

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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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Preface	viii
Acknowledgements	x
SECTION I: OFFICIAL OPENING	
1. Blueprint for Developing Professional Human Resources for the Agricultural Sector in SADCC. <i>Professor Walter J. Kamba</i>	3
2. Taking Stock of Regional Food Security after Ten Years of SADCC. <i>Dr. Witness P.M. Mangwende</i>	7
SECTION II: EARLY WARNING INFORMATION, FOOD ACCESS AND NUTRITION POLICY -- ISSUES AND OPTIONS	
3. Current Status and Future of the SADCC Early Warning Unit (REWU) <i>R.T. Masundire</i>	15
4. The Tanzania Crop Monitoring and Early Warning Systems Project <i>D.A. Kajumulo</i>	31
5. Food Access and Nutrition Policy/Programme Linkages in Mainland Tanzania <i>Festo P. Kavishe</i>	38
6. Food Access and Nutrition Policy/Programme Linkages in Malawi <i>Mabel O. Mpoma</i>	50
7. Food Access and Nutrition Linkages, Policy Issues and Programme Options in Zimbabwe <i>Julia Tagvireyi</i>	63

Food Access And Nutrition Policy/Programme Linkages In Malawi

*Mabel O. Mpoma*¹

INTRODUCTION

The Government of Malawi is committed to improving the food security and nutrition of its population. In 1986, a high level Symposium on Nutrition was held for all Principal Secretaries to discuss the magnitude and nature of the nutrition problems in the country. A key recommendation from this Symposium was that a Food Security and Nutrition Unit (FSNU) be established within the Department of Economic Planning and Development in the Office of the President and Cabinet. This Unit would be responsible for maintaining an overview of food security and nutrition related policies, undertake policy analysis, formulate policy and disseminate relevant information to the appropriate authorities.

This organisational framework for dealing with food and nutrition issues is unique to this region of Africa. In most countries, Food and Nutrition Units are placed either in the Ministry of Health or in the Ministry of Agriculture. Malawi has food and nutrition units strategically placed in all relevant government sectors: the FSNU in the central planning department of Government, a Nutrition Unit in the Ministry of Health, a Food and Nutrition Unit in the Ministry of Agriculture, in addition to several University groups active in undertaking food security and nutrition related research. The different ministries and organisations involved in food security and nutrition activities (including non governmental organisations) form a food security and nutrition advisory committee which helps the FSNU in its coordinating role.

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PRESENT SITUATION AND STRATEGY

National Level Food Security

At the national level, food security is defined as the ability of the country to produce or import adequate food to feed the population. The country is basically self-sufficient in food although production sometimes is affected by disasters like drought, floods and infestation by a pest like mealie-bug.

Household Food Security

Though the country is self-sufficient at the national level, this does not guarantee that all people have access of enough food at all times for a healthy life. The Government therefore recognises the importance of addressing household food insecurity in addition to attaining national food self sufficiency. At the household level, food security is defined as the access of families to adequate amounts of food, either through home production, purchases or exchanges to satisfy minimum human requirements throughout the year. This is affected by:

- employment opportunities;
- productivity among female headed households; and,
- land holding sizes.

Survey results have shown that those farm families with less than 0,5 hectare of land are often never able to produce enough food to feed themselves throughout the year. Female headed households also have been shown to be at risk in producing enough food to feed their families throughout the year. These families have to supplement their food intake either by working for someone in exchange for food or money (*Food Security and Nutrition Bulletin*, Volume No. 2).

Population Dynamics and their Implications on Food Security and Nutrition

The population of Malawi is growing rapidly. The fixed land area will result in more pressure on agricultural land and other scarce resources in the future and strain the ability of many households to feed themselves. The government recognises that large amounts of the scarce resources have to be allocated to increase food production and social services simply to cater to the increasing number of people. Food insecurity at the household level will run a risk of deterioration for many families unless they can be given some land, improve the productivity of their limited land, be provided with employment or create income generating activities.

STRATEGY

National Level Food Security and Nutrition Strategy

The Government of Malawi is now guided by a Food Security and Nutrition Policy statement produced this year. The Government is trying to provide both direct and indirect focuses in efforts to stimulate growth, *i.e.*, helping smallholders raise the productivity of their land, together with investment to generate off-farm employment opportunity; investment in health and sanitation facilities to reduce the burden of sickness; investment in household technology to help break labour bottlenecks at key periods; and investment in education to improve productivity, welfare and nutrition.

