

LIFE IN A TIME OF FOOD PRICE VOLATILITY

Zambia Year 2 Country Report



A food stall of items consumed frequently in Kabwata. *Photo: Mwila Mulumbi*

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During the last few years, Zambia's food security conditions have generally been stable with poorer rural households experiencing moderate food insecurity. While the food security conditions have been favourable, the food prices, particularly of essential food items, have become more volatile and emerging into a major crisis. The focus of year two research of the Life in a Time of Food Price Volatility is therefore an update of year one research on poor people's experiences of food price volatility with greater focus on variables including prices, wages and work, what people are eating, and local governance of food security/accountability for hunger. The research noted that the increase in prices of essential food items, high cost of agriculture inputs, stagnant wages and income, high cost of non-food items such as electricity and housing, the removal of the fuel and consumer miller subsidies, contributed on a large scale to the choice of crops produced, choice of food eaten, change in needs, change in habits and change in the overall quality of life. While issues on food security and hunger are slowly being focused in social protection policies, what is missing is a discussion on the right to food of citizens. Year two research therefore gives a spotlight on the right to food security and freedom from hunger and recommends that food producers and consumers should be put at the centre of decision making processes on food issues.

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1. INTRODUCTION

This report presents the voices of poor people's experiences of food price volatility (FPV) in Zambia and contributes to the qualitative research led by Oxfam GROW campaign on food justice in partnership with the Institute of Development Studies. The report is an update to the year one report¹ which had revealed that the quality of life of different occupation and social groups had slightly gone down and at the centre of this change was the increase in prices of essential food items and high cost of agriculture inputs. The change in the quality of life was further compounded by stagnant wages and income; high cost of non-food items such as electricity and housing; limited coping mechanisms; limited and sometimes nonexistent government social protection and low political commitment to implement policy pronouncements on food security issues. The year two research therefore provides continuous monitoring of these aspects so as to provide timely data to policy makers on how they can revise or design programmes to respond to the vulnerabilities. The Year Two report focuses on some of the variables *prices, wages and work, what people are eating, and local governance of food security/accountability for hunger* and as such should therefore be read alongside Year One report.

The first sections of the report provides the background to the project, the method and approach used, the rationale for selection of the research sites and their main socioeconomic, geographical and demographic features. The second part provides an analysis of Zambia's context of FPV and policy responses. The third part provides local findings about FPV and on the following: a) *prices* b) *wages and work*, c) *what people are eating and the impact on their wellbeing*. The fourth part of the report provides an analysis on *local governance of food security/accountability for hunger*, policy implications of the research findings.

2. METHODS

The research aims to contribute to improving the food security prospects of poor and vulnerable people in Zambia exposed to food price volatility by improving knowledge of how people's lives are affected by FPV. The key research questions the project addresses are:

- How do high and unpredictable food prices affect overall wellbeing and development in poor or vulnerable communities?
- How does food price volatility affect wellbeing of people on low / precarious incomes? (**wellbeing**)
- How do these people cope with change? (**coping**)
- What sources of support are available to them? (**social protection** – formal and informal)
- Special topic questions – different each year (last year was **future farmers**; this year is **local accountability for hunger**)

Gathering evidence and improving understanding of how processes of social change are triggered and sustained by FPV are important because the wider social implications of such changes are easily neglected or inadequately grasped by policymakers and in public debate. Understanding how gender and social relations change during these times will help us to explain why and how food and nutrition security are affected, whereas conventional survey-dependent evidence can only really tell us by how much and for whom. The evidence we generate through this research will both support the case for efforts to regulate, manage or

prevent price volatilities, and inform policy responses to mitigate their effects on people on low or precarious incomes.

After four years of investigation, the aim is to arrive at a clear and strong understanding of the mechanisms through which people's wellbeing is affected by food price volatility. To make this possible, the core of the research design includes a diverse data collection exercise, combining longitudinal, in-depth topical and multi-site data collection activities.

Methods and tools

The research used a participatory qualitative approach integrating household case studies, focus group discussions (FGDs) and key informant interviews. Household case study respondents were retained from year one and mainly included low income households, the very poorest, as well as people who are vulnerable for other reasons, including that they are elderly, disabled, orphaned or female-headed households. In each site more than five key informant interviews were conducted with local administrative officials, NGO staff, religious and community leaders and community politicians. A total of 23 household case studies (a decrease of one household from year one research) were conducted. Focus group discussions (FGDs) were also held in each community with different groups including agricultural cooperative, petty traders, young people, men and women. The main point of these FGDs was to build a broader picture of economic change within the communities, how different occupation groups are experiencing FPV, and the different sources of support available. A combination of various tools was used and included Matrix ranking and scoring, cause effect analysis and household food basket analysis.

Data management

Most of the data was collected using voice recorders. Permission was sought from all the respondents to tape the interviews. For focus group discussions the use of both a voice recorder and note taking was used, thus requiring two people. All recorded interviews were transcribed, translated and labelled. All translations were checked by the Country Researcher for overall sense in English. All transcripts were kept in an up-to-date version of Word, and backed up onto a USB stick. Photographs were also used and stored in folders on a computer.

The research sites

The research sites from year one were maintained and included Kabwata as the urban site and Chikwanda as the rural site.

Kabwata – Urban site

Kabwata community is located in Lusaka district the capital city of Zambia. It is located south-east of the city centre. The Kabwata community is a medium to densely populated residential area and was selected as a site for the life in a time of food price volatility study because of the diverse economic and social activities taking place in the area.

