

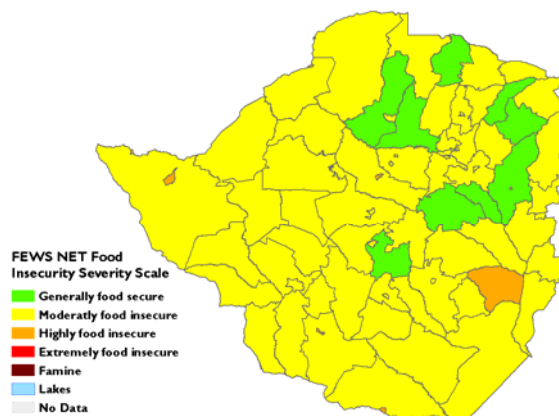
ZIMBABWE Food Security Update

February 2008

Summary

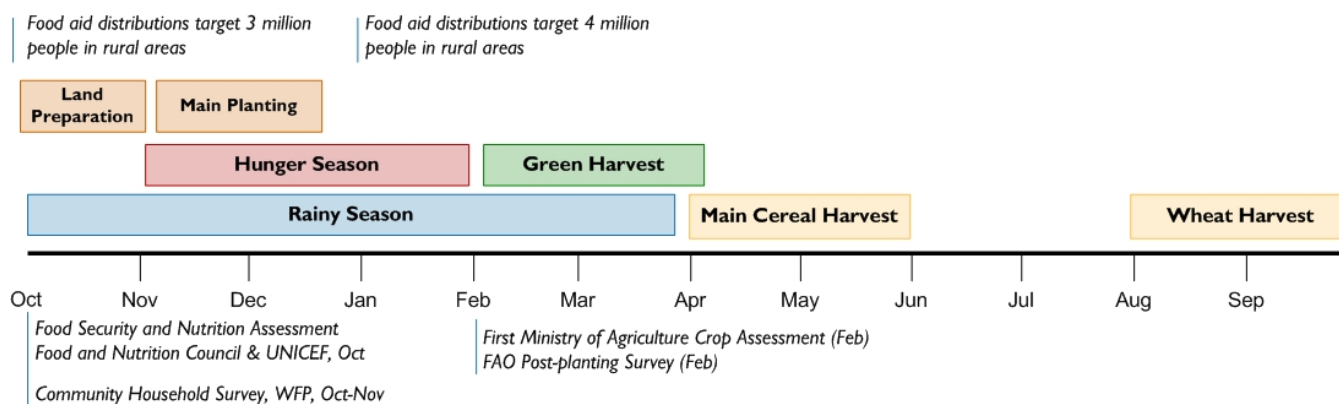
- Since the imposition of price controls last year, supplies of staple cereals have remained erratic and inadequate on most formal markets throughout the country. A few commodities such as milk and bread have become more available in January 2008, though the selling prices are unaffordable to most poor households.
- Food security in urban areas remains critical given the shortages and erratic supplies of basic commodities on the formal market and inadequate humanitarian support in these areas.
- Both the Government of Zimbabwe (GoZ) and humanitarian agencies have performed to satisfaction in moving cereals into the country. The outstanding national cereal deficit for the current marketing year (278,000 MT) is likely to be met.
- WFP and C-SAFE have continued supporting vulnerable households in grain deficit rural areas. In December 2007, the humanitarian agencies scaled up their programs covering over 3.8 million people, and increased to 4.1 million in January 2008, over 60 percent of the population in those districts receiving food aid.
- The adverse impact of heavy rainfall on this season's maize crop is evident throughout the country, including the country's major maize production areas. These poor crop conditions have also been worsened by the absence of top dressing fertilizer, and crops throughout the country are showing signs of nitrogen deficiency. Overall, yields for all crops are likely to be lower this season compared to those achieved last season. According to the Crop and Food Supply Assessment Mission, last season's maize harvest left a deficit of about 891,000 MT. While the total area planted to major crops, including maize, is higher this agricultural season than the area planted to same crops same time last year, it most likely that current season will leave a higher national maize deficit.
- Almost all parts of the country received cumulative rainfall amounts well above their long term average for the period from September to December. Rainfall became heavier and more frequent from mid November 2007. Overall, December 2007 was the wettest December ever in the recorded history of Zimbabwe.
- Since the beginning of the rainy season, more than 15,000 people have been affected by floods. These floods have damaged roads, washed away bridges, destroyed houses, crops and livestock. Farmers in some districts throughout the country are experiencing water logging problems, with fields submerged in water. This situation is likely to intensify as more heavy rains are expected in the remaining part of the season.

