



## Policy Brief

Chakula ni uhai / Food is Life  
Accelerating the goal of food security for  
all in SADC by 2025 post COVID 19.



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# Chakula ni uhai / Food is Life

Ending the triple pandemic of hunger, inequality & health  
Towards food security for all  
in SADC by 2025.

## The paradox of wealth and food and nutrition insecurity in SADC

The man who has bread to eat does not appreciate the severity of a famine.  
~Yoruba Proverb

Southern Africa (SADC) is the region with the highest GDP of all the Regional Economic Communities<sup>1</sup> on the Continent, and is also home to seven<sup>2</sup> of the ten richest economies on the continent in GDP per capita terms<sup>3</sup>. Five countries of the region fall within the UN category of Least Developed Countries (LDC) with Angola expected to graduate out of the LDC category in 2021<sup>4</sup>. However these economic disparities are not necessarily a predictor of poverty levels, economic precarity or food insecurity within and between countries. Food insecurity in the region as a whole has been on the rise. SADC and various United Nations (UN) agencies estimate in the first half of 2020 were that about 45 million people of the region's 345 million population will be at risk of hunger, but warn that this figure will likely be much higher as a consequence of the multifaceted impacts of the COVID crisis<sup>5</sup>.

Alongside health in the context of the COVID-19 crisis, guaranteeing food security for all should be a foremost priority for governments in cushioning populations against the unprecedented socio-economic impacts of the COVID pandemic. A common refrain when countries in the region responded to COVID with lockdown measures despite low infection rates, was that most households were confronted with a choice between dying of the coronavirus or dying of hunger. The World Health Organisation (WHO) has warned that the COVID pandemic will be a protracted one which is still in its initial phases<sup>6</sup>. Both urban and rural populations' livelihoods and incomes have and will continue to be negatively affected by a number of factors: loss of jobs, access to markets, declining incomes. Add to that the potential of a high death toll due to COVID as the pandemic spikes, weak health systems and high dependency ratios, many households may find themselves thrown into precarity through the loss or illness of breadwinners. How the region manages the question of food security will be a key determinant in the ability of her population to recover from this shock.

The most recent SADC Food Security and Nutrition Regional Vulnerability Analysis and Assessment RVAA 2020 points to crop failures or high prices (i.e. inadequate income) as the main reasons for acute food insecurity in many countries, with conflict additionally affecting two countries (Democratic Republic of Congo and Mozambique)<sup>7</sup>. This is because the majority of households in Southern Africa are rural, ranging between 73% for example in Malawi and 50% in South Africa and 34% in Angola;<sup>8</sup> they depend on their own food production for a large proportion of their food needs, so that their food security is directly impact by climate events. And yet with available technologies, agricultural knowledge, promises of a green revolution and on-paper commitments to direct more public funding to food production, climate disruptions should not be such a key predictor of whether households starve or eat. Where food security is so heavily dependent on the vagaries of increasingly erratic climatic conditions, and where incomes or savings or other assets are

insufficient to compensate for food deficits, the problem of vulnerability to food insecurity cannot be put on the doorstep of climate and market factors alone.

The FAO's State of Food Security and Nutrition Report (2020) has for the first time included global figures for both severe and moderate food insecurity and nutrition. According to FAO,

"People experiencing moderate food insecurity face uncertainties about their ability to obtain food and have been forced to reduce, at times during the year, the quality and/or quantity of food they consume due to lack of money or other resources. It thus refers to a lack of consistent access to food, which diminishes dietary quality, disrupts normal eating patterns, and can have negative consequences for nutrition, health and well-being. People facing severe food insecurity, on the other hand, have likely run out of food, experienced hunger and, at the most extreme, gone for days without eating, putting their health and well-being at grave risk."<sup>9</sup>

By this definition, the FAO report finds the levels of food insecurity are staggeringly high, even for wealthier SADC countries. Of the countries for which data was available, only Seychelles and Mauritius have both severe/moderate food insecurity prevalence below 20%; four countries have severe to moderate food insecurity in the 60-69% range, namely Angola, Eswatini, Mozambique and Namibia; two countries, Lesotho and Botswana are in the 70-79% range; Malawi has the highest prevalence at 81.9% while South Africa sits at 51%.<sup>10</sup> The report also shows that food insecurity does not necessarily follow countries' GDP per capita: Angola, Eswatini, Mozambique and Namibia have similar levels of severe and moderate food insecurity but their GDP capita ranges from \$441 (Mozambique), \$3942 (Eswatini) and \$5516 (Namibia). Lesotho and Botswana have comparable levels of food insecurity even though Lesotho's GDP per capita stands at \$1233 while that of Botswana is at \$7894. This demonstrates that regardless of 'economic performance' most SADC countries have inexplicably high--and rising--levels of food insecurity, poverty and inequality.

**TABLE 3**  
**PREVALENCE OF MODERATE OR SEVERE FOOD INSECURITY (MEASURED USING FIES) IN THE WORLD, AFRICA AND ITS SUBREGIONS, 2014 TO 2018 (%)**

Regions/ subregions*	Prevalence of severe food insecurity in the total population (%)					Prevalence of moderate or severe food insecurity in the total population (%)				
	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
World	8.0	7.7	8.0	8.7	9.2	23.2	23.2	24.1	25.6	26.4
Africa	18.1	19.0	21.9	22.9	21.5	47.6	48.3	52.6	54.3	52.5
Northern Africa	8.6	7.2	9.3	10.1	8.0	27.1	22.9	27.8	35.2	29.5
Sub-Saharan Africa	20.3	21.7	24.8	25.8	24.6	52.4	54.2	58.3	58.7	57.7
Central Africa	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
Eastern Africa	23.9	25.1	27.8	28.7	25.9	58.2	59.7	64.8	65.5	62.7
Southern Africa	21.4	20.6	30.7	30.8	30.6	45.3	45.9	53.5	53.6	53.6
Western Africa	12.9	14.4	16.5	17.7	17.6	43.7	45.3	47.3	47.7	47.9

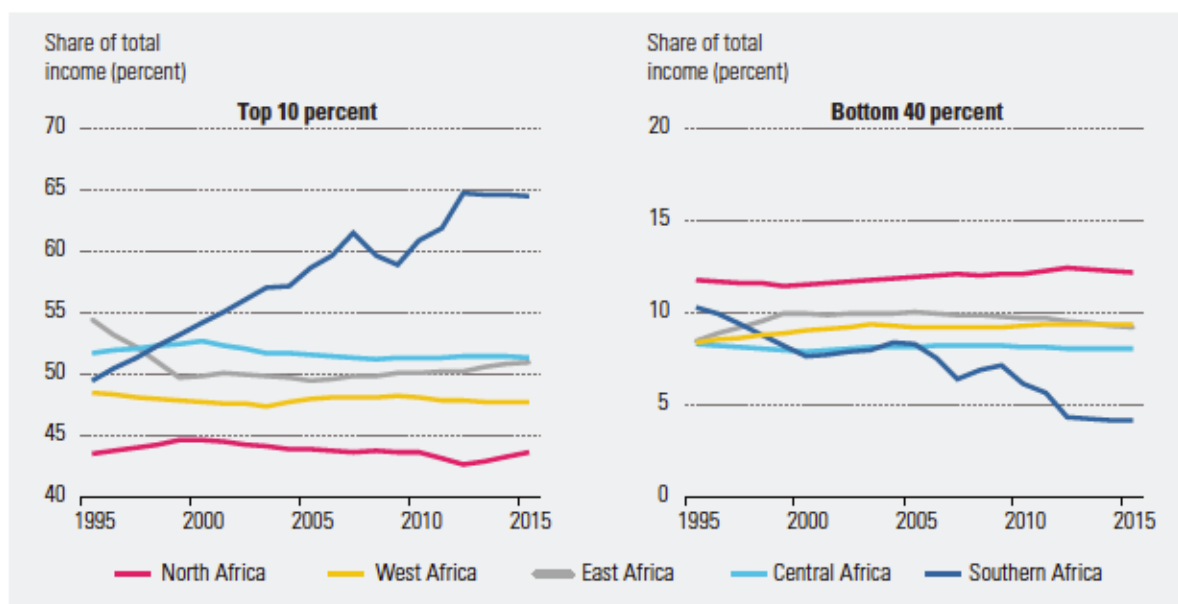
SOURCE: FAO

\* FAO uses the M49 country and regional groupings, available at <https://unstats.un.org/unsd/methodology/m49>. In this report, "Central Africa" refers to the M49 "Middle Africa" grouping.

