

Market Reforms, Research Policies And SADCC Food Security



Edited by

Mandivamba Rukuni & J.B. Wyckoff

University of Zimbabwe UZ/MSU Food Security Research in Southern Africa Project

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Published by:

UZ/MSU Food Security Research in Southern Africa Project
Department of Agricultural Economics and Extension
University of Zimbabwe
May 1991

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UZ/MSU Food Security Research in Southern Africa Project
Department of Agricultural Economics and Extension
University of Zimbabwe
P.O. Box MP 167
Mount Pleasant, Harare, Zimbabwe
Telex 26580 UNIVZ ZW
Fax 263-4-732828
Telephone 303211 Ext.1516

ISBN Number 0-7974-1000-7
UNIVERSITY OF ZIMBABWE 1991

This publication reflects the views of the authors alone and
not necessarily those of the University of Zimbabwe
or Michigan State University.

Typesetting and page layout:
Daphne Chanakira and Florence Chitepo

Originated by:
Lucas Photolitho

Produced by:
Print Brokers, Box CH 113, Chisipite,
Tel: 796996

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Taking Stock of Regional Food Security After Ten Years of SADCC

Dr W.P.M. Mangwende¹

The Southern Africa Development Coordination Conference (SADCC) has now reached its tenth year. This is a most suitable occasion to take stock of what has been achieved so far and what still remains to be done. For the purposes of this Conference, my task is to consider these issues in relation to the food security situation in the region.

All ten SADCC countries are heavily dependent on agriculture. This sector provides not only national and household food security but is the major source of employment for the people of the region. It generates foreign exchange in the net agricultural exporting countries and achieves large import savings in the other countries.

It is this dominant role of agriculture in the economy of the region which led the Heads of SADCC states to agree to develop regional action programmes for seven agricultural sub-sectors. It is the action programme dealing with food security, which is the responsibility of Zimbabwe, that is the focus for this Conference. The primary objective of this programme was initially to increase food production in order to improve nutritional levels of rapidly expanding populations.

Cereal production has been increasing but at a slower rate than population growth. This means that, in spite of an increase in cereal imports into the region, there has been a decline in the *per capita* availability of cereals within the region as a whole.

It was agreed in the initial stages that the long term solution to ensuring an adequate supply of food could be achieved only within a broad agricultural development framework involving improved rural infrastructure, more agricultural research and improved training and extension services. The food security programme has expanded to meet these wider goals.

¹Minister of Lands, Agriculture and Rural Resettlement.

The major strategies that have been identified to achieve the SADCC food security objectives are:-

- the development of food production capacity together with the expansion of cash crops and other farm enterprises;
- the improvement of agricultural infrastructure particularly input supplies, storage, transport, processing and financing;
- programmes to control major crop and livestock pests and diseases;
- the expansion of manpower skills;
- the growth of trade within the SADCC region; and,
- the effective exchange of technical and economic information within the region.

These strategies fully recognise that food production would not and could not develop equally among SADCC member states. Some countries simply do not possess the natural resource base to achieve national food self-sufficiency. Others have faced constraints that have prevented them realising their full agricultural potential. At the same time, a few member countries are not only self sufficient but produce a surplus for export. The food security programme must be designed to accommodate these widely differing situations in order to provide maximum benefit for the SADCC region as a whole.

However a policy of food self-sufficiency, either for an individual country or for the SADCC region as a whole, does not automatically lead to food security. Food security should be seen as a situation in which all people have access to enough food in order to live a normal, active and healthy life. This definition focuses on the two distinct aspects of food security -- firstly, the availability of food throughout the region and, secondly, the ability of individual households to acquire the food they need.

In its early years, the SADCC food security programme concentrated on the food availability issue. Food production research, grain storage and the early warning system were the dominant themes. At the level of its regional responsibility, the programme is still concerned mainly with the stabilisation of supply -- to make sure that each member State can get enough basic food. The Regional Early Warning System, now producing regular quarterly bulletins on production prospects, will soon be extended to identify more clearly those who suffer from food insecurity.

On the supply side, the programme will complete its evaluation of the region's agricultural resource base. The programme will carry out a general review among all member States of technical production resources, the application of resources, production incentives, *etc.*, to see how production can best be raised to meet the

regional demand. This work will be supported by investigation and dissemination of techniques which will help to ensure that needed production is achieved. The programme will be working to improve input supply, evaluate irrigation potential for improved food security and expand seed production.

A review of the regional strategy for agriculture and natural resources will introduce an environmental component intended to ensure that activities to increase production are sustainable. A system to begin to control migrant pests is also being set up.

More recently, however, poverty and the consequent lack of access to food, with the resultant unacceptable levels of hunger and malnutrition, have increasingly become major areas of concern for the programme.

In Zimbabwe, however, we are moving towards solving the problem of food access at the individual household level. A National Consultative Workshop on Food, Nutrition and Agricultural Policy was sponsored recently jointly by my Ministry, the Nutrition Unit of the Ministry of Health and the Food Security Research Project of the University. This workshop brought together senior people from the relevant Ministries and related food and nutrition agencies to examine the problem of household food security and malnutrition as it exists in this country. The recommendations of this workshop should be of considerable value in designing policies to protect the more vulnerable groups of people in our society. This is an approach which I would commend to other SADCC member states. We still have much to learn ourselves and would be glad to exchange ideas and experiences in order to benefit from the lessons that have been learned in other countries. It is one of the main roles of the Food Security Programme to disseminate conclusions from such activities for even wider discussion and analysis and consideration of the implications.

