Food Security Status Report

Summary

- Three districts namely, Lunga in Luapula Province, Gwembe in Southern Province and Shang’ombo in Western Province were classified as being in the emergency phase by the Vulnerability Assessment Committee. However, this bulletin highlights the food security situation and responses in drought hit districts of Gwembe and Shang’ombo. Flooding contributed to the food insecurity situation in Lunga district whereas prolonged dry spells resulted in crop failure that affected food production in some parts of Gwembe and Shang’ombo districts.

- Relief efforts are ongoing in areas affected by the prolonged dry spells and floods during the 2018/2019 season as established by the vulnerability assessment (VA) outcome. Current relief activities have intensified and are being implemented in the affected areas by the Disaster Management and Mitigation Unit (DMMU) in collaboration with other stakeholders including the World Food Programme (WFP), World Vision (WV), Development Aid from People to People (DAPP), RED CROSS, CARITAS, World Renew and various faith based organizations. Relief aid provided include food stuffs and Emergency Cash Transfers (ECT). The relief activities are helping to cushion vulnerable households against deteriorating food security in areas identified by the VA.

- The supply of the main staple crop, maize, in most parts of Zambia has generally remained tighter than usual, pushing prices steeply upwards. Consequently, the price of mealie meal has risen above average. This upward trend in the price of maize grain and mealie meal is likely to continue until the main maize harvest period of April/May 2020.

- Between January and October 2019, the drawdown of maize grain by DMMU from the Food Reserve Agency (FRA) has been higher and more frequent, on average than other bad years. Western Province followed by Southern Province accounted for the largest share of the relief food distributed from January to October 2019 while the FRA community sales were highest in Southern Province. The ECT intervention is running alongside the existing Social Cash Transfer (SCT) programme with each beneficiary household entitled to ZMW 100 per month for six months.

- Delivery of relief supplies as well as agricultural inputs to Shang’ombo district in the Western Province remains a challenge due to the poor state of feeder roads and the rough terrain resulting in delayed deliveries. This emphasizes the importance for Government to prioritise investment in the Senanga - Shang’ombo road network to facilitate rapid response in times of humanitarian assistance as well as for the growth of private businesses in the district. In Munyumbwe agricultural camp of Gwembe, the limited number of agro-dealers affected timely access to inputs. Generally, land preparation was timely although input access remained a challenge, thus likely to negatively affect the current season’s production.

- The onset of rains in the 2019/2020 season has been mixed. While the onset of rains in the extreme north parts of the country was earlier than average, it was late for areas surrounding the central parts, from the west to the north, of the country. Rainfall activities in the southern parts of the country became erratic as the season progressed, with crops showing signs of moisture stress. Fall armyworm attacks on crops were reported in the early stages of crop development.
Introduction
Given the poor performance of rainfall in Western and Southern Province in the two previous consecutive seasons, it follows that these areas have a large number of people whose livelihoods have been negatively impacted. Out of the 2.3 million people projected to be food insecure between October 2019 and March 2020, Western and Southern Province accounted for the largest share, 27 percent and 22 percent, respectively. The food security situation in Gwembe and Shang’ombo districts of Southern and Western Province were classified as being in an emergency phase. A recent visit to the two districts revealed key issues surrounding relief efforts as well as the 2019/2020 seasonal progress. This food security status bulletin therefore gives an overview of relief responses and presents the status of Gwembe and Shang’ombo districts with regard to food security, relief efforts and preparations for the 2019/2020 agricultural production season.

Current Food Security Situation
The food security situation for some households in Gwembe and Shang’ombo districts remains of great concern due to limited availability of food as a result of crop failure in the previous season and resultant high food prices. In Shang’ombo, food accessibility is a challenge for those in more remote areas compared to those closer to the central business area. The poor road conditions leading to Shang’ombo remains one of the major contributors to poor food accessibility as suppliers shun away from reaching Shang’ombo preferring to deliver products only up to Sioma district, from where four-wheel vehicles have to be sourced to ferry the supplies into Shang’ombo district. This has been affecting the timely distribution of relief food as well as agricultural inputs.