## Figure 2 FAO Sub-Saharan Africa Food Insecurity Annual Report

The UNDP's Human Development Report focussed on inequality and found that Southern Africa has fared poorly in reducing inequality relative to other regions of the continent. The report found that "In Southern Africa the dramatic rise of the income shares of the top 10 percent occurred at the expense of both the middle and the bottom of the distribution, whose income shares fell. Indeed, Southern Africa's performance between 1995 and 2015 was highly negative (on average, the incomes of the bottom 40 percent grew 70 percentage points less than the average) and is the worst among African subregions." Inequality of both wealth and assets should therefore be a serious issue for consideration on food insecurity in the region.

**Between 1995 and 2015 the income share of the top 10 percent in North Africa and West Africa remained relatively stable, while the share of the bottom 40 percent in Southern Africa declined**



**Box 1 Source HDR 2020**

The policy brief explores a number of factors related to food security that policy makers in SADC need urgently to address the breakdown in food systems that the COVID pandemic has exposed: the lack of data around food systems, small scale farming and subsistence agriculture and growing land inequality; trade in foodstuffs and commodity dependence; urban food insecurity the informal sector and food prices; gender inequalities, unpaid care and domestic work and women's labour force participation; disruptions to young women and men's life journeys and finally social and economic policy. In addition, the paper goes beyond current food aid emergency requirements, to point to some of the other drivers of food insecurity pre-COVID19.

The following definitions are important to the discussion, since many groups view food security as inadequate in defining the most desirable food status that countries should aim for. While food security relates to a material set of conditions to describe the absence of hunger, the right to food and food sovereignty are two additional concepts critical to shaping of the type of food systems that deliver food security. The right to food speaks to the legal dimensions of ensuring food security by establishing food security as a human right, and hunger as a violation of human rights; while food sovereignty speaks to the political economy dimensions of food security--i.e. the what, who, how, where, why of the food systems that food security. Food sovereignty seeks democratic ownership, equity, self-determination and sustainability in the design of food systems. All these concepts contribute to defining public policies to guide what kind of food systems should deliver food security.

## Food security, the right to food, food sovereignty & sustainable food systems

### Happiness is as good as food (Maasai Proverb)

"Food security exists when all people, at all times, have physical, social and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food which meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life. Household food security is the application of this concept to the family level, with individuals within households as the focus of concern."

"The right to food is the right to have regular, permanent and unrestricted access, either directly or by means of financial purchases, to quantitatively and qualitatively adequate and sufficient food corresponding to the cultural traditions of the people to which the consumer belongs, and which ensures a physical and mental, individual and collective, fulfilling and dignified life free of fear."<sup>11</sup>

"Food sovereignty includes:

- prioritizing local agricultural production in order to feed the people, access of peasants and landless people to land, water, seeds, and credit. Hence the need for land reforms, for fighting against GMOs ((Genetically Modified Organisms), for free access to seeds, and for safeguarding water as a public good to be sustainably distributed.
- the right of farmers, peasants to produce food and the right of consumers to be able to decide what they consume, and how and by whom it is produced.
- the right of Countries to protect themselves from too low priced agricultural and food imports.
- agricultural prices linked to production costs: they can be achieved if the Countries or Unions of States are entitled to impose taxes on excessively cheap imports, if they commit themselves in favour of a sustainable farm production, and if they control production on the inner market so as to avoid structural surpluses.
- the populations taking part in the agricultural policy choices.
- the recognition of women farmers' rights, who play a major role in agricultural production and in food."<sup>12</sup>

Food systems encompass the entire range of actors and their interlinked value-adding activities involved in the production, aggregation, processing, distribution, consumption and disposal of food products that originate from agriculture, forestry or fisheries, and parts of the broader economic, societal and natural environments in which they are embedded.

The food system is composed of sub-systems (e.g. farming system, waste management system, input supply system, etc.) and interacts with other key systems (e.g. energy system, trade system, health system, etc.).

A sustainable food system (SFS) is a food system that delivers food security and nutrition for all in such a way that the economic, social and environmental bases to generate food security and nutrition for future generations are not compromised. This means that:

- It is profitable throughout (economic sustainability);
- It has broad-based benefits for society (social sustainability); and
- It has a positive or neutral impact on the natural environment (environmental sustainability).<sup>13</sup>

## Fragmented, partial or non-existent: information systems to determine food insecurity in SADC

Penye njaa hapana haki/Where there is famine, there is no justice  
(Swahili Proverb)

Food security and insecurity are complex and multidimensional and localised, yet regional food security statistics for SADC tend to be extremely aggregated and limited to narrow set of indicators which means it is difficult to understand and monitor the drivers of food in/security in the region's

political economies. In particular, food security data do not provide information about the region's diverse food systems which differ across ecological zones, levels of urbanisation, etc. This lack of data about food systems is compounded by the fact that food production, procurement and consumption is through informal food markets (including cross border trade) and subsistence farming (urban and rural) rather than formal market purchases which go into national accounting systems. SADC's RVAA on Food Security and Nutrition, and those of other humanitarian agencies currently offer limited tools to fully address the widespread structural socio-economic precarity and inequality causing mass food insecurity.

The most recent SADC COVID-19 RVAA has largely directed relief efforts towards areas that had experienced extreme disasters and shocks prior to COVID. In this sense, the response to the COVID pandemic appears to be shaped in the mould of a localised atypical humanitarian disaster rather than a structural and systemic collapse of food systems. At the same time policy recommendations and commitments on ending hunger suggest an awareness by governments of the structural nature of our food insecurity problem: for example the RVAA repeats a series of long-standing recommendations which point to the many known gaps in the food system (see below). These recommendations and commitments relate to the nature of the food system itself, economic performance and public spending priorities, agricultural and macroeconomic policy, structural inequalities, social indicators such as health, education, infrastructure and access to the means of production, particularly land. Not only are countries lagging behind on addressing these gaps, but data collection and monitoring systems to measure progress on these commitments is similarly lacking.

#### **Do More and Do Better! SADC COVID-19 Food Security and Nutrition RVAA Medium to Long Term Recommendations**

- a. Encourage crop diversity through the promotion of diversified diets, including indigenous foods. This includes species diversification in livestock production, especial small ruminants that are adapted to harsh weather conditions.
- b. Promote community irrigation schemes and rainwater harvesting and construct dams to ensure year-round agricultural production.
- c. Address market-related challenges for small scale farmers. In the long term, plan for the expansion of the social services closer to the people.
- d. Prioritize support to routine national information systems to improve monitoring of routine programme data at national and sub-national levels to be able to compare trends over years, monitor progress of programmes and ensure availability of high-quality data during emergency situations (such as the current pandemic) as well as non-emergency times.
- e. Develop resilience-building initiatives, including employment creation in rural areas, incorporating climate-smart technologies in subsidies and conservation agriculture.
- f. Enhance the coordination, harmonization and support of response planning, capacity development, monitoring and evaluation at sub-national, national and regional levels.
- g. Facilitate engagements between countries with surpluses and those affected by drought for prioritization of import/export inter/intra Member States food availability.
- h. Address water security, quality and safety. Here work would be on strengthening and expediting an end to open defecation and a shift to safely managed sanitation and water services resulting in the overall improved quality of water provided to communities and a positive impact on nutritional outcomes in the region.
- i. Develop policies and programmes to address social and economic vulnerabilities as inclusive approaches will contribute to the protection and promotion of everybody's rights (in the context of migration), access to food and health, and the overall well-being of citizens.