Kabwata has a population of about 46,000 people and the majority of these are within the youth or middle age category. The mean household size is six persons. Almost half of the houses are female-headed households and these generally represent the poor proportion of the population. The majority of the population has attended school, but only two thirds of the majority has completed secondary school. The population of Kabwata is comprised of civil servants, other working class people, retired, retrenched, unemployed and traders. Households living in the Kabwata rely on incomes from employment and trade but the majority of households are involved in informal employment with a significant number involved in informal petty trading activities. Informal employment activities comprise of petty traders, small producers and a range of casual jobs which include vendors of vegetables, fruit, meat, fish, snack-foods and non-

perishable items such as clothing, soaps and cosmetics to electronic goods. Others have small workshops that repair bicycles and motorcycles; recycle scrap metal; make furniture; stitch shoes; weave cloth and make and embroider garments. The majority of women sell or produce goods from their homes: stitching garments, weaving cloth, embroidering textile goods, making crafts, processing food or running a salon. Other categories of informal employment that are common in Kawabata include casual workers who operate in restaurants, security guards and gardeners; and temporary office helpers.

Household income for almost 70 percent of households is less than ZMW2,000 per month. Approximately 45% of household expenditures are spent on food and 12% on housing.

The household structures are those comprising high-rise flats built by the National Housing Authority and residential compact houses. The community has piped water serviced by the Lusaka Water and Sewerage Company, however the source is erratic. The community also has sewerage system used in liquid waste disposal although it requires some attention /maintenance most of the time. There is fairly good public transport. The major roads linking to the community are tarred, however, the residential roads are quite poor making certain areas of the community such as Kabwata Site and Service inaccessible especially during the rainy season. There is enough installed electric power capacity such that any household can be connected without problems.

There is a large government clinic called Kabwata clinic. The quality of services is average but the biggest challenge is that the clinic is understaffed. The supply of drugs has been satisfactory; the kit supply has been supplemented by district purchase through grant. Mortality rates are low, the main causes of death being Malaria and AIDS related conditions.



Picture 1: Makeshift food stalls found along the road side in Kabwata

The social life of people is varied. The community has different social amenities that include bars, night clubs, a community hall where weddings are held and several places of worship which include the United Church of Zambia, Catholic, Presbyterian, Anglican, Seventh Day Adventist and the Baptist church.

Within the political sphere, Kabwata is a ward and its local government system is composed of an elected councillor. The Kabwata councillor with other councillors in Lusaka, collectively constitute the Lusaka city council. The council is the highest policy making body in the district.

The most vulnerable groups in Kabwata are orphans, sex workers, widows, the unemployed youths, elderly people aged above 55 years old and households with inadequate income. There are few organisations working to assist the vulnerable, the majority of these run activities to

prevent /control the spread of HIV/AIDS and to assist and care for the infected and affected. The well known organisations are Kabwata orphanage that helps to look after the orphans. Then Young Women Christian Association who provide Peer education programs and peer educators, Youths groups and youths friendly corners, counselling services for victims of gender based violence. Then churches, who provide spiritual guidance and social welfare assistance.

The crime rate in Kabwata is high compared to a number of other areas. However, most of the crime involves petty theft. There is a police station with good infrastructure however there are few policemen to ensure adequate coverage of the area by police services.

Chikwanda - Rural site

Chikwanda community is located in Mpika district in the Muchinga province, formally known as the Northern Province. Chikwanda community is located 12km north of the district centre of Mpika. Mpika District, has an area of 4,100,000ha (41,000km²) and is Zambia's largest district. Chikwanda was selected as a site for the study predominantly because of the level of agriculture production of the area. The Chikwanda community is an agricultural and gardening belt of the district where vegetables and maize are mostly grown. Chikwanda community supplies 40% of vegetables and crops to the Mpika district and therefore the community provides a good case to explore people's perception on likely impact of food production and livelihoods in agriculture. Further, Mpika district is at a confluence of two major trunk roads that connects Zambia to two borders with Tanzania. As a result of this, Mpika is the sub-centre for travelers from and to the borders and provides services such as accommodation, drinks and meals to travellers. Mpika also acts as a transport hub and business trading area for Zambia – Tanzania cross border traders and this further provides a basis of selecting Chikwanda because of its proximity to the activities. Chikwanda has a population of approximately 18,425. It remains a predominately rural community with 70% of the population in the youth and middle age category.

Traditionally, Chikwanda is a Chiefdom. The chief of Chikwanda resides right in the community at a palace. The school and chiefs palace have electricity but the majority live in typical grass thatched houses with no electricity. Chikwanda is dominated by customary land tenure, with the chief as the custodian of the land. However, since all land is vested in the President this land can still be converted to state land through consultations with the Chiefs and legalisation by the Ministry of Land. The majority of the land is used for agriculture. Traditionally men control most of the land but the women have a say over what to do with the land.



Picture 2: Thatched grass houses Chikwanda

The vast majority of the population in Chikwanda earn their livelihoods through agriculture and vegetable production, while a few are engaged in piece work, making handicrafts or collecting and processing minor forest products. Those involved in agriculture production grow maize mostly, but others grown in addition include groundnuts, sweet potatoes, cassava, beans and soya beans. Using the area planted criterion, maize, groundnuts and beans are the biggest total and average area cultivated. Production levels are said to depend on two main factors, namely, availability of fertilizers and good rainfall patterns. The biggest challenges and problems that work against more productive farming include expensive farm inputs and inadequate extension services. It is believed that crop extension and technical services are difficult to implement due to the expansive space of Mpika District.

The source of water for the rural population is mostly from the streams and wells which are not well protected and hence the water is unsafe for household use. There is lack of public transport and poor information technology facilities. The community has a basic school of grade one to grade nine called the Chikwanda Basic School.

The community is characterised by different social economic groups. The poor households have few assets, low levels of own-food production and very little access to alternative income sources. Many households in this category are female-headed, elderly-headed, child-headed, and/or housing chronically ill members or orphans.

Formal social protection services are almost non-existent in the community and only include the Farmers Input Support Programme (FISP). The FISP is a form of government subsidy aimed at making fertilizer and maize seed cheaper and readily available to small scale poor farmers. Apart from this programme the World Vision (WV) and CAMFED provide some form of social protection. Orphans and vulnerable children are supported by WV but not all receive adequate assistance as the assistance is usually in form of improved spiritual life and or items received through sponsorship such as books, toys and clothes. CAMFED provides support to orphans and vulnerable children by providing school requisites. The Catholic Church also provides loans for farming inputs to widows and widowers and to those families that keep orphaned and vulnerable children.