With Malawi's relative shortage of land and abundance of labour, the focus of increasing productivity in agriculture is on land augmenting technology rather than on labour saving technology. The Government emphasises the use of high yielding varieties of cereals, the use of fertilizer, small scale irrigation systems, *etc.*

Household Food Security

The strategy for improving household food security is through an expansion of income and employment opportunities as well as an increase in agricultural productivity. To ensure that the population of Malawi is able to benefit and participate in this process, investment is directed into human resource development (including the expansion of child spacing programmes), the expansion and the strengthening of education and primary health care. The elements of the strategy include to:

- expand income producing employment opportunities;
- increase Agricultural productivity;
- increase Human Resources Development; and,
- increase income transfer.

The strategies are geared to improve food security and nutrition in the short, medium and long term. The first three elements are geared toward addressing household food security in the medium and long term and the fourth strategy is geared toward addressing immediate problems.

To adequately address household food security, several functional groups consisting of: small holding size; medium holding size; large holding size; estates; tenants and, urban poor; were identified and strategies planned for each of these functional groups.

For all smallholder land holding categories, the overall strategy is to intensify cultivation by increasing output per area unit of land in terms of food as well as selected high value cash crops. These strategies include:

- increased use of high yielding cereal varieties;
- improved availability of fertilizer; and,
- extended irrigation during the dry periods.

Small Holding Sizes

Because of their low level of land resources and income to provide food security, this group is very fragile and is highly dependent on output from their land and income generation through off-and non-farm employment. Specific strategies for this functional group include:

- expanding credit facilities;
- targeting specific extension advice and inputs to this group;
- improving storage facilities at the household level;
- ensuring a constant supply of food in the market place either through ADMARC or private traders;
- promoting small, rural milk cooperatives; and,
- instituting immediate income transfer programmes in the short term by creating off-season employment opportunities for farming families and year-round employment for families on very small, non-viable holdings, through public works schemes like food for work or cash for work.

Medium Smallholders

In years of good rainfall this group of farmer may be self-sufficient if they use high yielding varieties of seed and fertilizer. They are on the edge of becoming food insecure during periods of drought. They also depend on off and non-farm employment activities to earn additional cash income. The strategy for this group of farmers is to increase their income by increasing their agricultural productivity and improving the opportunity for rural employment activities. Due to their relatively large land holding size, when appropriate inputs are used enough food is produced to meet family requirements with some left over for sale. Most of the strategies for this group of farmers are similar to those with small holdings. In addition, the following strategies are also specifically targeted to this group.

- promotion of diversification into horticultural and cash crops depending upon irrigation potential and soil characteristics;
- promotion of medium term credit facilities to maintain income generating activities such as egg production, poultry and pig farming and other non-farm activities.
- promotion of agro-forestry through extension as a source of additional food and manure; and,
- encouragement of irrigation cooperatives to bring more land under irrigation and to promote cultivation of a second, particularly cash, crop.

Large Smallholders

This group of farmers have adequate land to produce enough to feed themselves and participate in cash cropping. They are an important source of employment for poorer farmers who depend on off-farm income. The specific strategies for this group of farmers include:

- promotion of livestock production for meat in addition to producing adequate marketing and cold storage facilities;
- linking of livestock production with farming practices to produce more food crops as well as to animal fodder (*e.g.*, re-cycling of manure for organic fertilizer); and,
- development of a small scale food processing industry based on crops which are promoted by extension agents.

Estate Workers and Tenant Farmers

The food security and nutrition status of estate workers depends on the wages they receive and on the social and health services provided in the estates. The specific strategy for this sector is to increase production by expanding the area under cultivation, thus increasing the demand for labour. The major strategy for improving the food security and nutrition of this group includes the regulation of wages on estates and involves:

- regular monitoring of the minimum wage level in relation to staple food costs in order to maintain a reasonable ratio of days worked to the ability to buy a family's monthly maize requirement;
- increased productivity and diversification of the estate sector to increase the demand for labour through provision of estate extension services and instituting land taxes to bolster land utilisation; and,

- increase access to off-season employment to provide income during non-peak estate labour periods.