COVID 19s simply exacerbates already dire food insecurity situation, due to longstanding neglect in many of these policy areas. While the RVAA indicates that around 45 million people out of SADC's 345 million population are likely to be severely food insecure during 2020, data on poverty, low wages, under and unemployment, informality, absence of social protection and other key public services, gender and socio-economic inequality, low education and skills levels point to a pandemic that finds a food insecurity crisis much larger than those suggested by current vulnerability assessments. While food insecurity is extensive, and there have been some challenges to agricultural production, the region is not facing an overall situation of food unavailability: according to the RVAA, SADC registered an increase in the maize harvest (with the exception of Zimbabwe) with other sectors, fruit and vegetable, livestock and aquaculture production having been relatively stable.

The lack of strong data on SADC's food systems and localised/in-context drivers of food insecurity point to the need for relevant actors to collate dedicated information systems on SADC food security and nutrition. This needs to go beyond the short-term humanitarian needs which were always built to address isolated shocks rather than to deal with endemic food insecurity. The more we understand about our complex and varied food systems in the region--in times of plenty and in times of scarcity--the better able we are to shape policy to meet the Malabo zero hunger goal and Sustainable Development Goals and Targets (below).

### **Sustainable Development Goal 2 – End Hunger**

- 2.1 By 2030, end hunger and ensure access by all people, in particular the poor and people in vulnerable situations, including infants, to safe, nutritious and sufficient food all year round.
- 2.2 By 2030, end all forms of malnutrition, including achieving, by 2025, the internationally agreed targets on stunting and wasting in children under 5 years of age, and address the nutritional needs of adolescent girls, pregnant and lactating women and older persons.
- 2.3 By 2030, double the agricultural productivity and incomes of small-scale food producers, in particular women, indigenous peoples, family farmers, pastoralists and fishers, including through secure and equal access to land, other productive resources and inputs, knowledge, financial services, markets and opportunities for value addition and non-farm employment.
- 2.4 By 2030, ensure sustainable food production systems and implement resilient agricultural practices that increase productivity and production, that help maintain ecosystems, that strengthen capacity for adaptation to climate change, extreme weather, drought, flooding and other disasters and that progressively improve land and soil quality.
- 2.5 By 2020, maintain the genetic diversity of seeds, cultivated plants and farmed and domesticated animals and their related wild species, including through soundly managed and diversified seed and plant banks at the national, regional and international levels, and promote access to and fair and equitable sharing of benefits arising from the utilization of genetic resources and associated traditional knowledge, as internationally agreed.
- 2.A Increase investment, including through enhanced international cooperation, in rural infrastructure, agricultural research and extension services, technology development and plant and livestock gene banks in order to enhance agricultural productive capacity in developing countries, in particular least developed countries.
- 2.B Correct and prevent trade restrictions and distortions in world agricultural markets, including through the parallel elimination of all forms of agricultural export subsidies and all export measures with equivalent effect, in accordance with the mandate of the Doha Development Round.

2.C Adopt measures to ensure the proper functioning of food commodity markets and their derivatives and facilitate timely access to market information, including on food reserves, in order to help limit extreme food price volatility.

## A hundred million broken promises: land poverty, landlessness and inequalities amongst small scale, family & subsistence farmers

If you see a man in a gown eating with a man in rags, the food belongs to the latter. ~Fulani Proverb

While urban populations are increasing in terms of their number and share of the total population, rural populations are still growing in absolute numbers. IFAD further points to a rapid increase in rural population density, noting that “rural populations have more than doubled since 1950 in developing countries and increased nearly fourfold in the least developed nations.”<sup>14</sup> Policy focus has shifted to questions of urbanisation, unfortunately, and possibly deliberately, in a narrative that implies rural populations and rurality is dying out globally and on the continent. Attention to rural development—except perhaps at election periods—is forgotten even though rural populations still are the majority of the population in most SADC countries. While rural households may be heavily dependent on remittances from urban family members, it remains the case that small scale, family and subsistence farming remain the backbone of food security in the region. This despite the fact that investment in rural development and infrastructure continues to fall short globally.

The investment gap in agriculture, food security and nutrition are difficult to quantify, though there is agreement that it is huge. For instance, the Intergovernmental Committee of Experts on Sustainable Development Financing quotes a figure of around US\$50 billion required annually to eliminate hunger by 2025; while the United Nations System Task Team Working Group on Financing for Sustainable Development assessed the additional investment needed for sustainable development related to land and agriculture at between US\$50 billion and US\$300 billion annually.<sup>15</sup>

In the absence of other productive assets and infrastructure, access to land remains the primary resource for rural households to generate income and strengthen their own food security. Millions of small-scale, family and subsistence farms that are dependent on communal or traditional land have access to less than two hectares of land. The category of family farms is not homogenous: farmers who are able to purchase land tend to have more, but a UNDP review of family farming in sub-Saharan Africa indicated that:

‘[a]verage per capita arable landholdings range from 0.1 hectares in Botswana to 0.3 and 0.4 hectares in most of the Southern Africa countries. In Malawi, family farms possess about 1.2 hectares per household, or 0.33 hectares per capita, although 33 per cent of these smallholder family farms own less than 1 hectare of cultivable land, compared to Zambia and Mozambique, both of which have more land. Between 1990 and 2000, about 77 per cent of the farms in most of the non-settler countries (e.g. the DRC, Lesotho, Malawi and Mozambique) had average landholding sizes of below 2 hectares, while over 95 per cent of the farms were below 5 hectares.’<sup>16</sup>

SADC follows the same patterns as those observed globally. Nine SADC countries participated in the FAO World Programme for the Census of Agriculture from which the following data were sourced:

### Land inequality in SADC

Country	Type of holding	No of farms / type	Hectares
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Mozambique	Smallholdings	3,827,797	5,633,850
	Medium holdings	25,654	1,30,651
	Large holdings	884	74,628
Mauritius	household sector	23,343	13,009
	non-household/commercial	113	53,440
Namibia	household/communal	159,484	463,248
	non-household/commercial	3,337	9,348,269
Botswana	household/traditional	62975	204965
	commercial	271	54,691
Malawi	Households with 0.1-1.9 ha	2,452,320	-
	Households with >2 ha	213,245	-
South Africa <sup>17</sup>	Commercial (All types)	39,966	

**Figures compiled from WCA/FAO Metadata - <sup>18</sup>**

The problem of land grabs in Africa exploded into headlines in the 2010 period. Even though the question has receded from international headlines, the preference--indeed appetite--of governments for large scale industrial or plantation style agriculture has not<sup>19</sup>. Whether it is from a genuine belief that colonial agro-industrial models are better, or because of accumulative self-interest of the elites, hundreds and thousands of hectares of land are being leased out to wealthy agribusiness for cash crop farming for export. Between the demand for large scale farmland (estimated at 25,249,885 hectares of land in Africa was acquired in large land deals ('land grabs') that are either concluded or intended, a significant 9.3% of the estimated 271 million hectares of crop land in Africa.<sup>20</sup> Under the current trend of rentier, financialised capitalism, COVID19 will exacerbate the rush for land as stock markets and hedge funds look for new income streams to park money as large economic sectors have collapsed globally. SADC countries will be under added pressure to liberalise their land markets in the face of high levels of external indebtedness and the collapse of sectors like tourism and fall in commodity prices driven by falling global demand.

Agricultural land use patterns do not indicate a high priority to reallocating arable land to sustainable food systems. The example of the box below is an excerpt from the South African Department of Agriculture Brochure on sugar production. Even though the DoA is pleased to report a flourishing sugar export sector, it is in contradiction with the fact that the country with a high obesity problem, relatively poor levels of food insecurity and nutrition indicate the mismatch in terms of land use and human development needs. KwaZulu Natal, the largest sugar producing area was reported to have 23.4% of households reporting severe or inadequate access to food in 2014.<sup>21</sup> The DoA not only boasts are considerable amount of land dedicated to sugar production for export, it also demonstrates the inequalities in terms of small- and large-scale sugar producers. Most egregious of all, most sugar cane production takes place on arable land in an area that receives high rainfall and therefore does not need irrigation.

