

***FOSENET***  
**NGO Food Security Network**  
**Community Assessment of the**  
**Food Situation in Zimbabwe**  
**April 2003**

*'There is a need of an entirely new and bold approach to address the intertwined crises of devastating illness and drought affecting agriculture'*

*Guruve*

**For the executive summary please go to page 14**

## **Background**

The 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. Previous reports provide information on steps being taken to ensure and sustain data quality. 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 [fsmt2@mweb.co.zw](mailto:fsmt2@mweb.co.zw).**

This **seventh** round covers NGO and community based monitoring on nationally for the period **April 2003**. This round of monitoring includes information related to food security-poverty links, coping strategies and production outputs. Input from Fosenet NGOs, 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 is actively following up on these issues up within these frameworks.

## Coverage of the data

The information is presented in this report by district<sup>1</sup>. Data is presented for April 2003 drawn from **151 monitoring reports** from **58** districts from all provinces of Zimbabwe, with an average of **2,6 reports per district**.

The data covers the period April 1 to 30 2003.

## Change in the food situation

**Nearly two thirds of districts (60%) note an improvement in the food situation primarily due to early harvests and relief supplies, although a further 21% note a worsening situation with falling national supplies and quantities of relief packages falling without adequate compensation from local production or deliveries. A further fifth note no change. Ensuring a balance between production, relief and local deliveries is important if food security is to be maintained and recovery stimulated. This demands transparent and responsive co-ordination mechanisms locally.**

The small flow of food from local harvests reported in March has continued to be reported in April with 29 of 48 districts reporting (60%) indicating improvement in the food situation primarily due to early harvests, particularly of green mealies and pumpkins, improved relief cover and in three districts improved GMB supplies. A further 21% note a worsening situation with falling national supplies and quantities of relief packages falling without

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<sup>1</sup> The term 'district' refers to an administrative district. Reports by constituency are allocated to districts. Fosenet monitors provide information on sentinel sites within districts.

adequate compensation from local production or deliveries. A further fifth note no change. Provinces where a greater share of districts report no improvements or worsening situations are Midlands and Matabeleland South, while urban areas generally report no improvement except for small inflows of green mealies from relatives in rural areas or local small plots.

*'Some residents have gone to the rural areas where there is relief food. It is tragic that only rural wards are considered by most donors as urban wards are also in desperate state. It was very proper that food distribution be done by residents associations because they are not partisan'*

Bulawayo

**The continuing inadequacy or absence of GMB supplies is an ongoing problem.**

Only three districts reported improvements in GMB deliveries.

Districts with sites reported to have not gained from improved relief or harvests by April were:

Manicaland: Chimanimani, Nyanga  
Mash East: Chikomba, Murehwa, UMP  
Mash Central: Shamva  
Mash West: Nil  
Midlands: Gweru rural, Gweru urban, Mberengwa  
Masvingo: Mwenezi  
Matabeleland: Hwange, Bulilimangwe, Gwanda  
Cities: Bulawayo, Harare

## **Food needs**

The pattern of vulnerability has remained the same as in previous months viz Elderly, orphans, children, ill people, people with disability and unemployed or destitute people. By April the share of districts reporting that 'everyone' was in need had fallen slightly to 45% of districts.

**The factors most commonly cited to be linked to insecurity were poor harvests, inability to afford food costs, and difficulties for particular groups to access food, particularly rural workers/civil servants and children, disabled, ill or elderly people and opposition party supporters.**

At a time when improved harvests are cited as the primary source of improvement in food access, the reporting of poor harvests is of note. This comes from sites in Seke, UMP, Mount Darwin, Shamva, Gokwe, Lupane, Bulilimangwe, Gwanda, Goromonzi and Murehwa.

*'Peasant farmers are need of food because their crops wilted. People have nothing in their fields to harvest'*

Gokwe

Groups that cannot access produced foods remain vulnerable, such as rural formal sector workers, extremely poor households, elderly, disabled people.

*'Infants and the aged have suffered most because of riots in food queues they have failed to stand the situation hence have gone without food'*

Seke

**Population movements and large scale farm settlement are reported in some districts to have left both the farmworkers *and* the newly settled farmers vulnerable to food insecurity** due to fallen production and inadequate access to alternative relief or GMB sources (reported in Guruve, Binga, Makonde and Mt Darwin).

