

## Capacity Building for Food Security in 21<sup>st</sup> Century Zimbabwe: The New Dispensation

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### Abstract

Food security is one of the primary goals of enhancing agricultural productivity and is at the heart of any sustainable development program. Food security has been at the centre of all development goals and strategies since independence in 1980 in Zimbabwe. Research however indicates that achievement of national food security is often at the mess of, governance, the weather as well as the global and local economic environment. This paper examines food security gains and dilemmas as well as attempt to map the way forward towards sustainable food security at national level especially in the new dispensation. Material for the paper largely drew from desktop; analyzing findings from literature from seasoned writers in the diaspora, Zimbabwe Farmers' weekly and works by international organizations, etc. A sample of women farmers were interviewed in Masvingo Province. Findings and recommendations are largely that food security as a national priority should be made sustainable through pragmatic, home grown, non-expensive, participatory and government supported programs.

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**Keywords:** food security, capacity building, command agriculture, new dispensation, direct foreign investment

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### INTRODUCTION

This study was prompted by the need to understand challenges experienced in Zimbabwe with regards food security. In 2015 Zimbabwe was grappling with the implementation of its economic blue print, the Zimbabwe Agenda for Sustainable Socio-Economic Transformation (ZIMASSET) which highlights food security as a top area of national interest. The new dispensation, in a bid to grapple with democracy, has opened Zimbabwe for business and as well allowed Zimbabweans to come to the fore to contribute ideas towards the Zimbabwe we want.

In the recent past, households have partly had their food security disturbed by the economic crisis, drought and sanctions that hit the country. Sachikonye (2013) calls the era that Zimbabwe suffered most between 2000 and 2010 'the lost decade.' Mlambo 2005 refers to the same period as the Zimbabwean crisis. Since 1997 shifts in Zimbabwe's land reform, agricultural and economic policies, and its relations with the international community, including external financial institutions, have accompanied dramatic economic decline. The economy faces crisis hyper-inflation, foreign currency and commodity shortages and hoarding, the erosion of incomes, increased food and social services, insecurity, the halving of production in the real economic sector, and reduced employment. Severe droughts between 2001 and 2002 worsened this situation. From 2000 with greater state control of commodity prices and markets, including interest rates and greater control and rationing of foreign currency, alongside expansionary monetary policies

and deficit financing the Zimbabwean economy began to suffer. These processes have led to a downward trend of increased economic informalisation and parallel markets, and to reduced incentives for production in most spheres.

### Food Security Defined

Food security speaks to a condition related to the supply of food and individual, household and community's access to it. Concerns over food security have existed throughout history, (Nyawo, 2018). At the 1974 World Food Conference, the term food security was defined with an emphasis on supply. Food security became the availability at all times of adequate food supplies of basic foodstuffs to sustain a steady expansion of food consumption and to offset fluctuations in production and prices, (Moyo, 2004).

Later, definitions added demand and access issues as a demonstration that availability was not synonymous with access. The addition suggested that there are individuals, even households, ethnic groups, people of certain political affiliations, and nationalities who can be food insecure even when food is abundant. Scenarios of discrimination happen as some groups of people get privileges along political party lines, preferred ethnicity, generational differences, gender lines and even geographical demarcations. The final report of the 1996 World Food Summit states that food security exists when all people, at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life. The

final definition adds finer details to the initial definition capturing minute details of what could stop a people from being food secure, (Nyawo, 2018).

### **Command Agriculture**

Targeted Command Agriculture was introduced in August 2016 as a Zimbabwean agricultural scheme aimed at ensuring food self-sufficiency. The scheme was introduced as Zimbabwe grapple with economic problems. According to Freeth (2016), the scheme targeted farmers near water bodies who could put a minimum of 200 hectares under maize per individual. These were found to be 2,000 in total and each farmer was required to produce at least produce 1,000 tonnes of maize. Each participating farmer was required to commit 5 tonnes per hectare towards repayment of advanced loans in the form of irrigation equipment, inputs and chemicals, mechanized equipment, electricity and water charges, Zezza and Tasciotti (2013). Farmers would retain a surplus product produced in excess of the 1,000 tonnes. The program will cost \$515 million. Each farmer will be earmarked to receive US\$250,000.

