

# An Assessment Of Challenges Of Relying On Food Aid As A Hunger Alleviating Strategy In Mutare District In Manicaland Province Of Zimbabwe: A Case For Ward 29

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**Abstract:** This study was designed to assess the challenges of relying on food aid as a hunger alleviating strategy in ward 29 of Mutare District. The main research instrument that was used to collect primary data for the study is a questionnaire, distributed to forty six (46) households. Five (5) interviews were done with five (5) headmen of different villages. Two focus group discussions were done with an average of six respondents per group. The research was conducted April and August 2013. The results showed that food aid, as a hunger alleviating strategy has a lot of challenges. Dependency was the major challenge faced by the people in ward 29 due to availability of food aid. The villagers reduced farming activities arguing that it was yielding nothing. Although the small grains can be effectively grown in the area, the villagers have abandoned them arguing that even though they can be used for household consumption they attract less money on the market. The study recommend that in order to reduce vulnerability to hunger, the aid implementers must also give the villagers survival skills and resources to generate food and not just give food in order to reduce the dependence syndrome.

**Keywords:** Food aid hunger alleviation, Farming activities, Survival skills, Dependence syndrome.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

One of the major hazards that affect many parts of the world since the twentieth century is hunger. This is due to a combination of drought and political instability which is affecting the economic environment. In order to fulfill the human right and the need in food deficit areas, the government of Zimbabwe is making a lot of efforts to reduce vulnerability to hunger through, among other things, food aid.

Food has been distributed in some areas for periods spanning to more than 10 years. Such interventions have really saved lives and reduced suffering. However, it is vital to note that food aid has devastating effects if a community solely depends on it. Shelton (2005) noted that there are concerns that if food aid is implemented over prolonged periods to the same communities it causes disincentives in food production and ultimately dependency. On the other hand food aid is essential since it is an immediate solution to the problem of hunger.

According to the WFP (1998) food aid refers to food assistance that is granted to governments, institutions or households to curb food shortages. It may be a government to government grant to make food importation cheaper or it may be a government or NGO grant or donation to another NGO for free distribution. Food obtained through NGOs arrangement may be accessed by households through general food distribution, vulnerable groups feeding, supplementary feeding, food for work or the recently introduced food for assets.

As highlighted by Shelton (2005), the general objective of food aid is to help support food security by addressing problems arising from food shortages or deficits whether they are caused by structural deficiencies or crisis situations calling for emergency actions. The long term objective is to prevent crises and to correct structural deficiencies by

supporting overall development and taking actions aimed directly at vulnerable groups. In this context food aid plays a positive role, whether it is supplied as food stuffs or through use of counterpart funds generated through local sales.

The effectiveness of food aid should be assessed against its impact in support of the Millennium Development Goal (MDG) number one which is to eradicate extreme hunger and poverty. It should therefore focus on saving lives, fulfilling a human right to food including that it should be nutritionally adequate, protecting assets especially human health and facilitate growth of productive assets where food availability and local market performance are limited.

Shelton (2005) further stated that the original objective of food aid is to alleviate poverty and hunger for the most vulnerable groups' and consistent with agricultural development in those countries experiencing hunger. According to Barrett (2006), the core intent of food aid is plainly to relieve human suffering. He pointed out that about half the world's population live on less than \$2 per day and about 800 million go to sleep hungry on any given day, a child dies of hunger every 5 seconds and that the need to respond to the poor's need is ever present and widespread.

A number of challenges are encountered in using food aid as a hunger alleviating strategy. These challenges are felt by either the implementing organizations or the recipients. One of the challenges is that food aid can be used as a convenient way to dispose surpluses and to circumvent disciplines on export subsidization. Gisele and Morduch (2002) noted that there is compelling evidence that this has often been the case over the past three decades. This is certainly clear in the case of the private sector. The United States of America (USA) agriculture industry groups often consider food aid as a means of surplus disposal and market expansion. For example, the USA rice industry views food aid as a critical escape route at times when prices are low and production is abundant.

It is against this background that this research seeks to assess the challenges of relying on food aid as a measure to alleviate hunger in Mutare District ward 29. It is hypothesized that some challenges are faced during selection of the beneficiaries and that the implementation of the food aid project as well as the continuation of food provision to the same beneficiaries for a long period will negatively impact on the villager's ability to generate own food.