*'Some people came back from their resettlement areas because of starvation.'*

Zvishavane

*'People have come back from the resettlement areas because of the poor rains they received'*

Mwenezi

**Food was a cause for movement into or out of districts in 22 districts in April (38% of districts).**

The movement of people was primarily from urban to rural areas or from areas with poor rains or harvests to access rural foods or relief. For example reports were made in Chikomba of people coming in from Manicaland, in Seke of people coming from Epworth and in Gwanda of people going outside the country for food. (See Table 2)

*'Some school children left school early for the rural areas where there are relief food agencies'*

Kwekwe urban

*'People come from town to exchange sugar and paraffin for maize'*

Zaka

**Table 2: Districts reporting food related migration in February and March**

<b>PROVINCE</b>	<b>Districts</b>	<b>Reason</b>
Manicaland	Chimanimani, Chipinge, Nyanga, Makoni	Farmworker eviction, displacement Lack of food on resettled farms.
Mashonaland East	Chikomba, Seke	Due to lack of food in home area (From Manicaland, Epworth). Also for employment.
Mashonaland Central	Guruve, Mt Darwin, Shamva, Rushinga	Displaced farm workers and their families. Movement for gold panning and for food.
Mashonaland West	Hurungwe, Mhondoro	Into town, for employment. Into rural areas for food aid.
Midlands	Gokwe, Gweru rural, Gweru urban, Mberengwa, Zvishavane, Zhombe	For employment, gold panning and food. Some came back from their resettlement areas because of starvation. Some migration out of the country.

PROVINCE	Districts	Reason
Masvingo	Chivi , Gutu, Mwenezi MasvingoUrban, Zaka,	From urban areas to look for food. Into urban areas for employment.
Matebeleland North	Binga, Hwange	Outward for employment.
Matebeleland South	Bulilimangwe, Gwanda	Outwards for employment and food. Some have gone out of the country for food.
Bulawayo	Bulawayo urban	Displaced farmworkers From rural areas to town for food.
Harare	Harare, Chitungwiza	To rural areas for food and because rents unaffordable. Rural opposition supporters denied food coming into town.

Movement from rural to urban areas is often in search of employment, while from urban to rural areas is often driven by food (to access harvests or relief) or as urban conditions have become unaffordable. Displacement continues to be noted as a source of movement, while poor conditions under resettlement (hunger) is driving some people to return to areas of origin.

**Movement continues to be a critical survival strategy. With the high cost of transport and unavailability of fuel, this is a further drain on household resources.** Transport problems, relating both to costs and availability of transport were reported in 15 districts in April (compared to 18 districts in March).

No food related deaths were reported in April.

## Food availability and access

**Household food stocks are gradually improving: An estimated 20% of households had more than one months food supply from districts reporting, up from none in December /January. This still implies that a large majority of households still have less than one months supply.**

Between October and January 2003 no households were reported to have food stocks of more than one month. By March 2003, reports from districts indicated that an estimated 9% of households had food stocks of more than one months supply. By April 2003 this had increased to 20% of households, although with an estimated 37% of households reported to have less than one months supply and 46% no food in stock. Hence while supplies are improving this is extremely gradual and there is still an estimated 80% of households with less than one months supply.

A number of districts still reported households consuming unusual 'famine' foods in April (See Table 3).

**Table 3: Districts reporting foods not normally consumed, April 03**

<b>FOOD CONSUMED</b>	<b>Districts reporting food consumed</b>
Treated seeds	Chitungwiza
Wild fruits/ Roots	Chikomba, Hwedza, Mt Darwin, Gokwe, Gwanda, Gweru rural, Zhombe, Chivi, Hwange
Cooked unripe bananas and vegetables	Nyanga
Watermelons	Gokwe, Binga, Bulawayo, Zhombe
Cassava	Harare , Chitungwiza

### **Food from Production**

As noted above harvest yields have begun to make a difference to food access. The late and inadequate distribution of seed was noted in the February /March report with only a third of households in that round reported to access adequate seed.

**Fertiliser and maize seed prices continued to show March trends of up to twentyfold ranges in cost between formal and parallel markets and between areas, more so for seed than fertilizer.** Price ranges in March and April appear to be comparable.