The command agriculture scheme is the second agriculture scheme to be implemented in Zimbabwe after almost 10 years. The first Command Agriculture scheme was implemented between 2005 and 2006 and it was initially named Operation Taguta / Sisuthi. In that program, the army was given the task of tilling large amounts land as it was peace time and their labour was available but the command agriculture in that seasons largely failed. Assessments led by Mnangagwa E. D ( Zimbabwe's Vice President at the time) were a source of joy with the scheme having coincided with a wet season and promising to bring forth great yields.

### **New Dispensation**

New dispensation is a buzz phrase currently in Zimbabwe referring to the post Mugabe era. In Zimbabwe, the term denotes the time from when Mugabe was removed from presidency November 2017 after 37 years as President. New dispensation is a term that is used to point to new thinking, new order, fresh set up and opening up Zimbabwe for new opportunities, businesses, investors, friends and markets. According to T. S. Eliot, 'to make an end is to make a beginning,' the closure of the Mugabe era must of necessity bring change, positive and constructive change. For now, the new dispensation has shown all the good signs for change. Most relevant to this paper are economic policies that would be conducive for investors, progressive business and promoting agricultural activities for food security. The mantra by the new regime, 'Zimbabwe is open for business' seems to have hit the correct codes with investors and locals alike.

## **FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS**

### **Food insecurity**

Contemporarily, food production in Zimbabwe has been disturbed by multi-farious factors that have included natural disasters and man-made problems. Drought, caused by erratic rainfall patterns, has resulted in a series of poor harvests, high unemployment, brain drain, corruption, politics of the belly, restructuring of the agriculture sector and many more challenges. This has contributed to increased levels of vulnerability and acute food insecurity, Chingarande (2004). It is this scenario that has necessitated large-scale humanitarian food relief operations, importation of food stuffs and Presidential interventionary programs.

In terms of weather conditions and climate change, much talked about is the destructive El- Nino. The El-Nino phenomenon has been devastating in that it has caused prolonged dry spells in some areas while causing floods in other areas. Readings indicate that global weather changes will continue to wreak havoc on food production across Africa for years to come. Over 100 million people in the southern African region have been left hungry by the unpredictable weather patterns, (Nyawo, 2012). The just ended 2016-2017 farming season has proven to be a very wet one although some areas have already been declared a disaster due to too much rain as a result of cyclones. Crops have drowned in areas that are low lying, prone to flooding, susceptible to bad drainage. Climate change is real and world leaders need to gear their nations towards curbing its effects and Zimbabwe has not been spared.

The new dispensation realizes the gap that needs to be filled by government to improve food security in the country. The new administration has its eyes set at opening up Zimbabwe for investors, for business, engaging Zimbabweans in the diaspora, creating a peaceful working environment, starting up banks for women and the youth to facilitate project loans, revisiting infrastructure and road networks, opening up moribund mines and introducing a Zimbabwean currency. Starting from the gains of command agriculture, (a program aimed at galvanizing stakeholders towards targeting and benefitting agriculture and agricultural production in Zimbabwe from 2016), the new administration is working to improve direct foreign investment and to rejuvenate the economy. An improved economy would buttress efforts by farmers who worked the land for years. Zimbabwe is so much blessed with trained agritech officers, farmers and agriculturists who are ready to exhibit their skills in the agricultural sector. However, without the help of a functional economy agriculture and therefore food security would be difficult to achieve.