3. COUNTRY CONTEXT

Changes in food security

Overall, the food security conditions in year two of the research compared to the previous period, were generally stable with very poor rural households experiencing moderate food insecurity in the lean period (November 2012-February 2013). According to official reports, none of the districts in Zambia reported food deficits. Many households were able to access basic foods either through their own stocks or through market purchases.

Though the food security conditions were generally favourable, the delay on the onset of rains caused delayed planting, along with armyworm infestations in parts of the country, especially the southern half (central, south and eastern maize belt areas). As a result of these events maize crops yields were much lower than the previous period. This situation was further worsened by the very late (January/February) delivery of subsidised top dressing fertiliser, which resulted in localized yellowing and stunting of some crops. In some parts of the country including south and central areas, water logging due to extremely heavy rainfall in January also contributed to the fair crop conditions.²

Staple food supply and prices

While maize grain supplies at the rural household level decreased especially during the lean season, maize meal supplies at the national level continued to adequately meet the increasing market demand. Farmers continued ferrying maize to the public market for sale in high producing areas of the country. This suggested that farmers in these areas were still holding surplus maize that they were trying to sell at a much higher price than was being offered by the Food Reserve Agency (FRA). Maize production in 2013 was estimated at about 2.6 million tonnes, 11% below the bumper output of 2012.³ Despite this reduction, maize supplies for the 2013/14 marketing year (May/April) were estimated to still be sufficient to cover domestic requirements, as well as providing a limited exportable surplus.

The FRA purchased approximately 426 000 tonnes of maize for the national strategic reserves in 2013 (below the target of 500 000 tonnes), at a cost of ZMK 65 per 50 kg (or ZMK 1.3 per kg). Most consumers complained that despite the very low maize price procured by FRA, the price of mealie meal the staple was progressively increasing and had become more volatile than the previous period. During the period under review, mealie meal prices had been steadily rising. Maize meal prices sharply increased in 2013 as a result of the removal of the millers' consumer subsidy as well as the fuel subsidy. Despite following the Government directive to reduce prices, prices continued to increase. By September 2013, the prices were about 36% higher than the 2012 September prices. Because of the increased price of mealie meal, poorer households in the urban areas were relying on industrially processed roller meal (slightly processed maize meal) as opposed to buying maize and taking it to the mills. At rural household level, maize prices followed seasonal trends. The price of maize grain had remained stable in early part of the period under review but increased as the season progressed.

Food security and social protection policy changes

In the period under review the government allocated ZMK 500 million to the Farmer Input Support Programme (FISP), targeting 900 000 beneficiaries, as in the previous season, to help improve small-scale farmers' access to inputs.

Under the FRA maize marketing program, payments for maize procured was delayed and this affected most farmers who were relying on this income to purchase inputs for the start of the

2012/13 season in November. Most of these farmers had sold off the bulk of their surplus grain in order to purchase inputs for the upcoming season and to reduce stocks due to limited safe storage at the household level.

To maintain price equability, the government began to sell limited volumes of maize from the strategic grain reserves at the end of 2013. The maize was sold at ZMW1700 per tonne to millers. Further, to deal with higher meal mealie prices that were expected to negatively impact household' food security, government provided assistance to an estimated 209 000 households that were assessed to be at risk of food insecurity, mostly located in the Southern province, the figure was based on the 2013 vulnerability assessment.⁴

4. MAIN FINDINGS ABOUT FOOD PRICE CHANGES

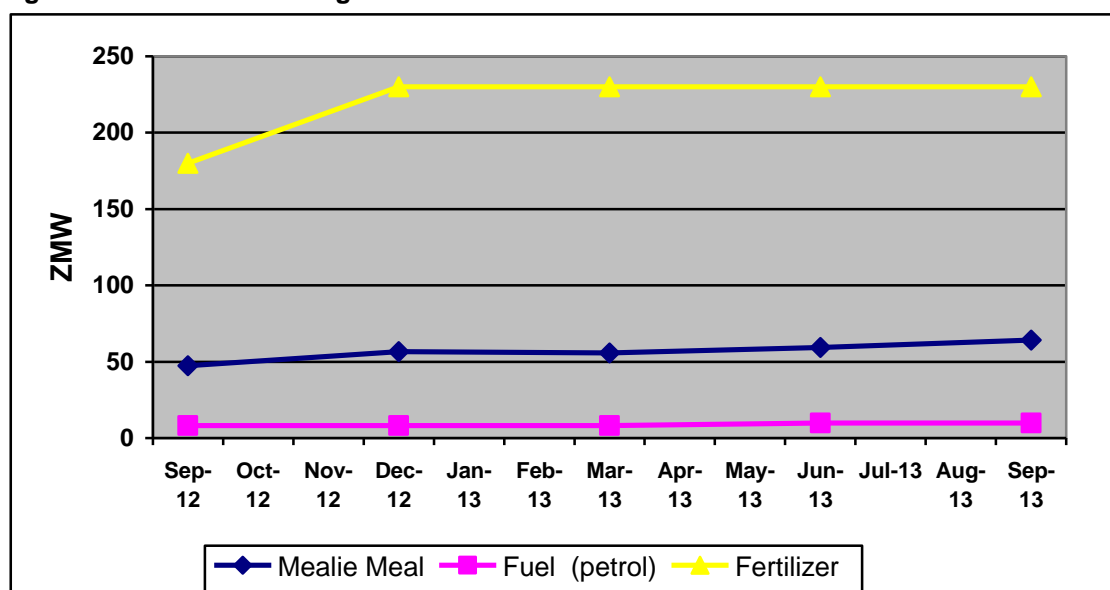
Changing prices

The cost of most of the essential food items and essential non-food essential items with particular emphasis on mealie meal prices and fuel costs had gone up from the previous period. The price of mealie meal had gone up by 36% from ZMW47 to ZMW64, while fuel costs had gone up by 22% from ZMW8.15 to ZMW9.91. The prices of fuel and mealie meal had drastically increased in May 2013, when the government sequentially scrapped off fuel and maize subsidies contending that the measure would free resources for infrastructure development and poverty reduction among others. The maize subsidy known as the millers' consumer subsidy, was the money that the government availed to enable millers maintain stable prices of mealie-meal sold to consumers. This change in subsidies generated a debate with the majority of citizens voicing great concern on the cost of living. At the urban household level, the effects of the subsidies removal on prices of basic commodities were felt two months afterwards with a female headed household in Kabwata lamenting that:

“The impact [of the removal of the miller consumer subsidy] was so sudden and it immediately changed the way we eat. There was no time and room to adjust the budget and the instinct was to ration the mealie meal in the house. This has since changed the mood in the house but worse even our diet”

Households in the rural site who depend on agriculture indicated that the cost of fertilizer had also gone up for D compound (basal) by 15% from ZMW200 to ZMW230, while Urea (top dressing) had gone up by 22% from ZMW180 to ZMW220. The change in prices of these items is depicted in *Figure 1*. At the time of removing the fuel and the millers' consumer subsidy, the government also revised the Farmers Input Support Programme in which farmers would pay double for the inputs. The bag of fertiliser had been revised from KMW50 to KMW100, while the seed pack under the programme was now going to be offered for free.

Figure 1: Timeline of Change in Prices of Essential Commodities



Source: from Shops, Fuel stations and Farmers

Note: Unit prices - 25kg bag of mealie meal, 1litre of petrol, 50kg bag of basal fertilizer

In addition to the mealie meal, households in Kabwata noted that prices for other food items such as beef, kapenta, beans and dry fish (depicted in *Table 1*) had also increased from a year ago. Most of the people argued that the change in prices was mainly attributed to the removal of the fuel subsidy which they stated had an implication on the value chain of food production and processing. In Chikwanda, the people stated that the price of some food items had increased but in some instances the food items were at the same price as the previous year but were however, a bit more inferior and sold in less quantity.

In addition to the essential food items, the majority of people in Kabwata also cited a drastic increase in most basic commodities like housing and transport due to the removal of the maize and fuel subsidies. The data on price changes of key food and non-food commodities is summarised in *Table 1*.

A few households in the urban site and the majority of households in the rural site had adjusted their household budget and were spending almost a majority of their income on food than previously. However, during the farming season, those engaged in farming spent most of their income on fertilizer and seed, with some households spending 30% on food and the rest invested back in agriculture.

Table 1: Price changes

List of main items households buy	Kabwata (Urban site)		Chikwanda (Rural site)	
	<i>Current price/unit (ZMW)</i>	<i>Estimated previous price change(+/-) (ZMW)</i>	<i>Current price/unit (ZMW)</i>	<i>Estimated previous price change(+/-) (ZMW)</i>
<i>Staple</i>	49 (50kg bag) mealie meal	18	7 (per gallon of maize)	3
<i>Kapenta</i>	79	6		
<i>Meat</i>	25	9		
<i>Vegetables</i>	5	2		
<i>Beans</i>	13	12		
<i>Agriculture production costs</i>			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 230 (Basal Fertilizer 50kg bag) • 220 (Urea Fertilizer 50kg bag) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 30 • 40
<i>Transport</i>	8 (bus fare round trip) Kabwata - Town	1	10 (bus fare round trip) Chikwanda – District centre	2
<i>Education (Tuition fees)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 400 – 600 Grades 8-9 (User + PTA/year) • 650 – 1,000 Grades 10-12 (User + PTA/year) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 100 • 300 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 200 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 50
<i>Rent (House or land)</i>	700 - 1,500 (medium density)	250	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1 bag of 50kg of maize/ per 1 acre 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Same price

Work and wages

A majority of the people in Kabwata continued to operate in informal employment with a significant number involved in informal petty trading activities. The few people involved in the formal sector, particularly those working in the public sector, were reported to be doing well compared to a year ago. The government through the Ministry of Labour and the respective Labour unions in March 2013 signed a collective agreement to harmonize the salaries of some civil servants. The harmonization of salaries was meant to address discrepancies within the civil service of people holding similar qualifications but receiving different wages dependant on the sector. The harmonisation process led to an increase in salaries for the majority of employees in the public sector. However, some of the government workers such as nurses and teachers had stagnant salaries, with all these categories of occupation generally falling under the Basic Needs Basket (BNB) of ZMW3, 536.69 of a household of five living in Lusaka.⁵

Table 2: Comparative Figures of Wages "Take Home Pay" (September 2012 and September 2013)

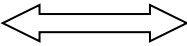
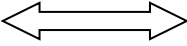

Occupation Categories	September 2012	September 2013
	Wages in ZMW per Month	Wages in ZMW per Month
<i>Teacher</i>	1,695.17 - 2,725.99	1,695.17 - 2,725.990
<i>Nurse</i>	2,418.24 - 2,798.25	2,418.25 - 2,798.25
<i>Guard with Security Firm</i>	320 - 980	320 - 980
<i>Secretary in Civil Service</i>	1,633.71 - 2,749.23	1,633.71 - 2,749.23

Source: JCTR

Other occupation groups in Kabwata including petty traders, general workers such as shop assistants, garden boys and house maids were said to have stagnated. A focus group of petty traders stated that the trading environment had not made it easier for them to generate extra income than in the previous period. Earnings had remained the same and this had a negative impact on the quality of life in the face of volatile food prices and prices of essential commodities. The general workers, who in the previous period had benefitted from the revision of the minimum wage, had stagnant earnings and had lost the purchasing power they had initially gained due to the high cost of living. The table below summarises the changes in the main occupations groups of Kabwata.