**Table 4: Price differences maize seed and fertilizer, March - April 2003**

<b>District</b>	<b>Fertiliser cost Z\$/10kg</b>		<b>Maize seed cost Z\$/10kg</b>	
	<b>Formal market</b>	<b>Parallel market</b>	<b>Formal Market</b>	<b>Parallel market</b>
Price range March	300-4500	600-3000	400-9000	720-10000
Price range April	350-1750	500-3250	300-5000	800-9000

Reported fertiliser prices in April ranged from Z\$350/10kg in urban formal markets to Z\$3 250 in urban parallel markets. Rural formal market prices were higher and parallel market prices somewhat lower than these costs. Maize seed prices range from Z\$300/10kg in a rural formal market to Z\$9 000 / 10kg in urban parallel markets.

**With food produced a critical determinant of household food security, the costs of seed and fertilizer and transport are likely to be significant limiting factors to yields. Improved food security would need to deal with these factors and the cost of transport. The number of people reported returning from resettlement areas indicate that making seed, fertilizer and transport available and affordable are as critical as land to agrarian reform and food security strategies.**

**Table 5: Maize seed and fertilizer prices, April 2003**

District	Fertiliser cost Z\$/10kg		Maize seed cost Z\$/10kg	
	Formal market	Parallel market	Formal Market	Parallel market
<b>Manicaland</b>				
Chipinge	800	800	2500	5000
Makoni	1300	1600	4000	
Mutare urban	700	1200	5000	9000
Mutare rural	1400	2000	600	800
Nyanga	1400	2800	4000	7000
<b>Mashonaland East</b>				
Goromonzi	1000	1500 - 1750	2000 - 3750	3000
Hwedza	900	1160		
Murehwa			300 - 1200	1500 - 2800
Mutoko	1200	1800	1200	2000
UMP	940	1400		
<b>Mashonaland Central</b>				
Guruve	1100	1400	1667 - 1800	3333
Shamva	1200	1800	6000	8000
<b>Mashonaland West</b>				
Hurungwe	1000	1400	1580	
Mhondoro			3600	4000
Zvimba	500	1000	2500	5000
<b>Midlands</b>				
Gokwe	1000	1000 - 2000	500 - 3000	2000
Kwekwe urban		1000	5000	7000
Shurugwi	920	1200	600	1200
Zvishavane	600 - 760	1200 - 1500	1250 - 1800	800 - 4500
<b>Masvingo</b>				
Bikita	600	1000	600 - 2000	3000
Chiredzi	1400	3000	1500	3000
Chivi	800	not available	1000 - 2000	3500 - 6000
Gutu	900	1600	2500	5000
Zaka	600 - 1200	1500 - 2400	1000 - 2500	1500 - 6000
<b>Matebeleland North</b>				
Binga			300	800
<b>Matebeleland South</b>				
Bulilimangwe			600	1000
<b>Urban</b>				
Bulawayo	350	500	4500 - 5000	6000 - 8000
Harare	600 - 1750	1200 - 3250	600 - 1250	1500 - 2500
Chitungwiza			490 - 1250	1500 - 6000

*'Some people got the fertiliser late and will use in the next planting season.'*

Mwenezi

*'Seed was difficult to access and also was beyond the reach of many since it was very expensive'*

Gutu

*'People had no seeds and fertiliser, some had used it as food and some had no money'*

Gweru Rural

**The area planted increased later in the season as people took advantage of late rains, but crop yields are reported to be poor to average, especially in Manicaland, Midlands, Matabeleland South and North, due to erratic or late rains and poor access to seed and fertilizer.**

As shown in Table 6, by April 2003 reported land areas planted at 64% overall were higher than reported in January (38%) and March (60%), as people took advantage of late rains. Crop yields are noted to be poor in many provinces, constrained by late rains and by poor access to seed and fertilizers. Many who lost their investment in the first round of planting found the costs of seed and fertilizer unaffordable by the time the late rains came.