#### **Sweet deals are made of this ... land inequality and injustice in sugar production in SADC**

"The South African sugar industry is consistently ranking in the top 15 out of approximately 120 sugar producing countries worldwide. There are approximately 26,400 registered sugarcane growers in South Africa, covering the provinces of KwaZulu-Natal, Mpumalanga and the Eastern Cape. Of the 26,000 sugarcane growers, more than 25,000 are small-scale growers producing about ten percent of the total crop. Large-scale growers (approximately 1,400) produce approximately 83% of the total sugarcane crop, while milling companies, with their own sugar estates, produce approximately seven percent of the crop. The bulk of the sugar belt receives sufficient rainfall to grow cane without irrigation; however, parts of northern KwaZulu-Natal and Mpumalanga regions produces cane

under irrigation (approximately 30 percent of total production)."<sup>22</sup>

As the agro-industry powerhouse in the region, South African agribusiness has been key in reshaping food systems in the region, while also looking to expand its production foothold in the rest of the region. In a 2010 PLAAS Working Paper on the roles of South African capital in land grabs, supported by the SA government and governments in the region, South African farmers (AgriSA) had made land deals in Botswana, Mozambique, Malawi, Zambia, Madagascar, Angola, Cameroon, DRC, Egypt, Gabon, Guinea, Namibia, Senegal, Sudan and Uganda so that by late 2010 AgriSAAfrica was negotiating land deals with 22 African governments.<sup>23</sup> The bitter irony of governments that had vehemently opposed apartheid now inviting apartheid farming models, complete with land grabs and dispossessions, and assisted by a former liberation movement, must certainly have more than a few post-independence leaders spinning in their graves!

Small scale, family and subsistence farmers therefore are squeezed between these two accumulative trends. In addition to the trend of large-scale land grabs, land is also being reallocated away from the small-scale communal farming sector towards middle scale farms and increasing numbers of the middle class opt into farming and buy up land to farm. Medium scale farms (5-100 hectares) in Zambia, Tanzania, Ghana and Kenya are reported to account for a rising share of total farmland, especially in the 10–100-hectare range where the number of these farms is growing especially rapidly controlling roughly 20% of total farmland in Kenya, 32% in Ghana, 39% in Tanzania, and over 50% in Zambia<sup>24</sup>. The rapid rise of medium-scale holdings has been a result of increased interest in land by urban-based professionals or influential rural people. It could well be that such farms are producing food for sale locally; the question of whether and how lower income groups are able to afford prices, particularly given the growing role of supermarket chains in the region is one that requires questioning in the context of food security.

Despite adverse climatic conditions, overall the SADC region has seen increases in commercial agricultural production. Despite the fact that the failed models are driving inequality, food insecurity and the climate crisis, changing the current direction of travel will be challenging. Moving to sustainable agriculture and food sovereignty models will mean taking apart some of the lock-in mechanism that are making this turnaround challenging. The International Panel of Experts on Sustainable Food Systems (IPES) countries listed the following lock in mechanisms that are making it difficult to shift the paradigm away from industrial agriculture models:

- path dependency,
- export orientation,
- expectation of cheap food,
- compartmentalised thinking, short term thinking,
- "feed the world" narratives (Green Revolution);
- measures of success (e.g. total output),
- concentration of power.<sup>25</sup>

While there is a consensus globally to use the COVID pandemic to learn from past mistakes and chart new pathways forwards, without strong government policies, COVID 19 will likely further tip the balance against small scale farmers and in favour of transnational capital or well-connected local elites. Already for example countries are backing down on their opposition to the introduction of GMOs (e.g. Zambia, Zimbabwe and Kenya) and COVID could be the final blow to this well-founded resistance. More small-scale farmers may also find themselves obliged to go into exploitative, monocropping forms of contract farming as the only lifeline available, when what is needed is diversified and climate adaptable forms of farming that large scale farms are not able to manage. Redistributing more land to small scale, family and subsistence farmers should not be with the aim of getting farmers to produce more cash crops but for the sustainable production of more and diverse foods for local and regional consumption. It is imperative that the region go beyond food security and the right to food and adopt the model of food sovereignty the small scale, peasant, family and subsistence farmers have been championing for decades.



# Inner city blues: urban food insecurity, food prices and looming household indebtedness and informality

*Matakadya kare haanyaradzi mwana - You cannot tell a hungry child that you gave him food yesterday. (Zimbabwean Proverb)*

With respect to food insecurity in urban areas, the SADC RVAA very preliminary estimates are that 11.1 million of the 44.8 million people who are severely food insecure live in urban areas, but given the high levels of economic precarity in urban areas, this figure needs to be revised upwards urgently if it is to meet the needs of urban food insecurity and the impacts of COVID on these numbers. According to the ILO, five countries in SADC have over 75% of the population working in the non-agricultural sector informal sector (DRC, Angola, Eswatini, Mozambique, Madagascar; the majority of Southern African countries have between 50%-74% workers in the non-agricultural sector (Malawi, Botswana, Zambia, Tanzania, Namibia, Zimbabwe, and Lesotho); South Africa non-agricultural informal sector employment is in the 20-50% category. Among young women and men, the unemployment rate is three times that of adults.

The impact of COVID19 lockdowns on the informal sector in the region were immediate and highly visible. Restrictions on the informal sector over the course of the pandemic will therefore continue to affect urban communities. In addition to lack of decent work opportunities, that could offer some form of social protection, lack of water and sanitation in public and private spaces, social protection, health infrastructure, housing have exacerbated vulnerabilities. The ILO has estimated that around half of informal sector workers globally lost their jobs in the second quarter of 2020<sup>26</sup>. Women workers in both the formal and informal sectors, given their concentration in the hardest hit sectors—retail, catering, tourism, arts and entertainment, domestic work—will experience particularly long-lasting effects from lockdowns. Other groups of women workers will lose jobs due to the slump in demand, and women migrant workers will also be affected, with impacts on both jobs and cross border remittances.

While many urban dwellers still have strong connections to their rural homes, where they may also engage in food growing and livestock, this is not the case for many households especially as increasing numbers of urban populations become second, third or fourth generation urbanites. IFAD notes that “in countries where urbanization has been associated with large-scale reductions in poverty and hunger, economic growth linkages between rural and urban areas have been catalysts for inclusive development.”<sup>27</sup> Urban populations are expanding rapidly in relative and absolute terms, and while urban agriculture is a growing trend in many urban areas, and food trade is an important part of urban livelihoods, significant numbers of urban households rely on purchased food: a household survey of nine cities in the region found households using between 35.9%-62.4% of their income on food<sup>28</sup>. Food prices continue to be of critical importance to urban populations: both the international trade dynamics as well as profiteering point to high food inflation, as well as high prices for other essential goods such as medicines. Urban food insecurity is also affected by the large number of dependent household members in urban areas.

TABLE 5: Food Purchase as Proportion of Household Expenditure		
City	N	% of Household Expenditure
Harare	417	62.4
Cape Town	985	54.8
Lusaka	357	53.6
Maputo	314	53.1
Msunduzi	456	52.2
Johannesburg	886	49.1
Blantyre	424	46.5
Maseru	628	46.0
Gaborone	374	45.7
Manzini	345	42.2
Windhoek	430	35.9
Total	5,616	49.6

**Box 2 -Source AFSUN – the State of Urban Food Security in Southern Africa 2010**

Of the different coping strategies in the face of food insecurity, there should be concern that the region will see an escalation in levels of household indebtedness for both lower- and middle-income groups who all tend to have few savings or assets. The lack of regulation of the microfinance industry, its predatory lending practices, particularly with the advent of mobile banking and the inclination of poor households to use microfinance for consumptive purposes portend a long extension of household poverty beyond COVID. Rather than hope that microfinance institutions will provide a temporary cushion for poor families as has been the case up to now, governments have to find solutions to ensure that food is affordable for households.<sup>29</sup> This could include cash transfers, food subsidies but must include a crackdown on profiteering and anti-competitive business practices.