Figure 1. Estimated current food security conditions through March 2008



Source: FEWS NET

Seasonal Calendar and Critical Events Timeline



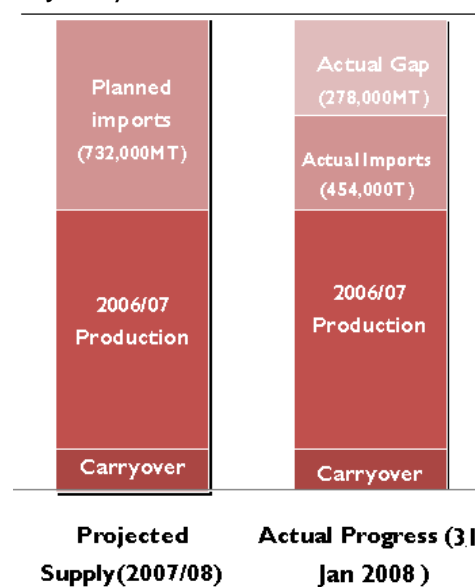
Source: FEWS NET

Maize grain imports likely to be adequate through to the end of the 2007/08 consumption year

As of 13 January, the GoZ had managed to move 239,827 MT of maize grain from Malawi, leaving a remaining balance of 166,403 MT, and a total of 60 percent of required grain imports delivered to date (Figure 2). Given that the performance of cereal imports by the GoZ and humanitarian organizations has been satisfactory so far, it is likely that the national cereal requirements for the 2007/08 will be met. However, the 2008/09 marketing year will start with limited carryover stocks. While the outcome of this year's very wet season is not known, there will be localized deficits, and the country will again need to import a significant amount of cereal, likely to be more than was required this year, to meet its needs. The upcoming February crop assessment by the Ministry of Agriculture will provide very important information on the performance of the 2007/08 agricultural season.

Though the cereal situation at the national level is satisfactory, distribution challenges remain and are likely to result in grain availability variations at the sub national level (including both rural and urban areas). The Grain Marketing Board (GMB) is faced with transport and fuel shortages, and this has been further worsened by the poor road networks that have been damaged by heavy rains in the country since December 2007.

Figure 2. National maize balance sheet as at 31 January 2008



Sources: Ministry of Agriculture, WFP, C-SAFE, and FEWS NET

Urban Food security situation remains critical

An analysis of economic indicators suggests that food security has continued to decline among urban households, particularly the poor. Hyperinflation and the steady depreciation of the Zimbabwe dollar, the general increase in the cost of living, depressed employment opportunities, unstable supply of basic goods and services, and the overall poor functioning of the market continue to erode the food security of urban households. At the same time, urban households are left with inadequate access to services such as reticulated water, refuse collection and sewage maintenance, increasing the risk of exposure to water borne diseases. The continued power cuts throughout the country have also disrupted operations and reduced production in some sectors.

There has been no assessment of urban food security conditions since the June 2007 Crop and Food Supply Assessment Mission (CFSAM), which estimate about one million urban Zimbabweans were food insecure. With only 350,000 people receiving food assistance in January 2008, a relatively high proportion of people vulnerable to food insecurity are left without formal support.

Since the imposition of price controls last year, the availability and supply of basic commodities on the formal market remain erratic. A few commodities such as milk and bread have become more available in January 2008, though the selling prices are unaffordable to most poor households and rapidly rising. The cost of a standard loaf of bread increased by over 300 percent from October 2007 to early January 2008. Other basic commodities such as sugar, cooking oil, maize meal, and meat have remained scarce on the formal market but

were generally available on the parallel market, where prices have continued to go up. Prices for white sugar, cooking oil, and beef went up by between 60 to 250 percent from November 2007 to January 2008 (Figure 3). To address the problems with availability of food and other essential commodities in urban areas, there are plans by the GoZ to introduce “peoples’ markets”, which would sell basic goods at fairly affordable prices. How this will work in practice can only be seen when the plans are implemented.