Zimbabwe's economy is agro-based and as such this new administration must support the agricultural sector. There are a lot of Zimbabweans in the diaspora who fled the country due to an ailing economic environment and they have set up their roots in foreign lands and would not like to come back home but are willing to reconnect with their colleagues and start rebuilding the country through the farming business. The new dispensation has since reached out to the diaspora following the realization that all Zimbabweans should be involved to fill up silos around the country to the brim and have enough for export.

The Zimbabwean economy can benefit from the link between expertise possessed by many Zimbabweans locally and in the diaspora. The improvement of the economy is synonymous with the improvement of the situation of food in a country. There are huge investment opportunities for commercial and small scale farming in the country. Farming business has always been the mainstay of our economy and the government must make sure that the land is in right hands especially to people who are knowledgeable with agriculture. Livelihoods dried up slowly and life became expensive, difficult and unbearable for many classes, from the farm labourer to the new farm owner. In fact, people were now moving away from agriculture related activities.

Instead, there has been an increase in petty trading in most communities. The trading has been in second hand clothes selling, cross border trading, informal small scale mining and even prostitution. In districts closer to borders, Zimbabweans have drifted in their numbers into South Africa, Mozambique, Botswana and Zambia, with some never to return. Such drifts have pitted Zimbabweans against brain drain, xenophobia, abuse, prostitution, trafficking, drug related ills, death, discrimination and exploitation in foreign lands, Meredith (2013).

Occurrences of informal mining in gold and diamonds are on the rise, with some mining on agricultural land and jettisoning farming, Nyawo (2016). Meanwhile, a number of mouths go hungry and suffering increases when the able bodied of the family are lost in petty accidents as people scramble to skip the country to over rivers and mountains. The able bodied youths prefer mining that brings in quick gains to agricultural activities that are seasonal. While they mine, they meet bad company and they die in their numbers as they drink illicit beer and smoke substances.

The new government has designed a multifaceted but integrated program for targeted food consumption and incomes transfers for the poor, including most vulnerable groups (HIV-Aids affected including orphans, female headed households, poor peasant

families), the rural poor and disaster victims and the urban poorest. These types of interventions could be part of a more broadly defined agricultural and social "recovery" program.

Hard wares that supply agricultural equipment and farm machinery have been severely affected by the current shortage of foreign currency and general economic down turn at a time when potential demand for farm equipment among resettled new farmers is at its peak. Some of these shortages are a direct impact of resistance of the FTLRP by the west. The west has tightened sanctions on Zimbabwe to register their dislike of the move by the government to redistribute land. The program itself has affected different groups of people in Zimbabwe differently.

The FTLRP has had numerous effects on the residential status of former farm workers, who had resided on their employer's property for the greater part of their employment life. Some former farm workers have been forced to move off the farms to make way for new settlers, under either the A1 or A2 models, while some are still resident on farms acquired under FTLRP, either as squatters or in agreement with the new owners, Chambati and Moyo (2004). Those displaced in this manner are often stranded on the outskirts of the farms or they trek to the fast growing 'informal settlements' where social conditions are desperate, especially in areas where there were higher proportions of former farm workers perceived to be truly "foreign" migrant workers.

Gender imbalances are poorly addressed in land reform processes in most African countries, despite the role women play in subsistence agriculture. In Zimbabwe, women are discriminated against with regard to land allocation and the reasons for this are cumulative and multi-dimensional such as the pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial combinations of custom, culture, by-laws and not putting gender discrimination associated with land. According to Nyawo (2013) the percentage of women land beneficiaries ranges from 5% to 20% depending on province and scheme.

HIV and AIDS has both short term and long term impacts on agricultural productivity, rural development, food security, poverty and livelihoods in general. Most impacts are negative retarding development and progressively lowering the country's development indices. Moyo (2004) writes that the HIV-Aids affected persons amount to almost 2 million people the majority of which reside in the rural areas and 30% of whom are pregnant women. HIV and AIDS affects agricultural production through decreased productivity and land use by infected and affected individuals. The labour of the able-bodied that would be invested in the field is often diverted to caring for the infected and attending

funerals of those who have passed on. Related deaths reduce the agricultural labour force. It is likely that when labour is reduced affected households might move towards cultivation of smaller areas, and lesser demanding crops such as tubers, which have less nutritional value than cereals.