Urban food security must start with addressing the informal sector, and implementing ILO Conventions on the informal sector and decent work particularly ILO Recommendation 204 since food insecurity in urban areas is intrinsically linked with the question of informal and precarious employment as well as lack of opportunities for small scale businesses and the self-employed. Public support to ensure food security for all would in turn support the creation of decent work and job opportunities for millions in the informal sector. Micro finance, used as a coping strategy, is not a viable way forward in this sense. Rather governments should opt for various means of publicly financed grants and credit through such structures as the public savings banks where informal sector actors can easily register, open accounts and access finance as well as other financial services.

**ILO Recommendation on the Informal Sector**

The adoption of the Recommendation No. 204 by the International Labour Conference in 2015 was of strategic significance for the world of work and for the future of work as it is the first international labour standard to focus on the informal economy in its entirety and diversity and to provide practical guidance to address these priorities. This Recommendation clearly stresses the need to: (a) facilitate the transition of workers and economic units from the informal to the formal economy, while respecting workers' fundamental rights and ensuring opportunities for income security, livelihoods

and entrepreneurship; (b) promote the creation, preservation and sustainability of enterprises and decent jobs in the formal economy and the coherence of macroeconomic, employment, social protection and other social policies; and (c) prevent the informalization of formal economy jobs.<sup>30</sup>

The experiences of the pandemic in urban areas have shown the extent of ill-preparedness and disrepair of urban planning in the region. Both economic and social infrastructure in most countries were not able to cope with either a mass spread of the virus or to put in place preventive measures that would cause minimum harm. So far governments do not appear to have presented recovery plans to address the weaknesses in urban development that created such havoc, particularly in terms of infrastructure programmes to create better housing, transport, water and sanitation, and markets for urban residents. Without tackling these problems, the region faces the daunting prospect of lurching from one uncontrolled crisis to the next over the coming years.

## Black sisters, you are on your own: women at the frontline of battling food insecurity

### They ate our food, and forgot our names - Tunisian Proverb

Food systems in Southern Africa are highly gendered and gender inequalities are present at every stage of food production, distribution and marketing, even though women provide more than half of the labour for food and agricultural production. Beyond food production however, women's labour in food systems particularly at the household level is overlooked in policy, where in addition to subsistence production, women are burdened almost exclusively for food production, processing, preparation and provisioning; women's role in household food provisioning is imposed through inequitable gendered political economies. Despite this imposed role in ensuring food security and nutrition, they receive little support in fulfilling these responsibilities. Subsistence production in particular has been looked down upon by policy makers, even as this is a sector which is critical for nutrition, a last resort for food security and a space of ingenuity, knowledge creation, and resilience building for household food security both in rural and urban areas in the region.

FAO notes that informal safety nets, which many households rely on to deal with shocks are insufficient particularly in situations where such shocks hit whole communities. Informal safety nets are usually driven by women—indeed one might say that women's unpaid care and domestic and community labour are de facto safety nets in and of themselves. Even as wider kinship networks kick in, e.g. with money contributed by male relatives, the work of transforming such contributions into household or community welfare is done by women... looking after the sick or elderly, feeding children. It is not unusual to find the practice of forced marriage as a coping mechanism for families, again putting women's bodies at the frontline of disaster responses. FAO notes that that

“Individuals, households and communities must have three capacities to cope and adapt to climatic (and other types) shocks and their impact:

- daptive capacity, i.e. coping strategies, risk management and savings;
- absorptive capacity, i.e. use of assets, attitudes/motivation, livelihood diversification and human capital;
- transformative capacity, i.e. governance mechanisms, policies/regulations, infrastructure, community networks and formal social protection.”

The gendered impacts of disasters have been well studied, if royally ignored. An Oxfam <sup>31</sup> report looking at the impacts of the 2007 food crisis ten years on noted that:

Men have more access to social capital and pathways out of crisis (their income pays past

debts and secures new farm loans), whereas women often face severe time burdens, given their household food-security roles. As they usually have a weak bargaining position with regard to household income, they frequently must reduce spending on nutrition and family well-being. Indeed, households adjust to reduced food purchasing power by shifting to cheaper, less diverse diets. Women tend to buffer the impact through extreme strategies: reducing their own consumption to feed others, collecting wild food, migrating or selling assets, and even taking on risky jobs.<sup>32</sup>

Women's contribution to food security in SADC is acknowledged in rhetoric but barely in terms of policy. International development circles have championed women's economic empowerment as a panacea for poverty alleviation, as it is known that women are likely to spend more of their income on household welfare (food, health etc) than men, thus putting women in a position of a household/community welfare or safety net mechanism in an environment lacking adequate social protections<sup>33</sup>. This highly exploitative perspective—the so-called “business case for women's rights”—is intensified as countries have expanded microfinance, targeted at women on usurious lending terms. Women's labour force participation in the region is relatively high—although it is noteworthy that higher income countries have lower rates of women's labour force participation, suggesting that the kinds of employment on offer for women, and the burden of care work and paid work, do not incentivise them to go out to work if they can opt out<sup>34</sup>. Participation in the labour force is not however an indicator of increased food security: the ILO has records high levels of working poor in Africa as a whole, with SADC being no exception.

Defined as the percentage of employed living below US\$1.90 PPP, working poverty in SADC countries is at 70% among women in the DRC, 54% in Mozambique, 69% in Malawi, 7% in Namibia, 36% in Tanzania, 5.6% in South Africa, 45% in Zambia and 17% in Zimbabwe (available SADC figures<sup>35</sup>). It should be noted that the US\$1.90 that the World Bank has defined as the international poverty level (IPL) for extreme poverty is heavily criticised for being too low. This criticism is validated in the context of COVID19 food insecurity: countries with large informal worker populations will inevitably have far higher food insecurity levels. For example the outgoing UN Special Rapporteur on Poverty and Human Rights in his final report (2020) rightly pointed out that:

“The IPL is explicitly designed to reflect a staggeringly low standard of living, well below any reasonable conception of a life with dignity. Under the measure, one can ‘escape’ from poverty without an income anywhere near that required to achieve an adequate standard of living, including access to healthcare and education. This standard is a world apart from the one set by human rights law and embodied in the UN Charter.”<sup>36</sup>

Given the high youth demographic in the region, it is worth recalling that a significant number of households in the region are headed by young women and men and many of these are young and female headed. The number of households where women were married before the age of 18 is high. UNFPA reports indicate that around a third of young women in Southern Africa have married before age 18: 31% in Zambia, 32% in Zimbabwe, 48% in Mozambique, 50% in Malawi and 32% in Comoros. Malawi, Mozambique and Comoros further have unacceptable rate of girls marrying before the age of 15 with 12%, 14% and 10% respectively. Many households are therefore suffering multiple disadvantages associated with youth: economic insecurity, lack of access to productive assets, and low education levels and lack of social capital and/or social protection. In addition to this, households in SADC support a fairly large number of people: 35.5% of households in SADC have over 5 members, and 26% have more than 6 household members indicating the high care burdens that households in the region have to carry.

Persons per household (SADC 2007-2012)						
SADC Total	1	2	3	4		>6
60 085 512	8 106 850	6 519 164	6 824 630	6 893 401	5 604 685	15 730 349



Although women's labour force participation in SADC is high, the majority of younger women are working in very low wage jobs or as unpaid contributing family workers; ILO in 2016 estimated that over one third of women in Sub-Saharan Africa work as contributing family workers compared to less than 20% of men<sup>37</sup>. Even if they count as employed, the majority of young women are either in unpaid or lowly paid employment while still carrying a disproportionate burden of food provisioning in the household. In contrast to the high numbers of early marriage mentioned above, Namibia both has lower numbers of girls marrying before age 18 (7%) and at the same time, lower numbers of working poor amongst women (7%). Furthermore the higher levels of women's labour force participation in some countries hides other economic disparities caused by low educational attainment levels and women's domestic care work burdens and underemployment (e.g. part time work).<sup>38</sup> Reports of an increase in teenage pregnancies and difficulties in accessing contraception during the COVID lockdowns<sup>39</sup> are likely to see increased forced and early marriages meaning an upward rather than downward trend in these statistics. As a result of COVID, more young women are being corralled into caregiver and household provider roles at the expense of their education and economic empowerment opportunities.