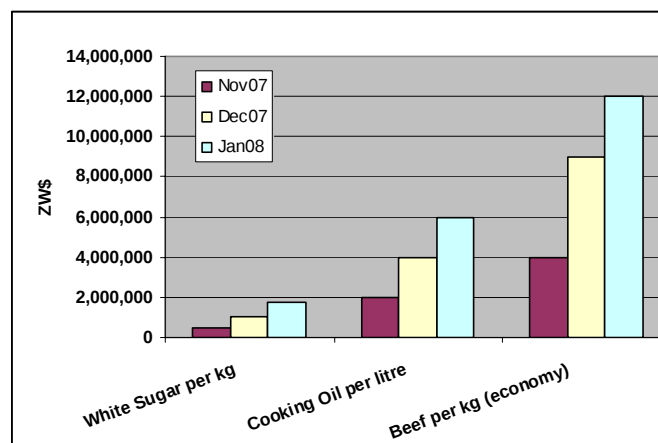
Anecdotal evidence reflects that the cost of living in urban areas has increased, and most households depend on purchases for almost all of their basic commodities. This situation has been further worsened by high unemployment levels, putting more pressure on the limited disposable incomes. For those fortunate to be formally employed, the meager salaries have never kept up with the ever increasing prices of goods and services. This mounting pressure is likely to result in increased industrial actions of both private and public sector workers.

Food security situation in rural areas

The food security in the rural areas continues to be relatively stable in most parts of the country, due to the contribution of food aid programs, some limited GMB supplies, and significant on-farm stocks moving through informal marketing channels. The major food security problem in most rural areas remains that of limited and ever diminishing purchasing power of poor, staple cereals-deficit households; staple cereals have been available only with great difficulty in several parts of rural Zimbabwe.

In the rural areas, food aid assistance through WFP and C-SAFE has continued supporting the vulnerable households. In December 2007, the programs scaled up, covering over 3.8 million people, and these figures increased to 4.1 million in January 2008, which is over 60 percent of the population in those districts receiving food aid. While the poor road network poses a serious challenge to food aid distributions, particularly during the wettest period of the rainfall season, there have been no major disruptions of food aid distributions this season. GMB maize supplies, however, continue to be irregular and inadequate; the distribution channel is being undermined by shortages of available transport and fuel as well as the poor road network, the condition of which was worsened by the excessive rainfall in December 2007 and January 2008.

Figure 3. Trends in parallel market prices of selected food commodities in Harare

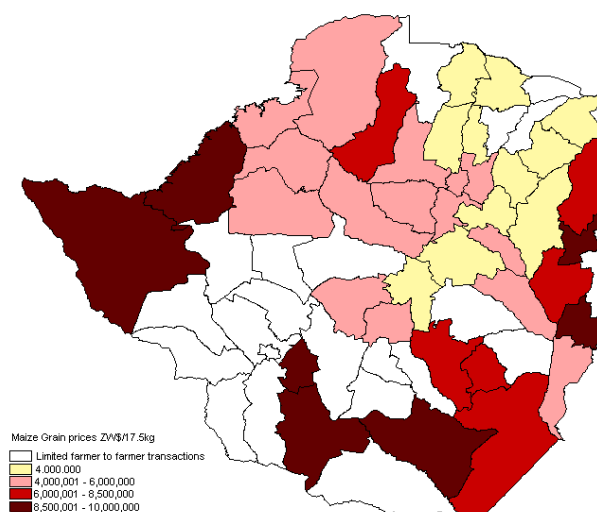


Source: FEWSNET

The relatively high and ever-increasing staple cereal prices in the grain deficit areas, which make up most of the southern half of the country, continue to pose enormous challenges to households dependent on the market for their food, particularly the poor households. According to FEWS NET price monitoring, in January 2008, a greater part of the Matabeleland provinces had fairly limited farmer to farmer maize sale transactions. Where they occurred, the highest selling prices ranged from ZW\$ 5,000,000 to ZW\$ 10,000,000 for 17.5 kg (Figure 4). Limited farmer to farmer transactions were also observed in some districts in the north and parts of Masvingo Province. In general maize grain prices exhibited a much, steeper up-wards trend of increases ranging from 100 – 300 percent from December 2007 to January 2008.

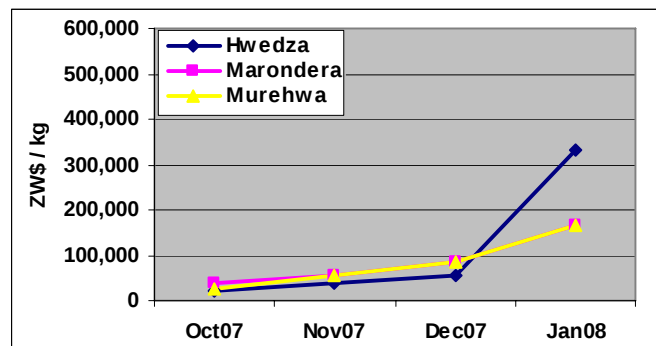
Maize prices in districts like Murehwa and Marondera that had an estimated cereal surplus at the start of the current marketing year were still lower than in deficit areas; 17.5 kg of grain sold for ZW\$ 4,000,000 in January 2008 and maintained a steady increase mostly likely in response to inflation (Figure 6). However, in some districts like Hwedza, maize prices increased more than 500 percent from December to January, much higher than the rate of inflation. This may have been spurred by a structural change in the demand and/or supply of maize in the district, which needs some closer monitoring (Figure 6).