*'There was a shortage of rain in our area all the crops failed no one harvested this year'*

Bulilimangwe

**Table 6: Reports of land area planted, crop yields, rains and production constraints, April 2003**

<b>PROVINCE</b>	<b>Ave % land area planted</b>	<b>Crop yields</b>	<b>Rains</b>	<b>Production problems</b>
Mashonaland East	80%	Average-poor	Too little early in the season, improved after March	Seed and fertilizer unavailable or unaffordable
Mashonaland Central	83%	Average	Poor rains in the beginning of the season but normal or above average after March	Seed and fertilizer unavailable or unaffordable
Mashonaland West	80%	Average-poor	Poor early rains, Good rains after March	Seed and fertilizer unavailable or unaffordable
Manicaland	50%	Poor-average	Erratic or late	No seed or fertilizer
Midlands	38%	Poor	Rains late and inadequate	No seed or fertilizer
Masvingo	43%	Average	Rains late, good rains at the end but some after crops had wilted	Seed or fertilizer expensive or not available
Matabeleland South	58%	Poor	Late and inadequate rains	No seed or fertiliser
Matabeleland North	80%	Poor-Average	Erratic, late and inadequate	No seed or fertiliser



*'The amount was enough but the timing was poor, those without inputs could not replant'*  
Zvishavane

*'It only rained heavily very late when all the crops had wilted'*  
Masvingo Rural

**Erratic rains and high production costs makes it important in assessing food security to go beyond aggregate yields in areas, to getting information on the share of households who experienced early crop failure and were unable to replant due to cost and access factors.**

## **GMB Deliveries**

*'GMB deliveries are now coming once in about 50 days. It has been affected by the fuel crisis'*  
Mutare Rural

*'We got two GMB deliveries but it was a strategy of wooing people to attend council rallies as some of the maize was distributed at the meeting venue'*  
Chivi

**GMB deliveries were reported to be low during April 2003, although there was some evidence of a small increase in frequency and volumes of deliveries in April over March. GMB deliveries are now compounded by fuel shortages affecting deliveries.** The average number of reported deliveries to sentinel wards was 0,87 in April 2003, slightly more than the 0,67 reported in March 2003. The average volume per delivery has increased to 13,9 tonnes per delivery, above the 7,34 tonnes reported in March. **There is report that many people have now stopped trying to buy GMB food, relying instead on relief foods and own harvests.**

*'Some people have given up buying food from the GMB'*  
Gutu

Table 6 shows districts with NO wards reporting ANY grain deliveries in the period reviewed, compared with information from previous months.

**Transport problems and political bias are the two obstacles most commonly reported in relation to GMB food access. The latter is now reported across almost all districts and grain distribution at political meetings was also reported in April. It would appear that there has been little progress in resolving this bias in access to GMB maize or in making GMB maize sales more transparent within communities.**

*'People had to pay \$1000 to the independence celebration funds first before getting GMB grain which they refused'*

Chiredzi

**Table 7: Districts with NO sentinel wards reporting any GMB deliveries in April**

PROVINCE	April 03	March	February	December/ January
Mashonaland East	Goromonzi, UMP	Chikomba, Marondera urban, UMP	UMP, Chikomba, Mudzi	Chikomba, Mudzi, Goromonzi, Mutoko
Mashonaland Central	Nil	Mt Darwin	Nil	Nil
Mashonaland West	Chegutu Makonde	Chinoyi urban, Hurungwe, Mhondoro	Norton, Makonde, Zvimba	Mhondoro, Hurungwe, Zvimba
Manicaland	Mutare Urban Nyanga	Nil	Chipinge, Makoni	Nil
Masvingo	Masvingo rural, Mwenezi	Zaka,Chiredzi Masvingo urban	Zaka, Mwenezi, Masvingo	Nil
Midlands	Chirumhanzu Gweru rural Gweru urban Mberengwa	Gokwe, Gweru rural, Shurugwi, Zhombe	Shurugwi, Kwekwe rural, Mberengwa	Chirumhanzu
Matabeleland North	Nil	Umguzi, Hwange	Umguzi	Binga, Lupane
Matabeleland South	Bulilimangwe Insiza	Gwanda	Insiza, Umzingwane	Gwanda

**There has been an upward movement in the GMB price. The reported upper price range of GMB maize in April 03 of Z\$500 /10kg is higher than prices in March and is 330% above the controlled price.** Districts with highly inflated reported prices of over Z\$200 /10kg in March 03 are shown in Table 8.