Table 3: Main occupations and changes in work patterns Urban site (Men FGD Kabwata)

Main Occupation groups	Doing well, doing worse or staying the same since last year	Why quality of life
<i>Businessmen</i>	↑	<i>There are many opportunities for profitable businesses. Those with income for investment are doing well.</i>
<i>Working class (private or NGO sector)</i>	↔	<i>Salaries have not changed</i>
<i>(Working class) public sector)</i>	↑	<i>Government harmonised and</i>

		<i>increased the salaries of all civil servants.</i>
<i>Petty Traders</i>		<i>The economic and supportive environment is the same. Earnings are the same and this has had no impact on the quality of life since 2012</i>
<i>General workers (maids, garden boys e.t.c)</i>		<i>Earnings have remained the same since the revised minimum wages</i>
<i>Prostitutes</i>		<i>Most of the commercial sex workers are doing well, because they target the rich businessmen, whose businesses are doing well.</i>

In Chikwanda, the vast majority of the population were peasant farmers, who also in the majority did piecework to survive. Other major occupation included cooperative farmers and garden owners. Income from maize production was noted to be much lower in year two of the research than year one, due to the poor maize yield. The farmers pointed out that the start of the rainy season for the 2012/2013 farming season delayed, preventing farmers from planting between October and early November. Some farmers also experienced delays in accessing the government subsidized fertilizer due to the delayed payment of the suppliers by government. Although fertilizer is available in most district markets for purchase, its price had increased from the previous period, thus prompting the majority of the farmers to wait for government to supply the fertilizer. Further, there was an uncertainty among the farmers on whether the price of fertilizer would stabilize and so the majority of the cooperative members were careful to save the income and wait for government. The delay by government subsequently resulted in the late application of fertilizer and consequently reducing crop yields and income of the majority of farmers.

The wages for the garden owners had increased compared to the previous period. Income for vegetable producers had also gone up compared to the previous year due to the high demand of the produce. In the previous year, the market had been flooded with garden produce and therefore many garden owners in the subsequent period opted not to grow any produce, thereby leaving very few producers to grow the vegetable.

The wages for those engaged in varied type of piece work especially those involved in farming or gardening had increased compared to a year ago. Those engaged in this type of work had demanded for increased wages so as to match the costs of food and non food commodities. However, the demand for labour by the better-off households particularly those engaged in farming had reduced as their harvest had not yielded enough crops to pay for labour in cash or food. Labour income for some of the poor therefore declined in comparison to the previous year (see *Table 4*, for details)

Table 4: Comparative Figures of Wages (September 2012 and September 2013)

Occupation	Type of activities	Current wages	Previous wage
<i>Farmer (cooperatives)</i>		<i>An average total income of K1,800 for 20 bags of 50kg of maize sold at K65 per bag</i>	<i>Same income - K1,800</i>

Garden	Different produce (tomatoes, onions, cabbages)	An average gross income of K5,000 for entire harvest	An average gross income of K1,000 for entire harvest
Farming	Sell of maize	K65/50kg	K65/50kg
Piece work	Working in the garden (weeding and watering)	K40 per 1 acre	K30 per 1 acre
	Cultivating	K60/per 1acre	K40/per acre
	Making bricks	K0.20 per brick	K0.15 per brick
	Digging toilets	K15/ metre	K10/metre
Carpenter	Making a Bed	K300	K250
	Making Chairs	K45	K35

The quality of life of the main occupation groups in Chikwanda was varied. Among the groups perceived to be doing well compared to the previous period, were the garden owners and the petty traders. On the other hand, despite the increase in wages among those engaged in piece work such as gardening, farming, building, bricklaying, their quality of life had remained poor and at the same rate previously. Their quality of life was affected by challenges they faced in accessing opportunities for labour and as a result they spent any wages they made on food purchases rather than investing to improve their livelihoods. The stress of looking for food or money to buy food was illustrated by one male focus group participant:

“A lot of us now have so much debt as we are forced to borrow money when our food runs out. We fail to rest with a peace of mind as we are constantly working, borrowing or looking for something to eat.”

The peasant farmers and cooperative farmers were said to be doing worse off compared to a year ago, due to the high cost of farming inputs and cost of labour. To survive, most of the farmers were taking on piece work from better-off households. However, due to reduced labour opportunities because of few better-off households, many of the farmers' quality of life had gone down. The changes in the main occupations and work patterns in Chikwanda are summarised in Table 5.

Table 5: Main occupations and changes in work patterns rural site (Women FGD Chikwanda)

Main Occupation groups	Doing well, doing worse or staying the same since last year	Why quality of life
Cooperative farmers	↓	High cost of production, low sales and loss of income
Piece work (gardening, farming, building, bricklaying)	↔	Reduced local labour demand by the better-off households as their harvest had been reduced from the 2012/2013 farming season. Labour incomes for the poor therefore declined
Petty traders (stall owners, marketeers)	↑	The traders have increased prices of their commodities to match the changes in wholesale prices and other costs such as transport

<i>Peasant farmer</i>	↓	<i>No income as most grow food for household consumption</i>
<i>Garden owners</i>	↑	<i>The previous year the market had been flooded with garden produce and this affected the price but in the current period, there were few farmers who produced vegetables and thus the demand for garden produce inflated the price.</i>
<i>Formal workers (teachers, councillor)</i>	↔	<i>Salaries had remained stagnant.</i>