Tenants

The land tenure status of estate tenants is a major determinant of their food security and nutrition situation. The major strategy for this group is to improve the terms of their employment with the estate owners to improve their food security. Specific actions include:

- increasing productivity and diversification within the estate sector to increase the demand for labour through provision of estate extension services as well as instituting land taxes which should bolster land utilisation;
- providing access to health services which meet government standards;
- promoting good health and nutrition practices through education to ensure that the cash income earned will be invested in meeting the family's requirements to ensure optimal nutrition;
- increasing access to off-season employment to provide income during non-peak estate labour periods.

Urban Sector

The urban poor are characterised by a high dependency on wage employment and are highly vulnerable to fluctuations in the availability of staple foods, especially due to changing price levels. A major element of the strategy for the urban poor is the expansion of employment opportunities in the industrial sector. Specific elements of this strategy include:

- developing urban, medium-term credit facilities to support income generating activities;
- encouraging urban employment in both the informal and formal sectors;
- developing vocational training in skills needed to produce innovations such as appropriate technology in addition to basic technical, engineering and mechanical skills to meet the trained manpower market requirement;
- regular monitoring of minimum wage levels in relation to staple costs to maintain a reasonable ratio of days worked to the ability to buy a family's monthly maize requirements;
- developing and promoting labour saving programmes to reduce the time burden on women;

- promoting sustainable and profitable income generating activities, particularly with NGOs; and,
- promoting income transfer programmes by encouraging employment opportunities for poor urban families through public work schemes (e.g., food for work, cash for work) which would strengthen urban infrastructure.

ORGANISATIONAL FRAMEWORK

Food Security and Nutrition Unit (FSNU)

The FSNU was established to provide the leadership, guidance and analysis needed to improve Malawi's food security at both the national and household levels. A central issue, in improving the welfare of the people of Malawi, is improving the quantity and quality of food available as well as assuring that all have access and the ability to obtain their minimum nutritional needs, particularly the most vulnerable groups.

Accomplishing these goals will take continued monitoring, analysis and implementation of effective national policies and programmes. This can be done only if there is an adequate base of information, correct analysis of that information, and effective action by Government to implement appropriate policies and programmes.

Since its establishment, the FSNU has been attempting to achieve this objective and was given the following mandate in order to accomplish its goals.

1. Maintain an overview and continuing analysis of policies and programmes most relevant for food security and nutrition, including those related to production, strategic reserves, exports and imports, food price policies in relation to income, as well as other health related policies.
2. Coordinate government policies and programmes relative to food security and nutrition.
3. Estimate the food security and nutrition effects of selected existing or potential policies and programmes and identify new policies and programmes or changes in existing ones which are likely to have more desirable effects.
4. Develop a National Food and Nutritional Surveillance system by synthesising, on an on-going basis, available and new information related to food security and nutrition and ensure that the information gathered by the system is disseminated in a timely fashion to the proper authorities via the preparation and distribution of regular bulletins and policy papers.

5. Facilitate the use of information generated for policy and planning purposes, in regards to existing and future Government policies and programmes related to food security and nutrition through the organisation of workshops and seminars.
6. Identify areas where additional information is needed and assume leadership among the relevant institutions in jointly establishing priorities for obtaining and analyzing such information.

Food and Nutrition Unit: Ministry of Agriculture

The aim of the food and nutrition unit in the ministry is to ensure a satisfactory nutritional status for the farming population with particular emphasis on the nutritionally vulnerable households. This is to be done by promoting household food security and improved food utilisation.

In this respect, the unit has been very active in:

- helping the smallholder farmer ensure basic food security through increased and diversified production and decreased post-harvest losses;
- promoting improved utilisation of foods, particularly in the feeding of infants, small children, pregnant and lactating women, through appropriate technology and nutrition education programmes;
- encouraging more equitable food distribution within the family through an expansion of nutrition education and the involvement of men in nutrition education;
- providing sound baseline data for food and nutrition planning through large scale surveys and relevant ad hoc surveys;
- establishing a reliable system for assessing household food security and early prediction of possible shortfall areas through the introduction of appropriate methodology to extension services;
- developing long-term strategies for food and Nutrition at the local level based on data obtained from The National Sample Survey of Agriculture (NSSA) and other relevant large scale surveys;
- developing methodology for evaluation of the impact of development programmes on the food and nutrition situation of smallholder families through the evaluation services of the Ministry of Agriculture;
- continuously monitoring the Food and Nutrition situation at EPA, RDP, ADD and National levels for making decisions and formulating programmes for nutritional improvement at each level; and,

- strengthening interministerial and multi-sectoral cooperation in food and nutrition through permanent representation at inter-ministerial committees.