**Table 8: Reported costs of GMB maize, Z\$/10kg**

Provinces	Price range in Z\$ / 10kg			Districts reporting GMB prices above \$200/10kg April 03
	APRIL 2003	MARCH 2003	DEC/JAN 03	
Manicaland	116 - 300	116-250	110-232	Chimanimani, Chipinge, Makoni, Rusape urban
Mashonaland East	84 - 126	110-174	112-170	nil
Mashonaland Central	120 - 400	116-150	116	Bindura urban
Mashonaland West	116 - 500	112-260	110-112	Hurungwe, Mhondoro
Masvingo	116 - 200	116-250	100-250	nil
Midlands	116 - 254	112-160	110-260	Kwekwe urban
Matabeleland North	112 - 500	100-116	116	Hwange
Matabeleland South	100 - 124	116-120	112-165	nil
Cities: Harare and Bulawayo (*)	250 - 300	250-300		Harare and Bulawayo

Nominal Zimbabwe dollars

(\*) Higher prices in urban areas reflect GMB distribution of silo maize meal rather than maize grain in these areas

## Market supplies

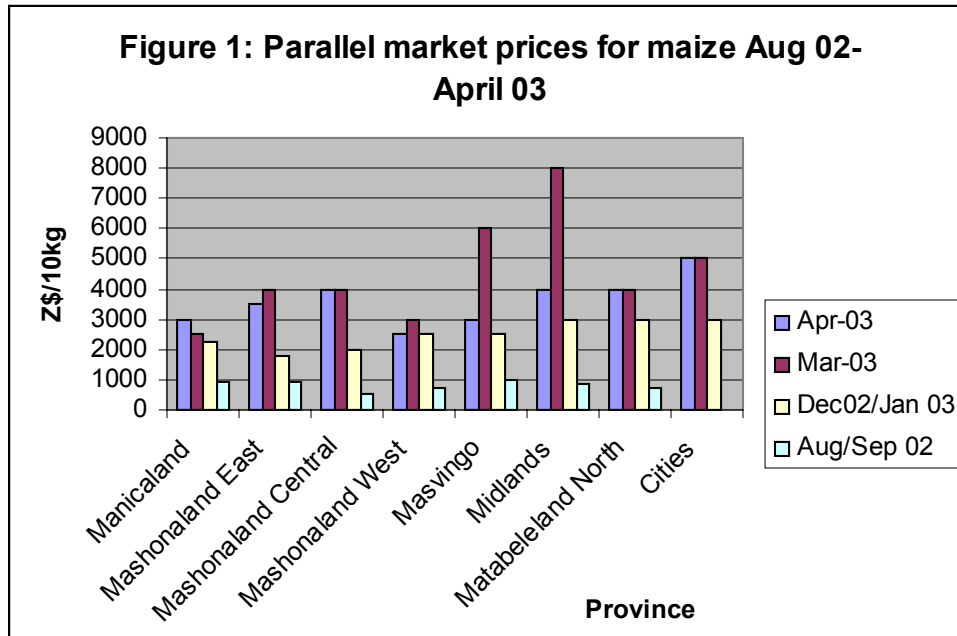
*'Sometime ago the prices were very high but now they have reduced because of relief food'*  
Goromonzi

**While parallel market prices have remained high in April they have not risen further and in some areas the widespread availability of relief food and milling of local maize by small scale millers has brought informal market prices down. This means that urban dwellers who do not access relief or local produce are likely to face inflated prices for longer.** Parallel market prices for maize in Harare, for example, are reported to be \$5000 /10kg.

**Table 9: Upper prices of maize meal in parallel markets**

Province	Upper prices of maize meal in parallel markets Z\$ / 10kg			
	April 03	March 03	Dec02/ Jan 03	Aug/ Sep 02
Manicaland	3000	2500	2250	900
Mashonaland East	3500	4000	1800	900
Mashonaland Central	4000	4000	2000	500
Mashonaland West	2500	3000	2500	700
Masvingo	3000	6000	2500	1000
Midlands	4000	8000	3000	880
Matabeleland North	4000	4000	3000	750
Cities	5000	5000	3000	

Figure 1 below shows the escalation in **upper** limits of parallel market prices since August 2002, worse in some provinces than in others.