Figure 4. Maize grain prices for January 2008



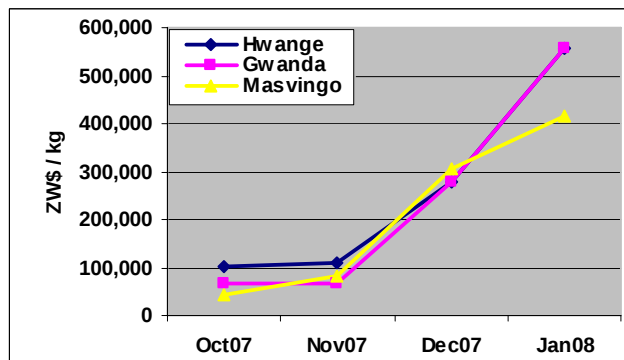
Source: FEWS NET

Figure 5. Maize grain prices (Oct 07 – Jan 08) in grain surplus areas.



Source: FEWS NET

Figure 6. Maize grain prices (Oct 07 – Jan 08) in grain deficit districts.



Source: FEWS NET

Excessive rains fall in the first half of the 2007/08 rainfall season have had a profoundly negative impact on cropping in most parts of the country; normal to above normal rainfall forecast for the remainder of the season

Almost all parts of the country received cumulative rainfall amounts well above their long term average for the period from September to December 2007 (Figure 7). Rainfall became heavier and more frequent from mid November 2007. Overall, December 2007 was the wettest December ever in the recorded history of Zimbabwe. By end of December, most of the country, save for the central parts of Midlands, the greater part of Matabeleland north province, and the northwestern parts of Matabeleland South provinces, had received cumulative rainfall amounts between 150 and 300 percent of average rainfall for the period from 1 September to 31 December 2007 (Figure 8). The excessive rains continued during early January but eased midway through the month, particularly, in the eastern half of the country (Figure 9). The reduction in rainfall activity was much greater in the southern districts of Masvingo and Matabeleland provinces. However rainfall

activity picked up through the country in the last ten days of January 2008, and the rainfall forecast for the rest of the season continues to point towards increased chances of normal to above-normal rainfall.

Figure 7. Rainfall for 1 September to 31 December 2007 as a percentage of average for the same period

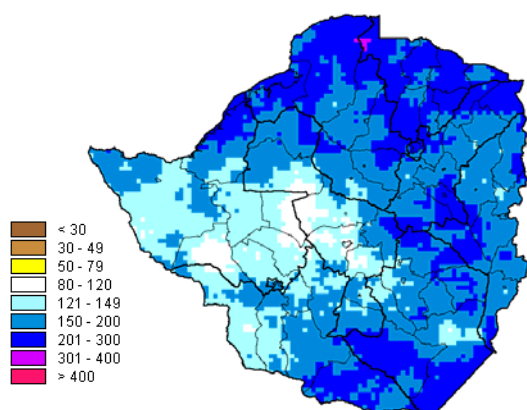


Figure 8. Rainfall for 1 – 10 January 2008

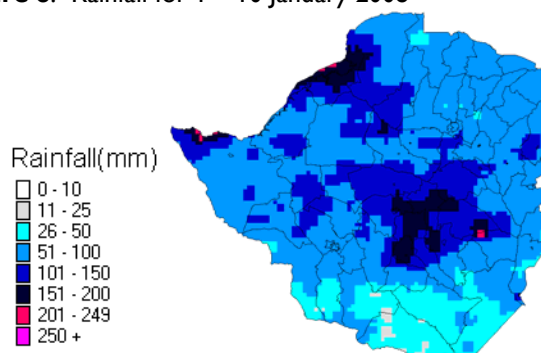
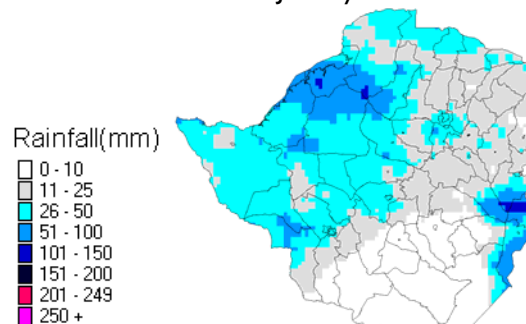


