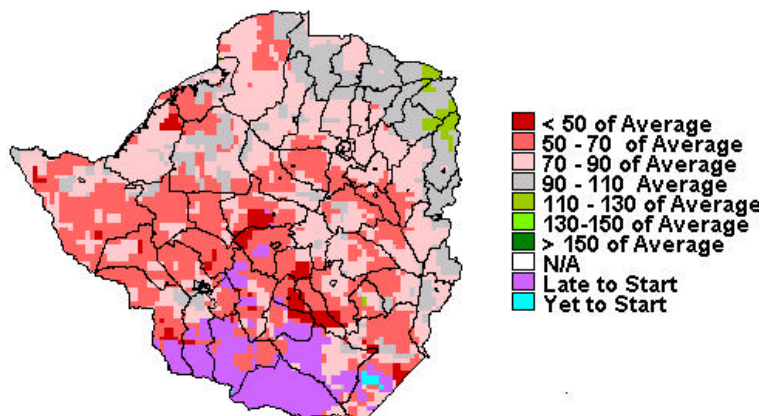
(VAC) reports (September and December 2002), households in as many as 9 of 10 rural communities

now rely on unusual coping mechanisms such as sale of wild fruits, gold panning and even prostitution. Most households in the central, southern and western districts of the country have limited scope to expand their income-earning options; their food security conditions are expected to deteriorate further.

FEWS NET found that some households sent members away in search of work in the commercial farming sector. After four consecutive years of crop failure, desperate households from central districts such as Kwekwe (Midlands Province) and southern districts such

as Gwanda (Matebeleland South Province) bought the rights to tend and subsequently harvest plots of immature maize in northern districts such as Hurungwe in Mashonaland West Province, where crops are doing better; only households with cash reserves can afford this option.

Figure 1: Maize Harvest Potential (percent of average yield), based on the Water Resources Satisfaction Index using satellite imagery as of February 1-10, 2003



Source: USGS/FEWS NET, February 17, 2003

All indicators point to worsening food insecurity in 2003

Converging indicators point to a dramatic rise in food insecurity: drought-induced declines in crop yields coupled with an outbreak of armyworms in parts of Masvingo, Manicaland, Mashonaland East and Midlands Provinces; cattle deaths in Matebeleland South Province where households mainly rely on livestock; and a deteriorating economic environment as reflected in runaway inflation (208.1 percent per year as of January) that rapidly erodes purchasing power. People in more than two-thirds of the districts are likely to be moderately, highly or extremely food insecure in the 2003/04 marketing year starting in April. Food insecurity conditions could be worse than those experienced now in 2002/03, following a similar crop failure, when households in all farming sectors depend on food aid from the World Food Program (WFP) and non-government organizations (NGOs) and on purchases of unreliable supplies from the Grain Marketing Board (GMB). Some rural households in southern and eastern Zimbabwe have not harvested any crops since March 2000 and have long run out of their own food stocks.

Expectations of a dismally low 2002/03 grain harvest dampen hopes for recovery

Given on the high dependence of households on crop production for food and income, Figure 1 suggests that rural households in most southern and central districts are likely to have below-average maize yields and hence a food deficit in 2003/04. Only households in the central and northern districts who expect 70 percent or more of average yields have prospects of being food secure in 2003/04. Even in the slightly better-off districts, the total harvest will be adversely affected by the reduced area planted to crops, shortages of ammonium nitrate fertilizer and below-normal rainfall, thus limiting the contribution of crops to food security. Based on a similar population in need last year, over 3.7 million people of the estimated communal population of 7.5 million will require some form of food aid in 2003/04, as well as about 850,000 people in urban areas. The third-round Zimbabwe VAC assessment (March-April 2003) will further adjust these numbers.

Farmers planted a total of about 1.9 million hectares to crops in 2002/03 growing season (October/November-March/April). Of these, 63 percent were planted to maize, about 14 percent less than in the previous year, 2001/02. Most of the maize crop is performing badly due to inadequate inputs and poor rainfall distribution. Crops are in a much worse situation than last year, when more than half of the country experienced a complete crop failure or well below-average yields. At this point in the season, FEWS NET estimates the size of the 2002/03 grain harvest between 414,100 MT and 800,000 MT. The lower end of the range falls 20 percent below the 2001/02 harvest and 77 percent below the recent five-year average.

Over 1 million MT of maize will need to be imported during the 2003/04 marketing year

The 2003/04 marketing year will begin on April 1 with limited government grain reserves and very low on-farm stocks. Current maize imports from South Africa and the United States are arriving at the rate of about 70,000 MT per month — less than half the requirements for human consumption of about 150,000 MT. Given the poor harvest prospects and anticipated low stock levels, Zimbabwe will need to import between 930,000 MT and 1.3 million MT of maize to meet the estimated pre-harvest deficit for 2003/04. Moreover, these import needs exclude carry-over stocks from late arriving imports committed for 2002/03.

FEWS NET Recommendations

It is clear that Zimbabwe's food emergency will continue well beyond March 31, the end of the WFP southern Africa regional Emergency Operation. Accordingly, FEWS NET recommends that:

- The Government and GMB start planning now to find financing to import as much as 1.3 million MT of maize during the 2003/04 consumption year (April-March) and that the Government coordinate its use of all five ports in the sub-region to allow timely imports to avert a potential famine.
- The Government quickly appeal for continued donor assistance and that the Government and WFP start planning now to extend the Emergency Operation for another year.
- NGOs reduce their general distributions of food aid in favor of self-targeting food for work activities for about six months from April onwards to protect rural household incomes and reduce dependency on food aid, and thereafter revert to general distributions.
- NGOs extend their mainly rural-based food aid programs to cover 850,000 urban poor and up to 1 million displaced farm workers.
- All stakeholders in Zimbabwe meet urgently to coordinate their management of the worsening food emergency and schedule regular meetings to review the situation and take action.

In the meantime, FEWS NET recommends that the Government remove price restrictions on food staples and other items as a way to enlist the support of the market to help distribute supplies and moderate prices.