The sale of GMB grain through parallel markets at profit margins of over \$4000 /10kg continues to undermine the use of public subsidies to control prices and channels public funds into private profits.

## Relief food

**Relief continues to be the major source of rural food. In many urban areas there is little or no relief and the situation is noted to have worsened.**

*"This month people were given maize only no oil, beans and porridge"*

*Masvingo Rural*

In April 2003 13 districts (22%) noted an improvement in relief supplies, while 48% observed that supplies remained the same. **It would seem that the expansion of relief cover has begun to plateau. In ten districts (17%) relief was reported to have stopped or quantities of relief reduced.**

### Reported reasons for interruption of relief

Mutare Rural: - decline attributed to diesel shortages  
 Gokwe - The supply was cut to half, especially in relation to beans  
 Shamva – relief stopped on political grounds  
 Seke – Relief stopped by councillor  
 Makonde – Reason not given  
 Chirumanzu –papers not processed  
 Masvingo Rural - people were given maize only, no oil or beans  
 Zaka – cooking oil was withdrawn from relief  
 Gwanda – relief supply was reduced and no porridge given  
 Insiza – the relief supply was stopped during the month

The agencies and target groups for relief appear to be largely unchanged over previous reports.

There are fewer barriers to accessing relief reported than to access in other sources of food (GMB, Commercial market) and reports generally indicate that relief is more fairly accessible than other food sources for those in need. Sixteen districts (28%) reported some problem with access.

*'There was a problem when one of the kraal heads tried to deny some people food and hid some cartons of food but it was corrected'*

*Gweru Rural*

**Relief distribution is generally noted to be fair with some barriers in access or non supply to people thought to need relief in farmworkers, settlers, urban areas and rural workers.**

In a number of districts kraalheads were reported to be leaving out deserving names from their lists.

The problem of double supply reported in March was not reported in April. However there were ongoing problems reported in some districts in access to relief. In addition to general problems of non access by farmworkers and rural workers noted above and exclusion from lists by kraalheads, some further specific problems were noted.

**Table 10: Reported problems in accessing relief in districts, April 2003**

<b>DISTRICT</b>	<b>Production problems</b>
Seke	Unfair distribution of relief food by farm security guards to settlers
Bindura Urban	Corruption in beneficiary identification
Guruve	As the area is mountainous some people are facing problems in getting to food distribution points
Shamva	Political leaders are disturbing the distribution
Masvingo Rural	Many peoples names were cancelled from the book so they did not get food
Gwanda	The assessment is not properly done therefore some households with 10 members get 1 x 50 kg and those with 5 members also get 1 x 50 kg.

## **Food security and poverty**

Asset sale for food was reported in 39 districts, with an average of 20% of households in these districts reported to be selling assets for food (compared to 25% in March 2003). The items that people are selling are the same as in March, viz

- Electrical goods
- Household furniture and goods
- Clothes
- Small livestock / Cattle

**Relatively widespread sale of household assets for food in 67% of districts represents a downward poverty spiral that has long term social and economic consequences.**

*'Many are borrowing money from money lenders at exorbitant interest rates as everything has already been sold'*

*Bulawayo*

**While food supplies have increased in the month due to relief and harvest yields, there are a number of factors that indicate that households in Zimbabwe remain in a highly food insecure situation.**

Such factors include:

1. Poor harvest yields, erratic rainfall and cost barriers to seed and fertilizer undermining effective land use and household food production
2. Continued inadequacies and bias in the delivery of GMB food to poor households, and leakage into parallel markets selling at inflated prices
3. Reliance on relief food as a primary source of staples in rural areas
4. Poor regulation and high levels of speculation in food markets
5. Household sale of assets to purchase food from markets deepening household poverty and undermining future ability to withstand shocks

**There are reports of interventions at community level to deal with these problems.**

- Communities have petitioned leaders and formed committees to ensure more fair food distribution and have set up local food monitors to make sure food is fairly managed
- People have through local leaderships negotiated with the district 'task force' to make food distribution more fair and transparent
- Some political and community leaders have intervened to support fair access in the community, especially for the poorest, contrary to others who have been implicated in profit making, hoarding and biased distribution
- In one district report was made that a councilor was arrested for accessing food corruptly

*'The governor managed to stop the millers from selling food because the food was not reaching the needy'*

*Mutare rural*

This round highlights that the economic, social, political and institutional factors undermining household food production and food access are by no means resolved. Relief has mitigated these problems, but has not solved them. While community social action is yielding some returns in making local food distribution fairer and more accountable, it seems timely that this be supported by the '*new and bold approach*' called for from Guruve. This should include stronger measures at all levels to deal with production costs and inputs, ensuring the transparent and effective performance of the GMB, the control of price speculation and ensuring participation and accountability in co-ordination of food security at local and national level.