Figure 9. Rainfall for 11 – 20 January 2008

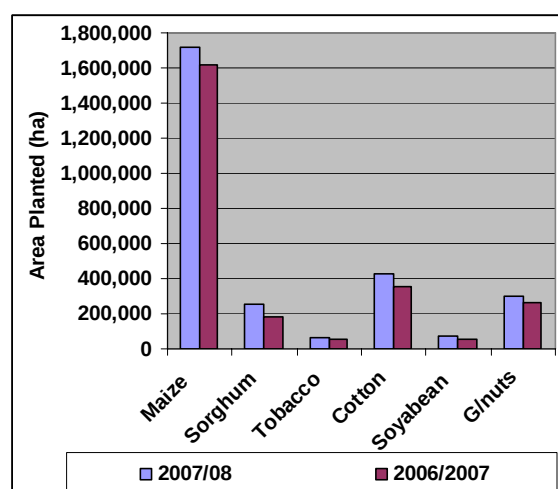


Source: NOAA satellite-based rainfall estimates

The area planted to all the major crops in the 2007/08 cropping season is estimated by the GoZ to be higher than the area planted to these crops last season (Figure 10). The area planted to maize increased by 6 percent; sorghum by 38 percent, tobacco by 17 percent, cotton by 22 percent and soybean by 35 percent.

In some parts of the country, excessive rainfall in December made it difficult for farmers to carry out land preparation, mechanical weeding and application of fertilizer, herbicide, and pesticide. Consequently, some farmers were forced to scale down their planned crop area. Weeds grew uncontrolled, competing with crops, most of which are now showing signs of nitrogen deficiency. Farms on low lying areas that are poorly drained were waterlogged, while in lighter soils, nutrient leaching was significant. Both factors severely reduced crop growth. The adverse impact on this season's maize crop is evident throughout the country, including the country's major maize production areas. These poor crop conditions have also been worsened by the absence of top dressing fertilizer. The opportunity to improve crop conditions using fertilizers that came into the country in early February 2008 are limited by the small quantities of fertilizer available and the advanced growth stages of some of the crop.

Figure 10. Area planted to majors crops compared to last season



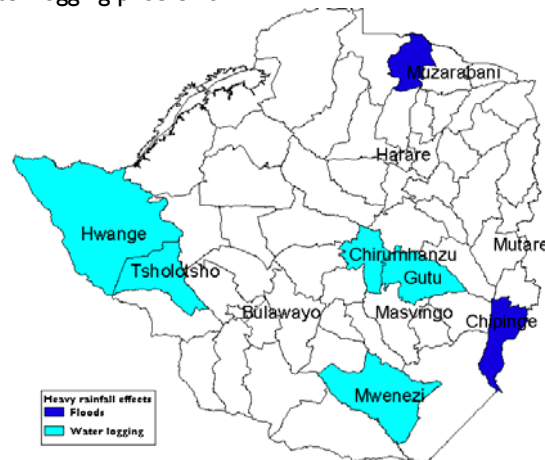
Source: Government of Zimbabwe

Overall, yields for all crops are likely to be lower this season compared to those achieved last season. According to the Crop and Food Supply Assessment Mission, last season's maize harvest left a deficit of about 891,000 MT. It is most likely that current season will leave a higher national maize deficit.

Excessive rains could trigger more flooding

Since December 2007, parts of the country have been hit by a series of floods that have disrupted the livelihoods of over 15,000 people. The most affected districts are Muzarabani (Mashonaland province), where over 8,000 people are affected, and Chipinge (Manicaland province), with over 5,000 people affected (Figure 11). Extensive damage was caused to infrastructure, including schools, roads, and houses; crops and livestock were also destroyed. In response, these districts have received assistance from the GoZ and some NGOs in the form of shelter, food, and cooking utensils, and rehabilitation of boreholes is taking place. Farmers in other districts, including Chirumhanzu, Gutu, and Mwenezi (Masvingo province), and Hwange and Tsholotsho (Matabeleland North province), have experienced water logging problems. Most planted fields are submerged, resulting in heavy leaching, and houses and toilets collapsing. Given the forecast for the remainder of the rain season, with greater chances of continued normal to above normal rainfall, the Disaster Management team has to be on the watch and continue monitoring and mobilizing resources in case floods intensify in the already affected areas or new floods emerge. It is also anticipated that the upcoming crop assessments will give a clear picture on the impacts of floods on this season's crop production.

Figure 11. Districts affected by floods and experiencing water logging problems



Source: Civil Protection Unit & UN/OCHA