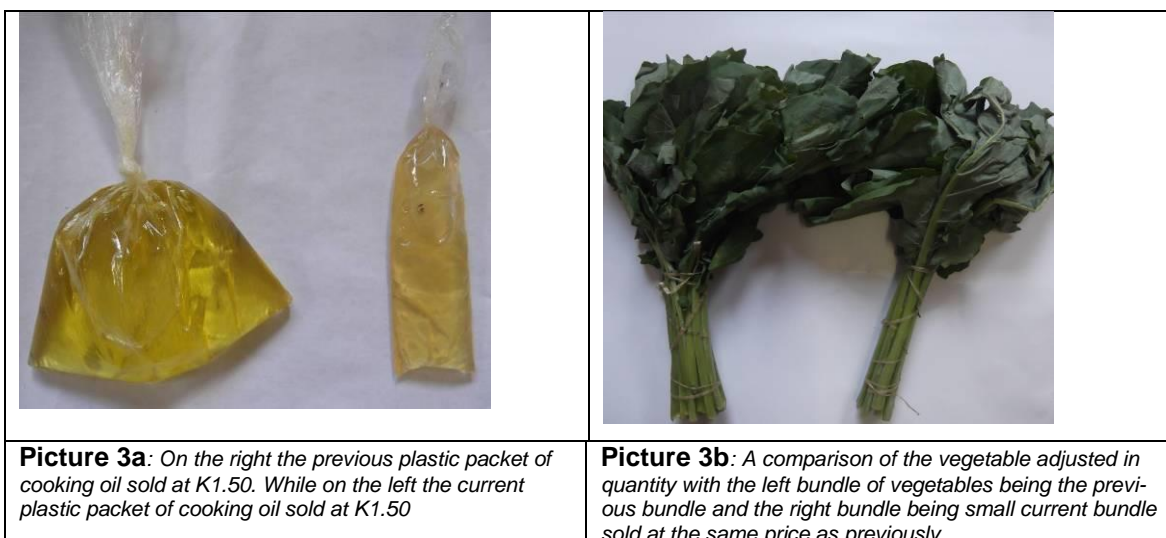
What people are eating

As a result of an increase in the prices of essential food items, both rural and urban households changed their levels of consumption, preference, quality and quantity of their food, with the drastic changes made among the poorer and vulnerable households.

The quantity of food being consumed slightly reduced from the previous period, especially among the rural households. Half of the people in the rural cite, who were eating two meals previously were now eating 1 meal and the very poor households were sometimes skipping meals a day especially during the lean season. Other households, particularly the majority of those in the urban site, did not adjust the number of meals being consumed, but adjusted the quantity of food being consumed with each meal. As one orphan from an orphan headed household expressed:

“Our stomachs have adjusted we no longer feel hungry”

Those selling food stuffs in both the urban and rural site were said to be distorting the quantity of food being sold by adjusting or re-packaging the food in less quantities but at the same time maintaining the price. For example those selling cooking oil, sugar and vegetables had slowly been decreasing the food packages and bundles but all the while maintaining the food prices at a stagnant value (see *picture 3a, 3b and 4a and 4b*). Customers instead of buying more vegetables or packets of sugar and oil to match their previous consumption levels opted to buy the reduced quantities at the same price as a year ago.





The quality of food being consumed had deteriorated both in the rural and urban sites compared to the previous period, with a majority of the households in the rural site being negatively affected. Some households were eating less nutritious food because they couldn't afford the much expensive and nutritious food. This therefore decreased their dietary diversity and limited the choice of requirements for a dignified and decent life. An exercise of the food basket with the various focus group discussions in the rural site revealed that most of the households increased consumption of wild foods and less preferred foods. For example in the place of cabbages or rape (a highly nutritious green leafy vegetable plant, see *picture 5a*), a majority of the poor households were seen gathering less preferred vegetables which usually grew near rubbish pits (see *picture 5b*). Further, a majority of the households who could not afford Kapenta (see *picture 6a*), were consuming a less preferred inferior and less tasty form of Kapenta called *daga* (see *picture 6b*). The dissatisfaction of consuming this type of food was lamentably expressed by one male focus group participant in Chikwanda:

"We have been eating less tasty food. People, who for example can't afford fish or kapenta, are now eating Daga [a small fish that is very bitter and smelly]".





To increase their dietary options, some households in the rural site preferred to eat their own grown foods such as beans and groundnuts in place of proteins such as fish and Kapenta or gather wild foods such as caterpillars. As a result of these dietary options, some households, as expressed by one female group discussion participant, still maintained good nutrition and a healthy status as the precious year.

“There has been little impact [on the nutrition status] and that is because even when we can't afford to buy good food, we try to balance our meals by eating beans, vegetables, groundnuts and caterpillars”.

How else people were coping with changes in prices

Due to the stagnant wages and income and the high price of food and non food items, the stress levels among most households in both the urban and rural site, were reported to have increased. The pressure of looking for income opportunities and access to food was cited as a major stress trigger among most heads of households. A few households in Chikwanda for example, were involving school going children, particularly male children to help with piecework. This had a negative impact on the levels of learning and concentration in class among some of the affected children. One male participant stated:

“We never rest these days. We are always tired. We spend most part of the day doing piece work and only spend a few minutes to eat one meal. The energy levels being consumed are less than the energy levels being used for the piece work. I'm sure you can see that some of us are thin compared to last year when you were here.”

Another participant stressed that:

“Everyone is stressed even children. When children come back from school they go to help their parents with piecework. There is no rest for them also. Just go around the community and you will notice very few children playing. A number of them are doing one thing or the other.”

Another participant echoed that:

“We don't force our children to work. Most of them offer to help when they notice that the situation is bad. But a few parents would tell their children that there are helping themselves in finishing their education. ”

Half of the participants in the rural site expressed that the changes in food production and prices helped to bring the families together as there was desperation to seek for livelihood strategies that would provide food and income security. This was clearly expressed by one FGD male youth participant:

“Couples are learning to discuss the budget now. Previously, the man used to control it [the budget]. But now for things to make sense in the home, many young couples are discussing and planning together and this has helped with maintaining good relationships”.

Another FGD female youth participant expressed:

“Some couples are even working work together to find a little bit of money. Because of this there is little suspicion that your husband has gone drinking or womanizing”.

The other half of the participants, however, felt that there was tension in the homes due to lack of understanding and communication on the priorities of the household between spouses and between parents and children. For example, the focus group of women accused the men of irresponsibly spending money they generated from piecework on non priority items like alcohol, while the women, who earned similar wages, were said to spend it on food. At a community level, the relationships had not changed compared to the previous period. The relationships among community members in the urban site remained distant, while the relationships among community members in the rural site remained communal mainly through church and community work interaction.