Nutrition Unit in the Ministry of Health

This Unit is responsible for incorporating nutrition activities into all health programmes with emphasis on preventive programmes. It plays a key role in primary health care programmes.

FOOD SECURITY AND NUTRITION RELATED ACTIVITIES

Food Policy Analysis

The focus of the early analytical work by the FSNU was on food security at the national level. This involved responding to requirements for food aid (drought in the lower Shire Valley and Cassava mealy bug on the central lakeshore areas), in addition to "food gap analysis". This demonstrated that, rather than two localised emergencies, a major national food shortage loomed in addition to the food aid requirements of the growing Mozambican refugee population. The unit played a key role in mobilising aid to forestall what could have been an enormous food emergency. The FSNU also prepared a project to rebuild the Strategic Grain Reserve which was successfully implemented with donor support. The FSNU continues to provide frequently updated reports to Government and to donors concerning the national food supply/demand balance, including specially prepared requests for food assistance.

From a policy perspective, the second major analytical focus of the FSNU has been the development of the rationale, magnitude and principles for managing the Strategic Grain Reserve. The Unit prepared, for the National Agricultural Symposium in November 1988, a preliminary analysis including recommendations which have generally guided the Government's rebuilding of the Strategic Reserve. This work was followed by the development of a more sophisticated analytical model that facilitates the exploration of trade-offs between maize price stability objectives, the cost of alternative stocking, and price and trade policies. The Unit also has developed a simple framework for examining alternative supply/demand/storage scenarios to assist in planning the need and timing of maize imports/exports.

More recently, in 1990, the FSNU took the Government's lead in drafting a Food Security and Nutrition Policy Statement. This provides a strategic plan which the Government will pursue to achieve growth through poverty reduction aimed at improving the food security and nutrition of all households in Malawi. The document now serves as a supplement to the existing *Statement of Development Policies 1987 - 1996*. A noteworthy aspect of the Food and Nutrition Policy Statement is that it concentrates on the issue of household food security and nutrition and includes specific strategies to increase the productivity of smaller farmers, increase income levels through expanded employment, improve human

resource development as well as institute short-term income transfers to the poorer segments of society.

Specific groups of households, vulnerable to food insecurity and malnutrition in the smallholder and estate sectors as well as in urban areas, have been explicitly identified and detailed strategies have been formulated to meet their differing needs.

Another important activity of the FSNU has been influencing the view and debate on some of the key issues concerning national and household food security. For example, relative to all consumer prices, the costs of maize has become cheaper in recent years. This statistical fact encouraged a false conclusion that low income consumers were not faring too badly. The FSNU has been able to shift attention from the price of maize, relative to all consumer prices, to the cost of maize relative to the minimum wage which governs what many low income people earn. The drastic fall shown in the "entitlement" to food, conveyed a more accurate picture of changes in the welfare of low income consumers. After purchasing their maize, they have little remaining income -- thus the price of other consumer goods is not relevant in judging their welfare.

The FSNU was also instrumental in initiating a dialogue for policy makers and donors on the broad issues of food-for-work, followed by sessions on the design and implementation of both community and household level food-for-work projects. This included identifying methods for establishing the beneficiary criteria for these and other household level food assistance measures.

Nutrition Education

Another noteworthy activity undertaken has been the development of a comprehensive nutrition education strategy. This has resulted in a book entitled *Nutrition Facts for Malawian Families*. Ten thousand copies of Nutrition Facts have been printed with funding from UNICEF and are being distributed to all extension workers and relevant government and university offices in the country. This book is the first of its kind in Malawi. It is also unique in this region of Africa with respect to the wide spectrum of educational messages presented including food production, child feeding, child health, and maternal health amongst others.

Food and Nutritional Surveillance

The broad range of food and nutrition issues found in Malawi has encouraged the Government to place priority on developing a National Food and Nutrition Surveillance System (NFNSS). The FSNU is charged with this responsibility and has developed the following four objectives.