The Food Security Programme will be working more on the problems of access, initially through a regional food security Training Programme to be put to SADCC in 1991. This programme will concentrate on knowledge-sharing among member States on the many programmes now being tried to support the chronically underfed and the victims of transitory food crises. The Food Security Programme has also been instructed to develop and promote activities that would reduce dependency on aid.

Other SADCC countries facing similar problems of food insecurity at the household level, must design policies with similar objectives using policy instruments which take into account the particular economic, social and physical circumstances of the country in question. Botswana, for example, has developed policies which explicitly recognise the difficulties of national food self sufficiency in that country. They have implemented policies designed to ensure that all people in their country have access to a calorie-adequate diet. This has evolved into pula-for-work-programmes, supplementary feeding programmes, feeding underweight school children, more general school feeding programmes, as well as food production programmes through

supplementary irrigation. These programmes have been studied with great interest by other SADCC members to determine their usefulness in their own countries. Mr. Chairman, I would urge other SADCC member States to emulate Botswana and put such programmes into operation in their respective countries.

On the demand-side, the regional food security programme will be working to identify and disseminate means of raising rural incomes through the introduction of cash crops and farm and village-level processing and marketing practices, emphasising those techniques which preserve the shelf-life of home grown foods or enhance its nutritional quality.

So where are we now with regard to regional food security after ten years of SADCC?

Even with two of our member States devastated by war and huge refugee problems, the region has achieved virtual self-sufficiency in the major staple foods -- indeed the most recent estimate is that, in the current year, regional supplies will be about 104 percent of requirements. This does not mean, however, that the problem of food insecurity in the SADCC is solved. The figure of 104 percent self-sufficiency masks the fact that only three of the countries in the region are producing sufficient food for their own needs together with sufficient surplus to cover the deficits of the remaining member states.

This, however does not imply that now is the time to rest on the laurels of what has been accomplished. Our population continues to grow, we are still beset by uncertain rainfall and not all pests and diseases are under control. We still need to strengthen policies designed to increase food availability. We must also take the necessary steps to ensure that our people have access to that food which may be available.

This apparent surplus also disguises extensive chronic under-nutrition in even the surplus grain producing countries. It also disguises the steady decline in the *per capita* availability of cereals at a time when rapid urbanisation demands more.

In spite of our huge and under-utilised production capacity, the region presently is importing about 1,5 million tonnes of cereals in an attempt to stabilise average consumption (now gross 154kg *per capita*). To maintain this level of consumption, we will have to increase our production at an annual rate of four percent, even if we sustain the present level of imports. This new target has to be compared to the average 1,4 percent *per annum* growth in cereal production over the last 14 years.

We have the resources to do this, but, as these figures show, we have not been applying those resources. We cannot afford this any longer and we must, from now on, provide our farmers with supporting infrastructure and appropriate incentives. We must improve our management of surplus production and shift the surplus to the deficit areas. The Food Security Programme will be encouraging even more

cooperation than before between member states to coordinate these surpluses and to establish a reserve for the bad years.

This conference should not, however, be an entirely inward looking one. The question of food security in this region is not just a matter for each individual member state, or even for SADCC alone. There is a new mood of international cooperation in relation to the achievement of food security for all countries throughout the world on a scale that has not been seen before. The growing recognition at the global level of the need to achieve equitable and sustained development, and thus eradicate continuing widespread poverty which is at the root of food insecurity at the household level, is a development that needs to be nurtured and encouraged.

We have to bear in mind that traditional surplus suppliers, who have provided the region with large quantities of food aid in the past, are starting to reduce subsidies to their own farmers. We must expect that these traditional sources, which are still providing much of our growing imports, will begin to be reduced. We need a constructive dialogue both within the SADCC region and between SADCC states and the developed countries on effective measures to end food insecurity once and for all in our region. We need to establish what we can do for ourselves and where outside assistance will be necessary to achieve our goals.

I would like to take this opportunity to express the appreciation, not only of the Government of Zimbabwe, but in my capacity as chairman of the SADCC Committee of Ministers of Agriculture and Natural Resources, of all the SADCC member states for the work being done by the Universities of Zimbabwe and Michigan State on food security research in the region. This conference, and all the papers and issues being discussed over the next three days, would not have been possible without the work of these two universities and the financial support provided by USAID.

I must also express the appreciation of the SADCC member states for the support given by a number of other donors to the work of the SADCC Food Security based here in Harare. This work needs to be strengthened and made more effective if universal food security in the SADCC region is to be realised in full. I hope that one of the results of this conference will be a stronger focusing of the efforts and resources of the SADCC Food Security Unit towards the objectives that I have already set before you this morning. There is a great deal still to be done in order to realise these goals.

Let me sum up the ideas that I have set before you today. We in the SADCC region have defined the problem of food security. We have made considerable progress in determining its causes and extent. We have implemented policies designed to alleviate the problem. The fact that food insecurity and malnutrition is still with us intensifies the challenge to ensure its abolition. Our people have the right of access, at all times, to sufficient food in order to live an active and healthy

life. It is our duty to work ceaselessly towards ensuring that their right to sufficient food is fulfilled.

I expect your conference to make significant progress on these issues. The problems are not simple. There are no easy solutions. I look forward to the answers you will provide in pursuit of the way forward on this complex issue.

I welcome all of you to our beautiful city of Harare. Thank you for the invitation to address this important international conference. I wish you a most successful meeting.

Finally, it is now my pleasure, honour and indeed humility, to declare the meeting officially open.

Thank you.



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