Very few households in both the urban and rural site were making any savings. Farmers involved in the agriculture cooperative were cited as the only occupation group making savings. However, compared to a year ago, the increase in the cooperative shares from K50 to K100 per share and on the other hand the stagnant marketing price of a 50kg bag of maize at K65 was said to be retrogressive and worked against the farmers in making any meaningful investment in agricultural production. The late delivery of farming inputs was also cited as a major factor that impeded a good crop yield and income from the 2012/2013 farming season. A normal harvest from 1 acre should be between 35 bags but for most people the harvest was between 15 – 18 bags due to the late delivery of the farming inputs. This had a great impact on the availability of maize in the community, which was less than the previous year. This further had an impact on the number of meals eaten which had reduced generally compared to a year ago.

5. LOCAL ACCOUNTABILITY FOR FOOD SECURITY/HUNGER

Understanding local accountability particularly to food security was a pertinent topic to explore in the view of recent price spikes and ‘food crises’ that has raised questions on the politics of accountability for food security. By understanding and examining this issue, the research focused on asking:

How food security policies were accountable to local food security/hunger situation. Are food security policies merely about protecting food shocks, or is there a longer-term food security strategy in place?

What is the local understanding of the right to food?

Who / which institutions, actors, agencies or groups are considered responsible for ensuring food security in each of the local area?

Who is monitoring local food security / hunger situation?

Whether /how institutions, actors, agencies or groups have been held to account when there have been incidences of local food insecurity / hunger

While a lot has been written and debated about on food insecurity in Zambia, what is missing is a local understanding of the relationship of food security, people’s rights and state obligation. The focus of this topic was therefore key to uncover and redress accountability for food security by putting a spotlight on the lived experiences of local people as they go through episodes of local food insecurity and hunger and how local institutions, government and the community have and can play a role in ensuring that a basic necessity of life and ability to attain food, is realised. While the lived experiences documented here, do not demonstrate the ideal realities of accountability against hunger, they provide animated evidence of issues and principles of accountability for food security, worth noting.

STANDARD OF ACCOUNTABILITY OF FOOD /NUTRITION SECURITY

The current legal, policy and public spending on food security in Zambia reveals that government’s strategy for food security is aimed at short term strategies aimed at protecting vulnerable people from food shocks. While a redirection of policies and spending towards longer-term food security strategies would advance basic food security and nutrition in Zambia, the responsibilities, in relation to food security, can only be promoted through a change of attitude and behaviour among state actors. The current republican Constitutional and policy framework demonstrates that government’s attitude towards the right to food is indifferent. The current Zambian constitution, last revised in 1996, does not extensively recognise food as a human right. Human rights in the Republican Constitution are provided for under Part IX of the Constitution, “Directive Principles of State Policy” and this part implies that these rights which include the right to health, education, food and water and sanitation, shall not be justiciable and shall not be legally enforceable in any court or tribunal.⁶ Further, government’s behaviour

towards food security priority is demonstrated by its very low budget allocation to the agriculture sectors, which over the last 5 years has averaged at 6% of the national budget.

However, the government has on the other hand made tremendous efforts in the realisation of food security, monitoring food shocks and food nutritional levels by putting in place programs such as the Farmers Input Support Program and Food Reserve Marketing Program. However, these measures are also faced with a number of challenges, especially in implementation and coordination. Further, the institutions mandated to look at the food cycle are also not fully committed to provide the vulnerable and the poor with adequate food or resources to access food hence subjecting to permanent hunger.

UNDERSTANDING THE RIGHT TO FOOD

When asked whether people had any rights to food, none of the people in the rural site explicitly expressed that people had a right to food, but rather they expressed that people had a right to “eat” when hungry. This they premised on the fact that for someone to survive they must eat. Those in the urban site generally expressed surprise at the question as demonstrated by one of the female FGD participant in Kabwata who asked:

“You mean people have a right to food? Nobody really has a right to food. People generally have a right to life but this does not mean a right to food. While I can be locked up if I took someone’s life, I don’t think I would be locked up if I did not give my neighbour food. It comes down to your conscious”.

A majority of the people, including key informants spoken to both in the urban and rural site, felt that people who faced hunger in some cases should not have any rights to food. It was a generally accepted view that “hunger” was a situation that faced every person on a day to day basis and due to its daily occurrence, the access to food to curb it was not a right entitled to a person but rather a personal, self-obligation that each person owed themselves. It was also perceived that most people who faced hunger situations, except for those who were extremely vulnerable (for example children, the elderly, chronically sick), were in that situation due to their own negligence and therefore should not be in a position to demand for the right to food. A male FGD participant in Chikwanda expressed that:

“Most of those who become hungry are lazy to grow their own food and therefore they have no right to food. Even the bible says that if you will not work then you should not eat”.

The right to food in both sites among all the stakeholders was perceived to be a new concept but when further pressed about what a right to food may look like, most of the people expressed that it would encompass access to affordable food, access to affordable fertilizer, access to land, access to good nutritious food and access to employment and credit opportunities.

RESPONSIBILITY FOR ENSURING FOOD SECURITY

When asked about who was responsible for ensuring food security in local areas, systemic biases were noted in the responses of local government officials spoken to in both the rural and urban site. The general view expressed was that the responsibility lay with individual households and not government. It was perceived that government could only intervene in a situation when parents’ efforts failed to ensure food security. For example the district social welfare officer serving Chikwanda expressed that:

“Primary responsibility lies with the parents. If the parents fail, the immediate family relatives should come in. If the relatives fail, then the community comes in. If the community fails then government should come in. The government is the last resort.”

The beliefs held by local government officials on who was considered responsible for ensuring food security was also similar with the reality lived by community members in both the rural and urban site. Ensuring food security in a household was said to be a responsibility taken by different actors but that the primary role lay with the parents. Parents were expected to ensure food security from the conception of a child to a time when the child was physically capable of working or growing their own food. Among parents, the role to ensure food security was much more pronounced among women than men. Women in both the urban and rural site expressed that their role was unquestionable in ensuring food security for the household. This point was stressed by a married female household participant in Kabwata who said:

“...if we women fail to provide food in the house, our husbands would divorce us. Whether there is money or not in the house, we are expected to use our own initiative to find food and make sure that everyone in the house eats. How and where we find food is nobody’s business. But it is everyone’s business that they eat and that I’m the only one responsible to feed them?”