There is also loss of indigenous methods, intergenerational knowledge, specialized skill, practices of farming because HIV and AIDS deaths. AIDS also exacerbates the existing gender based land imbalances since widows are often dispossessed of their family land once their spouses die. The management of the disease also affects household direct purchasing power as they seek funds for medicines, transport to treatment centres. Increased orphanage and deaths of breadwinners increases the dependency ratio, thus reducing the savings available to invest in farming, this result in less money for purchase of food supplies thus compromising nutritional status of the communities. As Kavanang (2017) puts it, in the present food crisis, those affected by HIV and AIDS have been obviously found to be more vulnerable as their ability to withstand hunger has been severely compromised by their low health circumstances.

Zimbabwean crisis or Zimbabwe's lost decade, as different critics would have it, almost paralyzed the country's economy leading to food insecurity. Mlambo (2005) describes the Zimbabwean crisis as comprising sanctions, economic meltdown, climate change, droughts, land reform, elections and more. As such, this research acknowledges that effects of the fast track land reform may not be too easy to isolate from effects of the lost decade as a whole. Nonetheless, the fast track within the melting pot of the lost decade has impacted differently on multi-farious groups of people which have included, new farm owners (men and women), farm workers, children and the elderly.

Poverty is endemic among many communities in Zimbabwe and is made worse by climate change. In practical terms, poverty in these communities translates as food insecurity and the question that arose in the study was how traditional knowledge is being utilized to improve food security. And what emerges from the study is that the value of indigenous knowledge lies in its ability to deliver social and economic goods, Nyawo (2016). The study clearly shows that disregarding traditional knowledge can have negative effects on the environment. On the other hand, the use and application of appropriate traditional knowledge can promote environmental conservation of land, forests, grasslands and biodiversity as well as the management of disasters in disaster prevention, mitigation, recovery, prediction or early warning, preparedness, response and rehabilitation.

The study also shows that traditional knowledge can promote poverty alleviation through traditional food production and preservation and health care through traditional medicine practices. The role of indigenous knowledge in enhancing food production and reducing poverty is, therefore, an important question in the study of the impact of climate change, women and mitigation strategies, (Nyawo, 2016). To this end, to enhance capacity building towards food security the new administration has since empowered local leadership with some modicum of training of elements of life to highlight and enforce. Local leadership has also been boosted with which to move around to check on the people as they go on with their day to day activities. Mobility improvement with ensure that the leadership stays in control of their areas in-terms of the dos and the don'ts for the good of health and the environment.

The period of land reforms in Zimbabwe split households. Families were divided and no one had prepared these families for such a prompt split (Nyawo 2013). Interviews conducted during this research revealed that most women suffered immensely in the fast track because families got divided and women ended up with chores that were never theirs in the first place. Women suddenly found themselves having to herd cattle, plough the fields, milking the cows and skinning dead animals on top of their own responsibilities.

Since responsibilities were not shared, women felt overwhelmed, over-burdened and over-loaded all the way. In cases such as these some women decided to abscond, run away relocate, migrate and start afresh in areas where they were not known and better still where they did not experience such a burden (interview with women in Masvingo). This split was not good for agricultural activities because manpower was reduced, resources were split, skills divided and time lost in between transfers. For a good period production fell and food insecurity set in.

The impact of HIV and AIDS also cannot be over stated, the scourge has been devastating to say the least. Over 30 per cent of the population is affected, which has had a detrimental effect on the economy and caused increased pressure on health services. There is a lack of drugs and, in some cases, health staff in the country. HIV and AIDS have been destructive in that it has affected and continues to affect Zimbabwe across generations.