## 2. METHOD

### 2.1 Study Area:

Mutare District is found in Manic land Province. The District lies north of the Bvumba Mountains and south of the Imbeza Valley. It can be divided into 2 thus east and west which are Zimunya and Marange respectively. Zimunya stretches from the Eastern side thus from Odzi River to Save River. The ward, Mukwada can be categorized under region 4 and 5 of the 5 agro-ecological regions in Zimbabwe. The dominant natural factor conditioning agricultural production is climate especially rainfall. Utete (2003) stated that these natural regions reflect the range from high to low quality of land and rainfall and crop production progressively deteriorate from region 1 to region 5. The ward is generally not suitable for cropping. Rainfall is erratic and generally 500mm per annum. The rainfall pattern creates extensive variability in agricultural potential yet agriculture is the major activity in the ward hence the existence of hunger and the need for food aid.

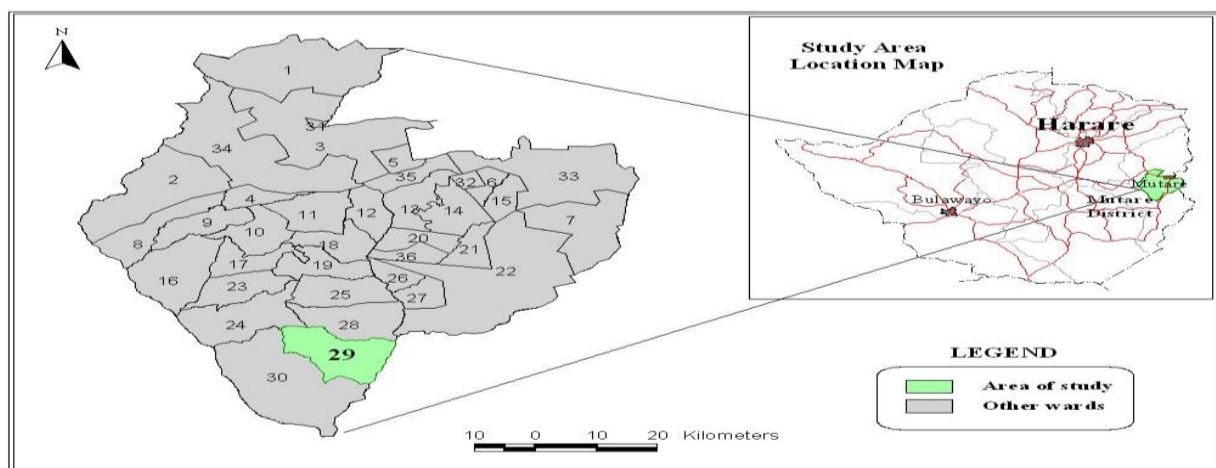


Figure 2.1 Map of the Study Area – Mukwada ward 29 (Mutare District)

## 2.2 Research Design:

A multi-method research methodology was adopted in this research that is the research used both quantitative and qualitative methods. This was done in order to gather all the data that is necessary for this research since the use of a single method often fails to explore all the components that the research is focusing on. Quantitative data is essential since it is statistics driven and can provide a lot of information. It makes it easier to compile the data onto a chart or graph because of the numbers that are made available (Word press, 2011).

Qualitative data was also used in carrying out this research. It emphasizes on the importance of looking at variables in the natural setting in which they are found. Interaction between variables is also important. Detailed data is gathered through open ended questions that provide direct quotations.

The use of both quantitative and qualitative research is essential in this research since it helps the research to fill in gaps that are left out by one method using the other. For instance with qualitative research it will be easier to gain a better understanding of the target market because the types of questions that are asked during the research process begin with the word why. Dercon and Krishman (2001) mentioned that why is a much more powerful word than when, how much, and what that are used in quantitative research. Therefore the combination of these two methods helps the researcher to come up with first class data.

## 2.3 Sampling Strategy:

Sampling involves getting a certain percentage of the population from which to gather data the results of which then can be generalized for the population. The chosen sample should therefore represent the population. A two stage sampling design was done for the questionnaire survey. The first stage was to sample the villages. Systematic sampling of villages was crucial in order to ensure that villages with different socio economic characteristics were sampled so as to ultimately have a fair representation of the population. The second and final stage was random sampling of respondents from a beneficiary register provided by Plan International. The two stage sampling design sought to minimize sampling errors and bias by ensuring that the sample was as representative as possible.

All the ten villages in Mukwada ward have benefited from the WFP/Plan International food aid programme from 2002 to date. Five villages were systematically selected from the sampling frame of 10 representing 50%. This was done to ensure that the selected villages are scattered evenly throughout the area of study. It also ensured that all micro characteristics were represented.