Apart from parents, other actors such as the church, NGOs and government were only expected to address food insecurity issues when there was a large-scale food crisis. The efforts by the actors and institutions were seen to be short term and included actions that promoted food handouts. When asked about actions they would want these actors to promote a majority of people expressed that in addition to food aid, government in particular should provide an environment that would create opportunities for people to devise their own food security strategies. It was expressed by the majority of people in the rural area, that provision of affordable fertilizer, seed, land and on the other hand creation of jobs in the urban area, would be some of the measures that government would focus on in promoting food security. A male youth FGD participant expressed that:

“The reason we participate in voting during elections [national elections], is so that the government of the day can help us in creating an environment and opportunities for us to earn a livelihood that would help us to take care of our own needs ”

It was a widely accepted view that government was entrusted with the public resources and were therefore expected to prioritise those resources towards food security whenever there was a hunger situation caused by bad weather. .

The role of NGOs in food/hunger situations was only cited by a few people in Chikwanda who pointed out that the role of NGOs was to compliment government and that in their case they had worked with NGOs, such as World Vision, who had built the capacity of some community members in issues related to sustainable livelihoods and food security.

When asked whether any of the participants or community members had tried to seek for help with the cost of buying or producing food in the past year, the participants in Kabwata stated that there were no known opportunities to seek for such help. Similarly, some people in Chikwanda expressed that there were no avenues to seek for that kind of help, while some others claimed that there were vague opportunities they had heard of but were either not well organised or lacked information to seek for such help. On the contrary the youths in Chikwanda, expressed that they were well mobilized and ready to seek out opportunities, but that they were being hindered by the adults, who they claimed were jealous of them. The women on the other

hand attributed their lack of education and lack of information as the biggest factors hindering them to claim their right to food from government. One female FGD participant expressed:

“We are scared to go and ask for help especially from government. It is much easier to go to the church or your friend to ask for assistance”

Another stated:

“We don’t have information on where to go. Maybe you through this research can help us with that information”

Among the various groups spoken to, only the farmers organised in cooperatives expressed that they had tried to get help through the Farmers Input Support Programme (FISP) in ensuring their food security. Those who sought assistance through the FISP had to pay ZMW1000 for shares before they could access subsidised fertilizer. However, very few could afford to pay that kind of amount, which meant that the majority of people were denied the opportunity of accessing farming inputs at a subsidised rate.

When asked whether institutions, actors, or groups had been held to account when there had been episodes of local food insecurity / hunger, without exception all the people spoken to in the urban and rural site expressed that there were no known official sanctions to any institution that may have failed to address food insecurity issues. For example the Ministry of Community Mother and Child Health who are tasked to provide social welfare are not sanctioned when they fail to guarantee social welfare. According to the Mpika District Social Welfare officer, he stated that they are not sanctioned due to limited funding. However according to him, parents who have the primary responsibility to ensure that their household was food secure can be sanctioned under the Juvenile Act CAP 53, which states that the parent or guardian can be charged for child neglect and this includes neglecting to provide food to young children. The department can take a parent who fails to provide food to court. But when inquired, there were no known cases of parents in Chikwanda who had been taken to court. The officer expressed that there are very few cases of malnutrition, so the department was not concerned.

When asked who the community would prefer to hold accountable for food insecurity / hunger issues, the majority of the people in the Kabwata stated that their MP should be held accountable to any crisis in the community, and though they did not have power to sanction their MP, they expressed that as the electorate they had the power to vote in or “out” a candidate. In Chikwanda, some community members similarly expressed that they would hold the MP to account, while others cited the Traditional Chief and local councillors.

When asked whether members of the community in both the rural and urban site have ever protested to demand for accountability to food security, it was expressed by both communities that none of them have experienced a severity hunger situation to warrant a protest. However, there was usually dissent between cooperative farmers and government when they failed to deliver the farming inputs on time.

Local monitoring of food security / hunger situation

Government through the FEWSNET monitor the hunger and food situation of the country. However there are no formalized ways of monitoring the food security or hunger situation as it is experienced at household level, which in part explains government’s poor targeting of food security interventions. Based on observations made during the research, it was noted that there was some attention, though not formal, to monitoring the food situation in the rural areas than in the urban area. For instance the Social Welfare officer in Mpika, revealed that they had a monitoring program, which however, due to limited funding was occasionally implemented at a small scale.

The majority of the people in Kabwata and Chikwanda expressed that they had never seen the government monitor the food security/hunger situation and they attributed this to government's blindness to the issue. The majority of the people in Chikwanda also felt that the government was not open to engaging in dialogue on food security issues. A male FGD participant expressed that:

“The government does not want to engage with the people on hunger issues, so we don't know what they are doing to address the issue. They forget we elect them to represent us and serve our interest.”

A few NGOs in the rural area were noted to be involved in food security/hunger situation. However, a few people complained that these NGOs did not provide feedback to the communities, while a majority of the participants expressed that they were not concerned about this type of information as most of them were more concerned about “putting food on their table.”

NOTES

¹ Mulumbi, M (2013); Life in a Time of Food Price Volatility, Zambia, Oxfam International: Oxford.

² FEWS NET (2013) Zambia Food Security Outlook,
<http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/Zambia%20Food%20Security%20Outlook%20April%20to%20September%202013.pdf> (last accessed 29 March, 2014)

³ FEWS NET (2012) Zambia Food Security Outlook,
http://www.fews.net/sites/default/files/documents/reports/Zambia_OL_2012_04%20final.pdf
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⁴ FEWS NET (2013) Zambia Food Security Outlook,
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⁵ Jesuit Centre for Theological Reflection (2012 and 2013), Basic Need Basket, September, 2012 and September 2013, Lusaka

⁶ RAPDA (2010), Right to Food: A Case Study Report of Zambia, 2010

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