The pandemic affects the infected and the caregivers, the immediate family and the extended, the rural and the urban, the working and the non-working across gender. As such, bread winners and the dependent continue to be affected and putting food on the table is rendered problematic. The new dispensation has seen the First Lady engaging doctors, donors and

Angels of Hope to offer free accessible services to remote, vulnerable communities in order that health services reach everyone around Zimbabwe. When health is emphasized within a community, that translates to a healthy people who can then engage freely in other activities such as farming.

Thus while the crisis in Zimbabwe has been caused by a number of interlocking underlying factors, the symptomatic effect has been a growing food crisis, both in terms of absolute lack of food and lack of access to food. Emergency food security assessment concluded that some 6.7 million people amounting to 49 per cent of the population required emergency food aid up to March 2003, FEWS NET Food Security Alert, (2011).

In the rainy 2016-2017 farming season, most communities have been rendered inaccessible because of bad roads, pot-hole ridden roads, swept-away bridges, flooding low lying areas and broken infrastructure at large. In this particular season, bridges have been destroyed in a number of areas due to cyclone Dione. The broken bridges and swept away roads have meant that some communities cannot be reached with food and more, they cannot be reached in time with fertilizers for their crops and also they cannot take their own produce to markets before they expire.

Post 2000, 2005, 2007, 2013 and even the just ended 2018 elections challenges continue to create uncertainty. National elections were held in July 2013, and returned President Mugabe and the ZANU-PF party to power (Nyawo, 2015). President Mugabe resumed sole executive authority after these elections, which succeeded a government of national unity with Prime Minister Tsvangirai and the opposition MDC party over the previous 5 years. There was no international consensus regarding the fairness of these elections and Zimbabwe's resulting relations with western countries remains strained.

The curtailed re-engagement between the restored government and the international community increasingly reduce potential budgetary support at a dire time when revenue collection is constrained. Mnangagwa coming in at November 2017 stressed peaceful engagement, free and fair elections. He managed to convince all contesting parties to sign for peace and violent free elections. The peace has been conducive for all other activities to go on unhindered and this has included agriculture. Post the election of 2018 Zimbabwe has mandated Mnangagwa to lead the country. All hopes are tied on this man for a transition into a more food secure Zimbabwe. Security of food to all people at all times will necessarily guarantee security of most of other needs that Zimbabwe needs. A well fed nation, sustainably fed nation will see development through.

The dusk of Robert Mugabe's reign saw the introduction of policies such as indigenization of major economic sectors and other policies which have also compounded issues of capital flight. Challenges related to the implementation of policies such as these further impact macroeconomic issues. All of these factors adversely affected the government's ability to provide the required support to agriculture and will have an impact on food security issues for the current cropping season and future seasons if projections by the Zimbabwe Food Security Brief of March 2017 are anything to go by. Policies around indigenization have in this new dispensation started being reviewed so that they don't lead to investor flight.

## CONCLUSIONS

Zimbabwe remains especially vulnerable given the challenging macro-economic conditions. Once considered the breadbasket of the region, paradoxically Zimbabwe can no longer feed itself and poverty levels have increased over the last decade. Government needs to pay urgent attention to restoring agricultural productivity. Admittedly countless measures have been taken to mitigate hunger, famine and promote food security a lot remains to be done to assure the nation of a sustainable food security.

The government should refine its policy measures in support of former, retained and new farm workers. It should produce a coherent and integrated policy statement in consultation with relevant stakeholders and ensure that it is widely disseminated in relevant government ministries, throughout Rural District Councils and local government offices, among farm workers and their organisations, to new farmers and to Non – Governmental Organizations.

Appropriate indigenous knowledge to enhance food security should be engaged. As concluded and recommended by this research traditional knowledge can promote environmental conservation and management of disasters in disaster prevention, mitigation, recovery, prediction or early warning, preparedness, response and rehabilitation. Gender parity should be upheld so that no group of people is relegated on lines of gender. Funding, infrastructure, skills and the land itself should be availed going forward so that proper participation begins in full swing.

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