School going children, in government and community schools, are receiving a meal through the school feeding programme jointly run by government, and the World Food Programme (WFP). However, absenteeism attributed to food insecurity was reported as some school children from distant areas could not attend school on a regular basis. To supplement and sustain the school feeding programme efforts, schools in Munyumbwe area of Gwembe are now running side projects such as legume production, goat rearing as well as poultry production.

Livestock rearing households continue to sell their animals at below average prices due to the poor livestock conditions as well as the need to raise cash to meet immediate food needs and access farming inputs. In Gwembe district, small ruminants such as goats are being sold for ZMW 90 - 150 per goat, a 64 to 100 percent below the average price of ZMW 250 – 300. Similarly, farm-gate prices for chickens are between ZMW 20 – 30 per bird which is about half the normal price. Cattle which typically sells for ZMW 1000 – 3000 per animal (depending on size) has been selling between ZMW 500 – 1200. Similar to Gwembe, the price of village chickens (ZMW 15 – 30) is about half of the normal price (ZMW 25 – 40) in Shang’ombo.

Staple Food Prices
Given the tight maize supply in the 2019/2020 consumption season following the 2018/2019 crop failure in parts of the southern half, maize prices have been exceptionally high during the course of the 2019/2020 marketing season. Record high maize prices have continued being recorded in all parts of the country with notably steep increases in the August to October months. In Gwembe, maize grain prices rose by 41 percent, from ZMW 175 per 50 kg bag in the third quarter to ZMW 248 at the end of November while prices in Shang’ombo rose by 33 percent (Figure 1). As at the end of November, breakfast and roller meal prices were at ZMW 145 and 130 per 25 kg bag, respectively marking a 16 and 9 percent increase between September and November period (Figure 2 and 3). The tight supply of maize grain has contributed to the increased maize grain prices. Most of the maize being accessed by households is from the FRA community sales in these districts which is pegged at ZMW 111 per 50 kg.

Part of the Senanga-Shang’ombo road (Nov,2019)
Figure 1. Maize Grain Nominal Prices Per 50 Kg Bag

Source: CSO and IAPRI field surveillance (2019)

Figure 2. Nominal Breakfast Meal Price Per 25 Kg Bag

Source: CSO and IAPRI field surveillance (2019)

Figure 3. Nominal Roller Meal Price Per 25 Kg bag

Source: CSO and IAPRI field surveillance (2019)
Overview of Relief Food Efforts

With the exceptionally high prices of staple food as supply remains low and given reduced income from livestock sales, vulnerable households are finding it hard to access adequate food and are looking to Government for relief food to help meet their needs. Between January and October 2019, about 56,107 MT of maize grain was drawn from the National Strategic Food Reserves (NSFR) by the DMMU for food assistance (Figure 4). Western Province accounted for the largest share, (13,300 MT), of relief maize distributed followed by Southern Province (10,100 MT), Central (7,300 MT) and Eastern (7,230 MT). In addition to relief maize, the FRA has made maize grain available at a below market price of ZMW 111 per 50Kg through community sales to vulnerable households which is also accessible to education and health institutions running feeding programmes in the areas. The total volume of maize grain the FRA sold through community sales was 86,175 MT. Figure 5 shows that Southern Province was the largest beneficiary of the community sales at 11,481 MT followed by Western Province at 4,422 MT. The largest quantities were sold in the Southern Province districts of Monze, Namwala, Kalomo and Choma (Figure 6).

The DMMU relief food is mainly in form of a mealie meal. Interactions with some of the affected households revealed that some recipients had to further share their bags with other vulnerable non-recipient households in the community indicating the inadequacy of the relief food and limited cover.