## Summary

Fosenet monitoring for April 2003 is drawn from **151 monitoring reports** from **58** districts from all provinces of Zimbabwe, with an average of **2,6 reports per district**.

Nearly two thirds of districts (60%) report improved food security primarily due to early harvests and relief supplies, although a fifth report a worsening situation with falling national supplies and quantities in relief packages. Ensuring a balance between production, relief and local deliveries is important and demands transparent and responsive co-ordination mechanisms locally.

There are a number of indicators of continued food insecurity, such as the continuing inadequacy or absence of GMB supplies, continued reported sale of assets for food in 67% of districts, and food related movements into or out of districts in 38% of districts in April.

Household food stocks have however gradually improved: An estimated 20% of households had more than one months food supply, up from no households in December /January. The large majority of households still have less than one months supply.

Fertiliser and maize seed prices show up to twentyfold ranges in variation between formal and parallel markets and between areas, more so for seed than fertilizer. The costs of seed, fertilizer and transport are reported to be significant limiting factors to yields. The number of people reported returning from resettlement areas indicate that making seed, fertilizer and transport available and affordable are as critical as land to agrarian reform and food security strategies.

The area planted increased later in the season as people took advantage of late rains, but crop yields are reported to be poor to average, especially in Manicaland, Midlands, Matabeleland South and North, due to erratic or late rains and poor access to seed and fertilizer.

These conditions make it important to obtain quantitative information on the share of households who experienced early drop failure, were unable to replant and now face poor yields. This will give a closer understanding of food security than overall yields and aggregate grain availability in areas.

There was some evidence of a small increase in frequency and volumes of GMB deliveries in April over March, although fuel shortages were reported to affect deliveries, the price of GMB maize was reported to have risen and political bias in access continued to be widely reported. Many people are now reported to have stopped trying to buy GMB food, relying instead on relief foods and own harvests. There appears to have been little progress in resolving bias in access to GMB maize or in making GMB maize sales more transparent within communities.

While parallel market prices have remained high in April they have not risen further and in some areas the widespread availability of relief food and milling of local maize by small

scale millers has brought informal market prices down. Urban dwellers who do not access relief or local produce are likely to face inflated prices for longer.

From reports the expansion of relief cover appears to have begun to plateau, with reports of unmet relief needs in farmworkers, settlers, urban areas and rural workers.

While food supplies have increased in the month due to relief and harvest yields, there are thus a number of indications of high levels of household food insecurity.

6. Poor harvest yields, erratic rainfall and cost barriers to seed and fertilizer undermining effective land use and household food production
7. Continued inadequacies and bias in the delivery of GMB food to poor households, and leakage into parallel markets selling at inflated prices
8. Reliance on relief food as a primary source of staples in rural areas
9. Poor regulation and high levels of speculation in food markets
10. Household sale of assets to purchase food from markets deepening household poverty and undermining future ability to withstand shocks

There are reports of interventions at community level to deal with these problems, including to monitor and organize for fair management and distribution of food at local level, ensure improved and more open performance of local management committees, and stop food theft and leakages to parallel markets.

This round highlights that the economic, social, political and institutional factors undermining household food production and food access are by no means resolved. Relief has mitigated these problems, but has not solved them. While community social action is yielding some returns in making local food distribution fairer and more accountable, this needs to be backed by stronger measures at all levels to deal with production costs and inputs, ensuring the transparent and effective performance of the GMB, the control of price speculation and ensuring participation and accountability in co-ordination of food security at local and national level.

*FOSENET welcomes feedback on these reports. Follow up queries and feedback to FOSENET, [fsmt2@mweb.co.zw](mailto:fsmt2@mweb.co.zw)*