

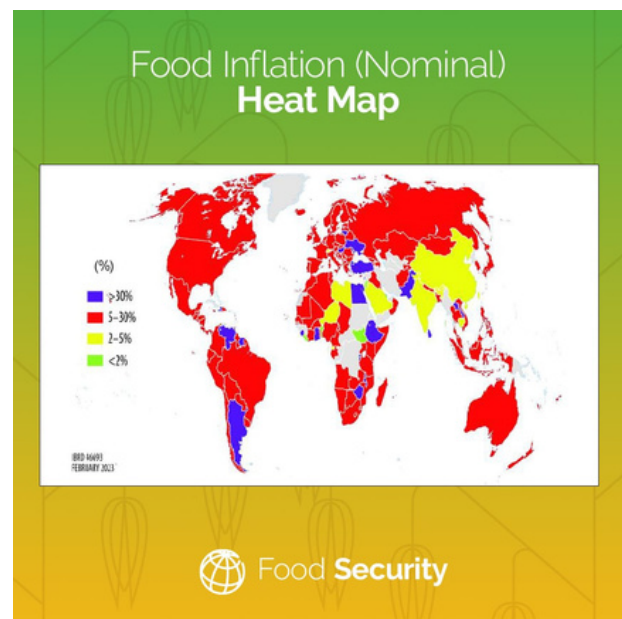


# THE WEEKEND READER

"Your Weekly Read on Debt, Development & Socio-Economic Justice"

## THE REALITY OF FOOD INSECURITY IN ZIMBABWE

Humanitarian organizations such as the World Food Programme (WFP) have declared that Zimbabwe is amongst the hungriest countries in the world. In the same light, the government has also declared that four million Zimbabweans are food insecure due to poor rainfall distribution patterns in the 2020-2021 farming season.<sup>1</sup> Following these metrics, Zimbabwe is facing yet another year of food insecurity worsened by the wider macroeconomic challenges such as the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, Climate Change, the Russia-Ukraine war and runaway inflation.



***\*The World Bank reports Zimbabwe hit hardest by food inflation***

### Context

Zimbabwe has been facing food insecurity for the last few decades, worsened by parallel economic challenges such as the currency challenge, unemployment and climate change. All these create a context of vulnerability which has left over 7,9 million Zimbabweans (about half the population) living in extreme poverty.<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, government reports that over 3,7 million Zimbabweans have registered for relief from the Ministry of Social Welfare under the Food Assistance Programme (FAP).<sup>3</sup> Where then are these people coming from if the nation is food secure? Below, we present indicators that show the plausibility of food insecurity rather than security.

1. <https://allafrica.com/stories/202301270180.html>

2. <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2021/jun/21/half-of-zimbabweans-fell-into-extreme-poverty-during-covid>

3. <https://allafrica.com/stories/202301270180.html>



## **Climate Change**

Zimbabwe has not been spared from the globally witnessed effects of climate change. Increasingly, we have seen climate variability through cyclones and droughts over the past 3 decades. This has negatively affected citizens who mainly rely on rain-fed agriculture. While indeed efforts have been made to improve irrigation services and infrastructure across the country, the capitalization costs have limited the scope especially for the poor. Those who relied explicitly on rain-fed subsistence farming are then left hanging dry and relying on government support which is meagre. The FAP program directly supports 3.2 million citizens with 10 kilograms of grain and cash ranging from \$US12 for individuals to US\$60 per household per month.<sup>4</sup> According to UNICEF, Zimbabwe is ranked in the top three in Southern Africa in the Global Climate Risk Index (2021) while evidence shows that it will continue to warm up to 2080.<sup>5</sup>

## **A Deteriorating Economy**

To worsen the situation, the Zimbabwean economy has been experiencing hyper-inflation over the last three decades. Runaway inflation has made citizens vulnerable especially as incomes are eroded and the local ZWL continues to lose power against the United States Dollar. The denial of the government of the actual exchange rate does no favours to citizens as well because their incomes lose value against the pricing of imported goods. The World Bank records Zimbabwe amongst the 10 countries hardest hit by the effects of food inflation.<sup>6</sup>

## **The COVID-19 pandemic**

The global economy is still reeling from the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. While stronger economies such as the Western states are able to set aside funds for such efforts, Zimbabwe amongst other third world countries does not have the capacity. During the pandemic and resultant lockdowns, businesses closed, savings were drained and food insecurity increased especially in urban areas. A research by Rukasha et al. ascertains that the pandemic negatively impacted agriculture supply chains from production systems, input supply, processing and packaging as well as the retail & marketing.<sup>7</sup> This unbalanced an already vulnerable food supply system affected by macroeconomic issues such as inflation. As a result, one can ascertain that citizens are still trying to get back on their feet.

## **Global Supply Chain shocks: The Russia- Ukraine war**

This conflict had deep implications across the globe, not sparing Zimbabwe. Spikes in fuel, food, fertilizer, supply chains & trade contributed to a high cost of living and widening inequalities.<sup>8</sup> The crisis also occurred at the same time as the other macroeconomic challenges mentioned above, contributing to the increase of Zimbabweans living under extreme poverty (7,9 million).

## **Conclusion**

The issue of food security or its absence is not a political one but a social economic justice issue reflecting the livelihoods of citizens and more importantly, the poor. As such, it is key that any reporting on the matter is factual and considerate of their plight. Indeed, poverty has a human face and it leaves citizens in indignity. Government has called for a helping hand from bilateral partners due to its inability to support those facing food insecurity.

4. <https://allafrica.com/stories/202301270180.html>

5. <https://www.unicef.org/zimbabwe/climate-change-and-children>

6. <https://www.newzimbabwe.com/food-insecurity-worsens-zimbabwe-rated-among-10-poor-countries-hardest-hit-by-food-inflation/>

7. <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/23311886.2021.1928980>

8. <https://reliefweb.int/report/zimbabwe/impact-ukraine-crisis-zimbabwe-october-2022>



Being a pro-poor movement, we then recommend that government meaningfully address the challenge of food insecurity while increasing the positive irrigation efforts already initiated. Only then can the 7,9 million citizens living in extreme poverty be afforded the dignity of a decent life.