Problem Identification:

- help to develop a better understanding of food security and nutrition problems and accomplishments; and,

- help to sensitise senior government policy-makers and donor agencies.

Provide a Sound Base for Policy Formulation and Planning:

- agricultural development policies and strategies;
- macro-economic policies and strategies; and,
- health policy and strategies.

Monitoring and Evaluation:

- impact of national programmes in a variety of sectors;
- impact of area-specific projects; and,
- impact of macro-economic policies including structural adjustment measures.

Early Warning of Impending Food Shortages:

- drought;
- crop pests; and,
- marketing bottlenecks.

The FSNU has not instituted any new data collection systems for NFNSS since Malawi has an abundance of information collected by agriculture, health and economic planning as well as University research groups, the National Statistics Office and the Agricultural Development and Marketing Corporation. The FSNU regularly obtains data from these groups and undertakes secondary data analysis useful for food and nutritional surveillance. The FSNU also has served in an advisory capacity to several groups on how to improve the usefulness of data collected to the NFNSS. The Food Security and Nutrition Monitoring System will form a central core of the information base of the NFNSS. In addition, the Ministry of Health has instituted their Health Information System, a clinic based nutritional surveillance system, which is an important component of the NFNSS.

Experience has shown that analysis of the data alone is not sufficient. The results have to be conveyed in a format which enables busy policy makers to grasp the essential facts and distributional impact of the findings. To achieve this, the FSNU has developed a strategy to disseminate the information generated by the

NFNU which is useful for medium and long-term planning, *i.e.*, the *Food Security and Nutrition Bulletin* with graphical presentations of data depicting the key issues related to food security and nutrition. The *Food Security and Nutrition Bulletin* will be produced twice each year. The first issue was released in April 1989. The *Bulletin* is distributed to all Principal Secretaries, relevant Government offices, the Reserve Bank, University groups, as well as the donor community in Malawi. All members of the National Economics Council, comprised of Ministers and senior officials in the Malawi congress Party, the Army, and the Police in addition to other important offices, receive copies of the *Bulletin*.

To institutionalise the National Food and Nutrition Surveillance System and the regular production of the *Bulletin*, a Food Security and Nutrition Advisory Committee has been formed comprised of a small group of experts from agriculture, health, and economic planning as well as the University of Malawi. This Advisory Committee meets on a regular basis to discuss current food security and nutrition policy issues. The content of each *Bulletin* is examined to identify important issues which need to be highlighted in subsequent issues. The advisory Committee also was instrumental in the formulation of the Food Security and Nutrition Policy Statement.

Early warning issues also have been addressed by the FSNU. However, from an operational standpoint, these are the direct responsibility of the National Early Warning Unit (NEWU) in the Ministry of Agriculture. The NEWU is responsible for data collection and analysis for early warning. To link early warning data with central decision making, an Early Warning Technical Sub-Committee has been formed with FSNU serving as the chair. The Early Warning sub-committee meets on a regular basis during the growing season to monitor the nation's food situation in order to detect impending shortfalls. Appropriate authorities can then be alerted and interventions put into place.

The Ministry of Agriculture has instituted a new approach to collection of household food security data. This approach will provide information on the household food situation. This will facilitate the Government in assessing the food security and nutrition situation at any point in time.

Community Based Household Food Security and Nutrition Activities

Government, in collaboration with nongovernmental organisations, has pilot programmes specifically targeted to those at risk. The programmes are multi-sectional with the following objectives:

- to improve the household availability of food for the population identified;
- to increase the immunisation coverage of children in that population; and,
- to improve the health and sanitation situation in the area.

These programmes have proven to be successful in improving both the food security and nutritional status of the target population.

Food and Work

This activity is promoted to assist families chronically affected by food insecurity due to low total production and low income as well as those families that have been affected by national disasters. Several potential food for work schemes have been identified and should be implemented soon.

COORDINATION MECHANISM

The Food Security and Nutrition Advisory Committee exists to ensure effective coordination. This committee meets regularly to discuss issues of food security and nutrition. Technical subcommittees include:

- subcommittee on education -- responsible for the production and dissemination of nutrition information;
- subcommittee on research -- responsible for research; and,
- early warning subcommittee -- responsible for monitoring food supply shortfalls.

These subcommittees feed information to the Advisory Committee.

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