**Table 2.2 Questionnaire Respondents, N=46**

Village Name	Total number of households	Sample size
Mukuze	113	11
Tandanai	80	8
Mukwada	101	10
Maenzanise	77	7
Chirara	100	10

Table 2.2 shows that a higher population sample was taken from villages with high population. This is proportional sampling which was done in order to ensure that there was fair representation of the population in the sample. The questionnaires were given to the household heads. This was done to ensure that correct information was collected from breadwinners who had adequate knowledge on the prevalence of hunger in their families. Some of the questions included in the questionnaire were the period one has been a beneficiary, the reasons why one was chosen, the sources of food of the families and the challenges resulting from food aid. The questionnaires were administered by the researcher who moved from one village to the other during the day.

The participants for the FGDs were selected using purposive sampling. Purposive sampling as defined by Shapori and Rosen (2004) is a non-representative subset of some larger population, and is constructed to serve a very specific need or purpose. In this case, the researcher chose the most influential people in the ward. These consist of the councilor, kraal

heads, village heads, village community workers, AGRITEX workers, business people and other influential people in the ward. However, it was not possible to specify the population since they were not all known, and access was also difficult. The researcher attempted to zero in on the target group, interviewing whoever was available.

The focus group discussions were conducted with heterogeneous members who were of different age groups, sex and economic status. The research involved two FGDs, with an average of six respondents per group. The targeted interviewees for the household included in the sample, were respondents who had shown their willingness to take part in the study after a brief description of the study by the researcher, which, according to Fals-Borda (1991), is democratic participation. The researcher explained the aims and objectives of the study and described the expected outcomes. Five interview sessions were held with five village heads who are also beneficiaries of the food aid programme in ward 29 of Mutare District.

#### **2.4 Secondary data collection:**

Secondary data from periodic and evaluation reports of the WFP, Plan International and government departments such as the Ministry of Women Affairs, Gender and Community Development were also used both as an alternative source and as a complementary source. They provided quantitative data on the magnitude of the food aid in terms of number of beneficiaries, the percentage of the total population targeted and quantities of food distributed. The specific objectives, activities and achievements were also analyzed in terms of whether due attention was given to enhancing the capacities of the community to be self-sufficient and self-reliant.

### **3. RESULTS**

#### **3.1 Challenges of the adopted selection criteria:**

The selection criteria adopted by WFP/Plan food aid programme, although it was effective it has its own weaknesses. Although the selection criteria was effective not every villager was able to benefit from the programme since there was always a targeted number of beneficiaries. This implies that once the number of targeted beneficiaries had been reached the selection for that particular village will discontinue. This did not effectively alleviate hunger since the targeted number was usually reached before incorporating all the vulnerable people in the village.

It was also found out that the number of beneficiaries vary from village to village due to the number of people who dwell in that village. This means that those villages with high population had a higher number of beneficiaries. This was because from the analysis made every year by ZIMVAC, it was discovered that villages with more people were having more beneficiaries in order to promote equity in the food aid programme (Government of Zimbabwe, 2005).

Another weakness of the selection criteria is bias. The criterion was based on the assumption that households would be fair in choosing beneficiaries. However the case was different since there was a lot of bias. Some of the beneficiaries were selected by other respondents because they had better relations. In situations like these, others could not rebuke it since they were afraid of reprisals.

#### **3.2 Challenges faced during implementation of programme and distribution of food:**

NGOs face a number of challenges in the implementation of their programmes. This is because they operate in environments with different socio-economic and political characteristics. One of the challenges noted during this research is that, they suffer from both internal and external pressures from local politicians and the state. Interviews revealed that NGOs succumbed to pressure and ended up implementing the program in other wards where the programme was supposed to be implemented at a later stage or was not supposed to be implemented during the given season. This happens in wards that are strongholds of certain political parties.

Another challenge faced by WFP and other agencies is difficult in decision making on what aid to provide to whom, and whether or when to withdraw. This means that the staff on the ground often has to make decisions on immediate responses. Subsequently, WFP generally informs the international community (donors) of its estimates of food aid requirements in areas to which it has access, and individual donor governments decide whether and to what extent to support particular operations. With an ever-increasing proportion of donor contributions being ear-marked, it is donors who decide on allocations and WFP has little discretion for the provision of assistance according to its own assessments

of relative need between different countries, areas or population groups. The programme is thereby exposed to accusations of being a tool for donor governments' foreign policies.