Figure 5. FRA community sales by province (MT), Jan-Oct 2019.
age. This situation has prompted a number of Non-Government Organizations (NGOs), Faith Based Organizations (FBOs) and United Nations (UN) agencies to step in and supplement government efforts by providing logistical support and food commodities such as mealie meal, salt, beans and cooking oil as well as Emergency Cash Transfers. These organizations include WFP, UNICEF, DFID, World Vision, DAPP, World Renew and various Church bodies, among others. The Ministry of Community Development and Social Services (MCDSS) has been providing food security packs to vulnerable households. The packs being distributed this time around do not include any maize seed but made up of legume seeds (beans and groundnuts) which is commendable. However, the number of target beneficiaries in Gwembe has declined compared to the previous year from 500 to about 310. In addition, MCDSS will provide goats and chickens to the same beneficiaries under a pass-on arrangement tailored towards building resilience for households in the medium- to long-term. In both districts, the ECT will be implemented alongside the SCT programme. For the ECT, each beneficiary household will receive ZMW 100 per month for a period of six months. Other efforts to build the resilience of the farming community include crop insurance through the R4 Rural Resilience Project in some agricultural camps spearheaded by WFP.

Progression of the Season

Rainfall Performance

Figure 7 shows that the 2019/2020 start of season anomaly was mixed (ZMD, 2019). For the extreme northern parts of the country in areas around Mwinilunga and Kaputa, rains set in 10-20 days earlier including areas around Kalabo district of Western Province. But, there was a 10 day delay for most areas in central Zambia. Further, much of Eastern province and Muchinga including a few areas in North-Western Province had the onset delayed by up to 20 days. As the season progressed, rainfall activity in most areas in the southern region remained erratic resulting in stressed crop conditions and fall armyworm outbreaks.

Figure 7. Start of Season Anomaly

Source: ZMD (2019)
The outlook for 2020 points to improved soil moisture conditions in January. This may result in the recovery of stressed crops and sustain growth in most parts of the country with the exception of some parts of the southern region. For example, in parts of Choma, Kalomo, Kazungula, Mwandi, Livingstone, and Sinanzongwe, some crops are unlikely to recover from the soil moisture stress, even with the expected improvement in rainfall activities in January as highlighted by ZMD.

**Input supply and crop condition**
The Farmer Input Support Programme (FISP) was reported to be slow this season in some areas of Gwembe and Shang’ombo. At the time of the field visit in November, about 75 percent (3,313 out of the targeted 4,400) of the farmers in Gwembe had managed to deposit the required ZMW 400. This is lower than the same period in the previous season. Most farmers that failed to make the deposit had limited liquidity due to last season’s bad harvest and the little money they had was being used to purchase food. Only an estimated 69 percent of the 3,313 farmers for the entire district of Gwembe had redeemed the inputs by the 28th of November 2019.

Preparations for the 2019/2020 agricultural season began early with most households having their land ready for planting by November and timely planting had been done. The field visit to Gwembe revealed that the main crop, maize, had germinated and farmers had been advised to stagger the planting and plant different varieties. However, in parts of the district such as Munyumbwe, access to agricultural inputs was still a challenge due to the limited number of agrodealers stocking the required inputs. Moreover, some farmers were reported to have been using inputs from the previous season which they never utilized due to poor rainfall in the 2018/2019 agricultural season. Otherwise, germination as well as the crop stand was good for those that had planted already. Reports of fall armyworms were made early way before the maize grain reached knee high. Chemicals available then were distributed and farmers were encouraged to redeem the necessary chemicals from the FISP package. Those that had not yet redeemed their inputs resorted to selling some of their livestock - chickens and goats, mostly to buy the appropriate chemicals. The fall armyworm outbreak has now become widespread in districts of the Southern Province.

Similar to Gwembe, the onset of the rains in some parts of Shang’ombo was reported to be early this season and land preparation was completed at the time of the field visit. However access to farming inputs was also a major challenge and some farmers were using left-over inputs for maize and millet from last season.

Although the target for FISP is only one hundred farmers, farming inputs were not in as of November 29th, while only 69 farmers managed to deposit the required ZMW 400 despite extension of the deposit deadline by 30 days. In the past, some farmers have resorted to using relief maize as seed which is not the case this season as relief is in the form of mealie meal.

**Efforts to Build Resilience against Livelihood Shocks**
Efforts are underway to help build resilience for farming households in Gwembe district such as encouraging farmers to adopt climate smart agricultural practices. To hasten adoption, the Ministry of Agriculture (MoA) has distributed agricultural implements such as fitarelli and magoye rippers to identified lead farmers.