In addition to the neglect of women's sexual and reproductive and health and rights concerns during the COVID response, gender-based violence during the pandemic has been widely reported<sup>40</sup>. Food insecurity caused by economic dependence and insecurity, particularly high amongst young married women will continue to be a driver of GBV and in turn food insecurity. Where women are able to leave violent relationships, they usually do so leaving behind their share of household assets: female headed households tend to be poorer and divorce/separation is an additional shock. GBV services are far from meeting the needs of survivors and public policy neglects the cyclical relationship between gender inequality, GBV and food insecurity.

The gendered inequalities in food and nutrition security in the region will continue to persist under the low levels of public investment in gender equality indicators for all women in the region. The de facto reliance on women's unpaid/underpaid labour the bulwark against household hunger and malnutrition is both unjust and unsustainable. Redirecting public funds towards all sectors of the care economy, in ending gender-based violence and providing women with economic security through decent work are approaches that governments must prioritise to play their part in support food security and nutrition in the region.

## Bad luck, bad timing & bad policy: impacts of food insecurity on young women and men in the context of COVID19

The COVID10 pandemic has been particularly disruptive for the lives of children and young women and men. In the case of the latter, many are in their critical school years, preparing to attend or attending tertiary education, hoping to find work after finishing school, or just starting their working lives and families. This one year in the region could dramatically disruptive life trajectories, depending on how well their households are able to cope with the shocks of the pandemic. Like the rest of sub-Saharan Africa, the current cohort of 15-24-year olds is the largest demographically to date ... the so called 'youth bulge' (cf Table below). Many countries in Southern Africa half the population of the country (the median age) hovers around 20 years of age. It therefore means that governments must spend considerable amounts of public funds must be dedicated to the full range of support needed for youth welfare at this time—mental health, sexual and reproductive health and rights, nutrition and of course education. The choices that governments make in relation to addressing the challenges faced by young women and men will likely determine the fate of the region for decades to come.

### Total Population vs Youth Population (15-25 in SADC)

Country	Total Population	Population 15-24 (2014) <sup>41</sup>
Angola	25,646,166	5,300,000
Botswana	2,024,904	429,435
Comoros	575,660	514'462
Democratic Republic of the Congo	78,736,153	14,390,000
Eswatini	844,223	298,206
Lesotho	1,741,406	482 995
Madagascar	12,238,914	4,950,000
Malawi	13,077,160	3,680,000
Mauritius	1,237,000	197 692
Mozambique	20,252,223	5,520,000
Namibia	2,104,900	519 049
Seychelles	90,945	12 352
South Africa	56,000,000	10 300 000
Tanzania	44,928,923	10 440 000
Zambia	13,046,508	3 310 000
Zimbabwe	12,973,808	3 270 000

Employment prospects for this generation of young women and men does not appear to be much better than the preceding generation, the Millennials. And yet the challenges to rebuild economies, social systems, address climate change and ramp up food security should offer a wide range of exciting job opportunities for young women and men if the investment in employment creation were there. The push factors of rural out-migration continue to be distress driven (particularly disinvestment in small scale agriculture) even as urban areas offer little by way of decent work or livelihoods. COVID will also exacerbate xenophobic tensions meaning opportunities for migration to more economically successful countries will be limited.

It is important in SADC that the region try to ensure stability in young women and men's futures and enable them to pursue their hopes and dreams in terms of education, training and employment. Statistics for the numbers of young women and men not in employment, education or training are fairly bleak with some of the largest gender disparities across gender age groups. The reasons for gender disparities require much deeper examination as they point to more extreme and prolonged risks of food insecurity--to mention but one of many risk factors--for adolescent and young women in the region. Participation in high value food and agricultural production, supported by further education and skills building programmes should be targeted at young women, if necessary through expanded public works and skills building programmes.

### Youth Not in Education, Employment or Training (M/F)

Country <sup>42</sup> (2011 - 2019)	Youth Aged 15-24 Not in Education, Employment or Training (Male/Female) %
Comoros	21.4 / 33.1
Angola	7.6 / 12.2
DRC	16.4 / 25.8
Eswatini	29.8 / 33.9
Madagascar	4.1 / 9.3
Mauritius	17.1 / 23.9

Malawi	23.6 / 41.4
Namibia	29.3 / 34.2
South Africa	28.8 / 33.9
Zambia	36.4 / 49/5
Zimbabwe	11.2 / 21.8

## The trade trap: the triple danger of price volatility, commodity export and food import dependence

### One who borrows a cloth does not dance proudly (Igbo Proverb)

Food trade is important both to economies and to food security, but as reported in a review by TRALAC<sup>43</sup>, Africa has become a net importer of food with Africa's overall food trade bill expected to rise to \$110 billion by 2025. Intra African food trade is a miniscule amount of overall food imports and exports. South Africa is one of the top 5 importers of food on the continent (9%), while Angola, Mauritius, Zimbabwe and Tanzania feature amongst the top 20 food importers in terms of value of imports between 2012 and 2016, while seven SADC countries are amongst the top food exporters (South Africa, Tanzania, Namibia, Madagascar, Mauritius, Seychelles, Swaziland).

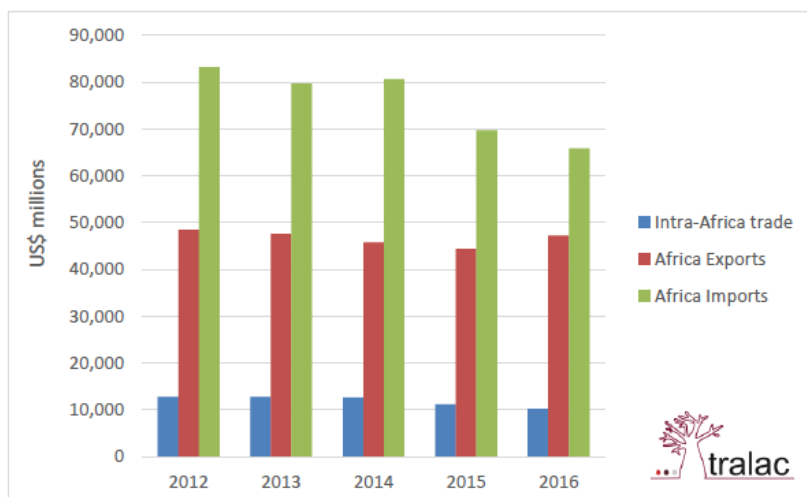
#### SADC Countries – Top Food Importers

Importers	2012	2016	% share
South Africa	6 791 081	5 747 490	9%
Angola	5 768 615	2 048 687	3%
Mauritius	1 155 810	1 053 305	2%
Zimbabwe	1 191 526	966 517	1%
Tanzania	1 206 210	849 589	1%

**The TRALAC study notes that a large percentage of Africa's food imports are for basic food stuffs:**

Over the review period, what is striking is the dominance of basic foodstuffs such as dairy products, edible oils and fats, meat and meat products, sugar and especially cereals, implying that food imports have been instrumental in ensuring food security in Africa. This is confirmed by trade data which shows that cereals alone are the largest commodity imports. Although the composition of food imports varied slightly over the review period, cereals (including rice, maize, and wheat), edible oils; sugar and sugar confectionary; and livestock products (dairy and meat) at any given period, represented over 60% of Africa total food imports.