Corruption is another challenge faced by the people in communities when distribution of food is underway. Usually the food is transported by WFP and government trucks provided by GMB. These are left under the custody of local leadership who assign a guard for the whole night that the truck will spend at the food distribution point (FDP). These chiefs and headmen are the ones who bribe the guards whom they assign to guard the food. Some of the food is diverted to their houses and they end up selling them to the same people who are supposed to be given that same food for free. When asked to give comments during interviews, the local leadership denied the allegations arguing that people always look for false accusations in every situation. However, the WFP and Plan staff highlighted that there had been such cases in the past where some of the headmen were arrested on such allegations.

### **3.3 Endurance of Food Aid:**

The continued existence of food aid in Mukwada is controversial in the field of development. It can be argued that although food aid can continue to exist for as long as there is hunger in the area it cannot yield effective results but rather continue to worsen the dependency syndrome that already exists in the area. It is vital to note that food aid is an emergency relief that does not offer long lasting but immediate solutions hence the argument that its endurance might fail to yield effective results.

Mukwada ward is among the driest and least productive areas in Mutare District. This means that during times of food shortages the area experiences the worst hunger in the district hence there is need for continuity of aid provision in the area. However, when asked about the future of food aid in their area, the villagers in Mukwada area seemed not to be sure. More than half of the reached people expressed their concern noting that they are not sure whether food aid is going to continue because there has been a significant decrease in the number of beneficiaries from the time it started to date.

In line with the above argument, one of the interviewed headmen also expressed his concern on the endurance of food aid saying that when the programme started back in 2002 they used to benefit every household in a village but now the number of beneficiaries has significantly fall from at least 100 households to around 40 households per village. On this note, ZIMVAC (2012) commented that number of beneficiaries is based on the food security assessments they make every year therefore people who receive food aid in a particularly year will be the worst affected by hunger in that particular year.

However, the villagers in Mukwada ward are finding it difficult to understand the outcomes of the ZIMVAC Assessments arguing that they are the ones, who are experiencing hunger hence, are the ones who are supposed to give the numbers of beneficiaries to the government who will give the aid providers.

### **3.4 Ability to Sustain Without Food Aid:**

The ability of people in Mukwada ward to sustain without food aid is controversial given the fact that their main source of food is agriculture which highly depends on climatic conditions which are unfavourable in the area. Technological advancement can be of much importance but the problem is the inability of the people to access it. They also lack knowledge on how to use it. This leaves livelihood diversification as the only panacea for people to sustain without food aid. Livelihood diversification enables villagers of ward 29 to recover from shocks and stresses of climate change.

### **3.5 Villagers Perceptions on Food Aid:**

Food aid has rescued a lot of villagers from hunger in every ward where it was implemented in the country as a whole. This has a very big impact on the villagers' perceptions on the programme. Most of the villagers in Mukwada ward believe that food aid is one of the best programmes that have been implemented in the country. They argued that the strength of a nation lies in the ability of that nation to feed its people.

However, the people seem to be ignoring the negatives of the programme. They highlighted that whatever the negatives associated with food aid are, they highly recognize and appreciate the important role that has been played by the programme in their area. The reduction in the prevalence of hunger and improvement in nutritional status is what they appreciate most.



#### 4. CONCLUSION

The research has managed to establish that negative dependency is one of the major challenges of relying on food aid. It usually occurs if rigorous assessments are not done prior to implementation, when it does not target the most vulnerable thereby including undeserving cases and excluding deserving cases, when it is implemented at the wrong time and if the quantities given are more than the requirements. The study has also found out that negative dependency on food aid is also occurring because aid is given over a long period of time to the same communities. Even though these same people are the most vulnerable it has been noted that they are not putting any effort to fight their vulnerability relying on food aid.

In addition, it has also been noted that the chief weakness of food aid programmes is that they offer short-term relief and yet it has long-term negative effects such as crippling the people as they can no longer be self-sustainable but become more and more dependent on the food aid providers. This dependence syndrome is very dangerous as it means that in the long run such communities cannot live without assistance, thus adding to their vulnerability and worse still, there is room for exploitation and manipulation. Food aid does not promote agricultural growth thereby affecting peoples' livelihoods negatively; it gives the people a short term sense of food security.

#### 5. RECOMMENDATIONS

Food aid should be coupled with direct support to livelihood strategies. Inputs for food crops which are suitable for the region such as drought resistant small grains of mhunga, rapoko and millet should be distributed to beneficiaries when they receive their food rations. Households need to abstain from concentrating on producing maize crop which is unsuitable because of harsh climatic conditions.

Vulnerability assessments should continue, the most vulnerable should be targeted, monitored and to guard against inclusion and exclusion errors, the rations should be appropriate and adequate. Interventions should be done timely in order to discourage negative dependency.

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