Irrigation projects are also gaining traction. Under the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Strengthening Climate Resilience of Agricultural Livelihoods in Agro-Ecological Regions I and II in Zambia Project, there are a number of mini-irrigation schemes that are being set up. Boreholes will be sunk and solar systems installed. In addition, through the Agriculture Productivity and Market Enhanced Project (APMEP) about 297 hectares in Chabbobombo agricultural camp will be under irrigation. The project is also promoting aquaculture through cage fish farming to encourage diversification among farmers. Value addition equipment such as solar dryers, oil extraction and peanut butter making machines have been distributed to cooperatives. APMEP is also implementing a livestock pass-on programme for dairy animals.

In Shang’ombo district, other livelihood alternatives like fishing are prominent along the rivers in the district. However, there is no inland river and this has limited the number of rural households engaged in fishing. Through the Pilot Programme for Climate Resilience (PPCR) Project, there has been a number of upcoming integrated fish farming projects in all the 12 wards in the district in addition to goat production and breeding programmes.

**Conclusion and Recommendations**
Generally, the humanitarian response to the food insecurity situation continued to gain momentum towards the end of the
year, with a combination of relief food distribution, community maize grain sales by FRA and social cash transfers (both regular and emergency cash transfer). These efforts have cushioned the affected rural households against hunger. In Southern Province, the volume of maize grain sold via FRA community sales has been higher than that distributed as relief food whereas the opposite is the case in Western Province. Livestock prices have been lower than usual signaling desperate sales in order to buy food stuffs, thereby moderating the decline in the purchasing power in the two districts of Gwembe and Shang’ombo. Apart from food items, revenue from livestock sales has further played a crucial role in the acquisition of farming inputs.

Although maize harvest saw a drastic decline in the previous agricultural season, it remains the preferred food crop among farming households. This is owing to the fact that it is the main staple and is easily traded to generate income, which has been limited this marketing season due to reduced harvest. The liquidity problem has negatively affected the ability of farmers to afford farming inputs during the current agricultural season. Moreover, total recovery from the effects of the 2018/2019 weather shocks and livestock diseases on rural livelihoods will take some time. Thus, food aid and ECT assistance from government and other stakeholders remain vital to prevent the current hunger situation in Gwembe and Shang’ombo from deteriorating further.

To foster resilience among farming households, there is a need to prioritize investments in road infrastructure in places like Shang’ombo. This will to open up such districts to more investment opportunities that can facilitate timely access to agricultural inputs and rapid response to counter the effects of shocks as a result of unfavorable weather conditions. To help the affected households rebuild their livelihoods, there is need to extend and expand the FSP as well as ECTs.

The large maize grain drawdown from the strategic grain reserve by DMMU and higher volumes of community sales implies low FRA stock carryover into the next marketing season. This is not a major problem if the country could start discussions on how to implement a cocktail of solutions that will help trigger supply response from small, medium and large-scale farmers. These options include purchasing a maize option from ZAMACE or other regional commodity exchanges such as SAFEX to meet any projected strategic grain reserve shortfall, production of early maize through guaranteed contracts with commercial farmers with irrigation and intensifying efforts for the country to produce winter maize crop. For Zambia to sustainably remain food secure, open maize border policy should be regarded as part of the solution because in times of shortfall, guarantees that borders will remain open triggers supply response among farmers who wish to produce and earn higher prices or traders who may want to fill the gap through well timed imports. A stop and go maize production and marketing approach will continue to hamper Zambia’s ability to be the region’s maize grain supplier.

To establish the effectiveness of current relief efforts, and draw lessons for future interventions, there will be need to do a quick assessment to review the country performance. This review entails revisiting the same households identified as vulnerable by the DMMU and targeted with relief food. The review will help determine whether the current food relief responses are effective in addressing food insecurity, and help inform future interventions. The proposed review will require a multi-stakeholder approach to mobilize resources, data collection and analysis.

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Main Authors
Alefa Banda, IAPRI Research Associate
Brian Mulenga, IAPRI Research Fellow

Editors
Antony Chapoto, IAPRI Research Director

References
Image taken between Shang’ombo and Seranga (November 2019)