### Africa's food trade overview (2012-2016)



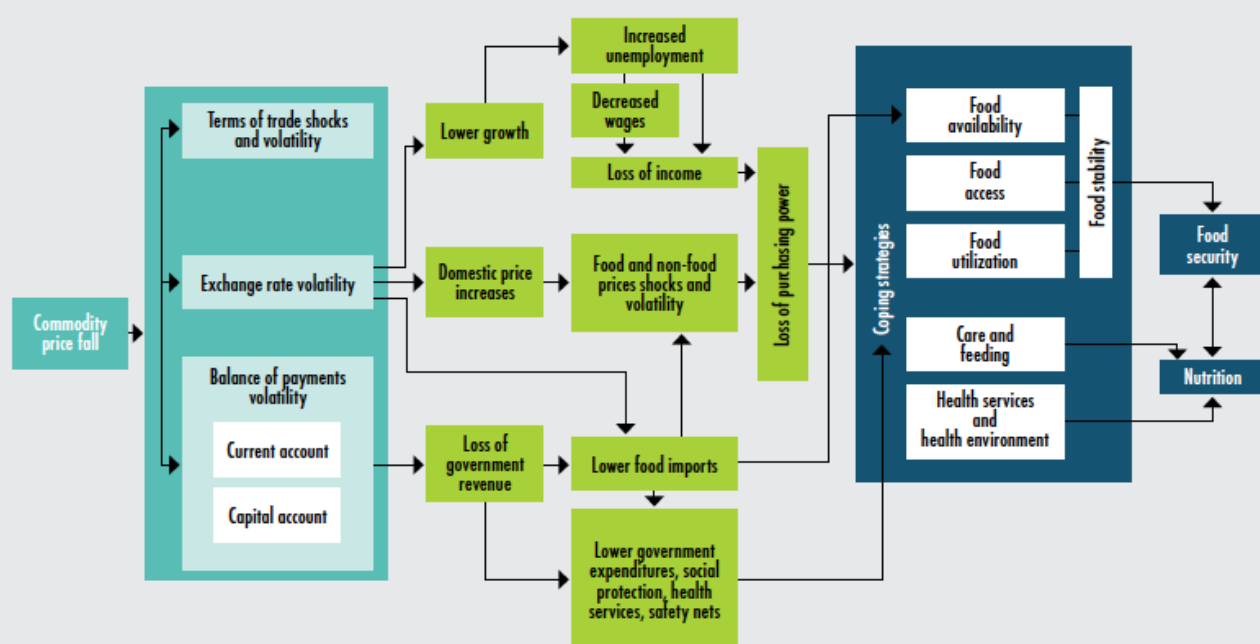
Source: UN ITC TradeMap database

A related consideration in relation to being net food importers is the overall problem of commodity prices. FAO's annual regional report on food insecurity in Sub-Saharan African focused on the question of the impact of economic downturns on food insecurity (authored prior to the COVID outbreak). In Southern Africa, only South Africa and Lesotho are low commodity dependent and low import countries. Eswatini, Mauritius, Madagascar and Comoros are high import/low export commodity dependent countries; Angola, Botswana, Malawi, Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe are high export/Low import commodity dependent and DRC and Mozambique are both high export and high import commodity dependent. Given the global nature of the crisis and its impact on already declining commodity prices globally (since 2014), import dependency (especially for food) and export dependency will have a deleterious impact on food prices. Commodity price falls have a negative impact on terms of trade, exchange rates and balance of payments which then trigger a series of negative impacts on employment, purchasing power, lower food imports, and lower expenditure on public services. Certainly, the COVID shock to global supply chains, in addition to climate change and unemployment concerns is likely to make many countries reconsider their trade policies and opt for localising critical goods in a bid to secure supplies of goods and services (e.g. tourism) closer to home.

While levels of intra-African trade are growing the role, size and origins of actors driving this process are important in considering whether such growth is equitable and delivering food insecurity. Supply chains in food and agricultural programmes are expanding in the region but this is driven by large agribusiness concerns (mainly South African) linked to global capital dominating value chains from fertilizer to feed to supermarkets. Such integrated value chains leave out small scale and informal actors, resulting a form of regional integration that is lopsided and exclusionary. The scorecard for SADC countries implementation on commitments indicate that SADC countries are on track in increasing intra-regional trade while still lagging behind on reducing hunger and public expenditure on agriculture.



**FIGURE 25**  
**COMMODITY PRICE FALLS AND THE TRANSMISSION CHANNELS BY WHICH THEY IMPACT**  
**FOOD SECURITY AND NUTRITION**



### Malabo Declaration Tracking - SADC Scorecard<sup>44</sup>

	Re- commitment to CAADP	Enhance Agriculture Finance	Ending Hunger by 2025	Halving Poverty Through Agriculture	Boosting Intra-Africa Trade in Agriculture	Enhancing Resilience to Climate Change	Mutual Accountability for Actions & Results	Country Averages	Progress 2017 Benchmark = 3.94
S. Africa	3,52	2,46	3,02	3,3	3,79	3,35	9,09	4,07	On Track
Botswana	5,4	3,4	2,37	3,68	4,68	4,61	6,52	4,38	On Track
Mozambique	5,59	2,7	2,65	5,27	3,84	3,36	5,49	4,13	On Track
Malawi	7,2	4,92	2,09	4,98	1,36	4,65	9,24	4,92	On Track
Zimbabwe	9,24	2,39	3,31	0	0,94	3,36	3,14	3,2	Not on track
Zambia	7,19	6,08	2,32	0,18	0,88	3,42	5,11	3,6	Not on track
Swaziland	5,15	8,07	2,72	1	1,54	3,33	6,16	3,99	On Track
Lesotho	4,44	3,3	2,38	0,05	5,19	3,33	7,52	3,75	Not on track
Namibia	4,79	4,16	2,65	3,13	3,85	4,01	6,16	4,11	On Track
Madagascar	4,41	2,31	0,49	3,53	3,44	4,1	3,39	3,1	Not on track
Mauritius	8,09	5,55	1,44	3,13	4,93	6,47	5,39	5	On Track
Seychelles	3,64	8,33	1,65	2,85	4,17	3,33	4,1	4,01	On Track
Angola	3,4	2,33	2,08	0,63	0	3,33	2,93	2,1	Not on track
DRC	4,34	0,57	0,42	0,63	0	0	4,15	1,44	Not on track
Tanzania	3,95	3,05	1,17	3,13	1,12	3,74	5,39	3,08	Not on track
<b>SADC Regional Average**</b>	<b>5,36</b>	<b>3,97</b>	<b>2,05</b>	<b>2,37</b>	<b>2,65</b>	<b>3,63</b>	<b>5,59</b>	<b>3,66</b>	<b>Not on track</b>
Minimum Score	3,33	6,67	3,71	2,06	1	6	4,78	3,94	
Progress	On track	Not on track	Not on track	On track	On track	Not on track	On track	Not on track	
Regional Average***	5,72	4,47	2,26	2,59	3,22	3,94	5,94	4,02	On Track
Minimum Score	3,33	6,67	3,71	2,06	1	6	4,78	3,94	
Progress	On track	Not on track	Not on track	On track	On track	Not on track	On track	On track	

In its report on regional value chains in Southern Africa the AfDB examined the trend towards the growing role of monopolies/cartels in regional food value chains and the need to regulate anti-competitive practices within such value chains. In respect to supermarkets as one such example the report recommends:

“Supermarkets may be integrating the region through their investments in transport and logistics but not necessarily in ways that support local producers. How, then, can supermarkets be partners in regional industrial development so that increased trade is part of building capabilities across countries to move the Southern African region from a net importer of processed food to a net exporter?

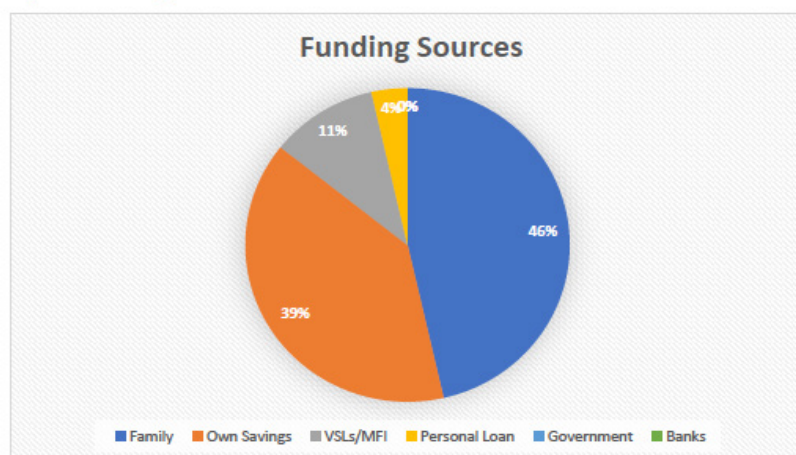
[...] The policy agenda for regional industrialization needs to start from recognizing the realities of markets, competition, and competitiveness across Southern Africa— including concentration, vertical integration, and market power. In processed food products, large firms have operations extending across the region, linked into global value chains and international production systems. Those firms are important to realizing economies of scale— an issue is whether the returns are from investing in capabilities or from exerting market power. It is also important to constrain the exertion of market power where it may be used to exclude smaller firms and new entrants. <sup>45</sup>

While regional food trade in SADC is increasingly dominated by transnational agribusiness, the informal cross border trade in foodstuffs, consisting of over two thirds of women cross border traders remains vibrant and growing. There has been an increase in field studies of informal cross border trade; despite the contribution that this marginalised trade makes to food security, regional integration, public revenue and livelihoods there are no serious SADC wide policies or protocols to support small scale cross border food trade. Rather, as with the rest of the informal sector, these sector--dominated by women traders--continues to be criminalised a marginalised. International development agencies, in addition to researchers have highlighted that informal cross border trading while unrecorded matches and may even surpass the value of formal cross border trade. (UNCTAD)

A Southern Africa Trust<sup>46</sup> study of cross border trading in Malawi, Zambia and Zimbabwe found while food trade is a significant component of informal cross border trade, barely any cross-border traders were able to find formal or public sources of funding to support their economic activity.

“Survey results confirm findings of other studies undertaken before with regard to access to finance. None of the women interviewed indicated that they got any funds from the commercial banking system. Surprisingly, none of the women got any financial assistance from Government. 46 percent of the women indicated that they got support from family members to start their operations, 39 percent used their own savings, 11 percent were assisted by Village Savings Loans (VSL) or a Microfinance Institution (MFI). Only 4 percent, who are in the agricultural sector, got personal loans from relatives and friends to finance their farming activities (See Figure 4). In fact in Zambia, women were financed solely by family and own savings.”

**Figure 4: Funding Sources for Cross Border Traders and Farmers Interviewed**



The lack of funding from government for informal sector traders indicates a lack of appreciation of the magnitude and potential of the food security/agriculture/trade/livelihood intersections in the region. Informal forms of finance predominate in supporting these activities, even as evidence mounts as to the volume and importance of informal cross border trading which represents ‘regional integration from below’. A UN Women Report (2010) indicated that for SADC “Official sources report an average value of informal cross border trade in the SADC Region of US\$ 17.6 billion per

year. Informal Cross Border Trade contributes for 30-40% to intra-SADC Trade. Seventy percent of informal cross border traders are women. The main foodstuffs traded in 2006/7 are maize (97,000 MT), rice (6,500 MT) and beans (10,000 MT)." As indicated in the section above, the microfinance "silver bullet" has not been able to ensure adequate financing to support women's economic activity. Nor has leaving support of informal cross border traders to NGOs and philanthropic 'women's empowerment' initiatives. In addition to the many recommendations made to reduce the hardships and challenges faced by women cross border traders, generous low interest public financing options, adapted to the needs of self-employed, micro entrepreneurs or cooperatives should be on the table to strengthen this critical area of regional food trade.

## New paradigms for food security: food sovereignty, social protection & social development

*If you sell a drum in your own village, you get the money and keep the sound (Malagasy Proverb)*

Governments in the region have for the past few decades stuck to the neoliberal script of a small 'open to business' and non-interventionist state, which liberalises, deregulates and privatises. The result is that social progress in the region is moving backwards not forwards. The neoliberal set up has shifted the social contract from one that supports citizen's welfare to one that enables corporate welfare by allowing cheap and easy access to the regions' natural resources, markets, labour and public finance.

The COVID pandemic has indeed exposed the false narrative of market/corporate led equitable and sustainable economic development. The food security situation is a symptom of the failure of this model. Decades of debilitating austerity has left the region with weak states unable to carry out their most basic functions such as data collection while ceding to the demands of transnational capital to open up for business--i.e. put up a for sale sign (and in the case of women and workers a for free sign) on anything and indeed anyone that they believe they can extract profit from in the present and future.

Populations are experiencing a long run of State neglect so extreme that poorer and richer countries in the region show the same levels of social distress--food insecurity and hunger, a third of young women and men not in employment, education or training; staggering levels of early marriage; life expectancy rates well below the global average, extreme commodity and import dependency for both food and manufactures and a popular but marginalised informal/survivalist sector that the authorities themselves understand little beyond seeing them as hordes of 'natives' that must be managed, policed and contained. We are confronted with a situation of neocolonialism par essence: using State power as a machine for extraction, political and business elites with aspirations of belonging to a global imperialist elite (the Davos class) rather than part of the masses they purport to lead but seem happy to condemn to a future of dispossession, insecurity, invisibility, disease and perpetual subaltern hood.

It is worth reading the most recent report of the UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food, where she notes that that the globalisation of agricultural trade has set back the attainment of the right to food for all, marginalised small holder farmers, contributed to climate change and put excessive power in corporate hands.<sup>47</sup> Amongst her recommendations for the way forward she reminds states of their obligations as duty bearers to promote and defend human rights. She also recalls that human rights are inalienable, indivisible and universal such that states must use a rights-based approach to governance:

Effectively implementing the right to food requires adopting a human rights-based approach to

governance. Such an approach reinforces the concept that all human rights are interdependent, interrelated and indivisible. Human rights should always be interpreted and applied holistically. The International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights recognizes that it is impossible to advance the right to food without addressing the rights to housing (art. 11), health (art. 12) and social security (art. 9). Instruments that advance the human rights of specific groups, such as the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, also need to align with the right to adequate food.

Universal social protection has been promoted in international development circles to address the problems of economic insecurity and poverty of the population. Universal social protection (which includes food security) is an important tool in fighting economic/social/food insecurity, as well as providing a basis for social mobility for the region's burgeoning youth population. However, effective social protection measures—which few countries in the region have implemented—are not simply about safety nets; they require a commitment to social and economic right, backed by robust social policy embedded in clear social development goals, none of which the SADC region appears to have paid much attention to. While governments faithfully report macro-economic policy data, they have been far more lax about social and sustainable development indicators: in public policy, what is not counted is invisible, and what is invisible is not a priority.

## Conclusion and Recommendations

### There is no one who does not like soup with fish in it - Igbo Proverb

This briefing paper has attempted to provide a picture of the extent of food insecurity and nutrition in COVID beyond those given by humanitarian agencies that often focus on disaster hit zones. Far from being a result of isolated and localised disasters, food insecurity is the rule rather than the exception in SADC, and has long been a structural and endemic problem which has been getting worse rather than better. Furthermore, food insecurity is not a result of lack of availability of resources, labour or knowledge to produce abundant, nutritious and diverse food for the regions populations, but a mix of existing inequalities exacerbated by public policies that are continuing the colonial pattern of land dispossession, corporate driven export orientation for global supply chains and marginalisation of the peasantry—i.e. small scale, family or subsistence farmers.

The key to food security in the region lies in a rights-based approach encompassing the right to food, right to development and rights to self-determination, with particular regard to agro-ecology, food and seed sovereignty models that focus on localised, equity, decent work and empowerment rather than trickle down food security models. This means prioritising indigenous, small scale and subsistence farming sector which already provides the bulk of food for the region's population: indeed inequalities within the food system are widening, particularly as regards access to land, inputs, infrastructure and markets. New agricultural interventions—such as contract farming—are introducing new types of dependencies and power relationships that will further weaken the ability of the regions food systems to end hunger.

There are many recommendations and commitments made by SADC governments themselves and international fora that if implemented could turn around the situation rapidly with political will. In the process of drafting this briefing paper the following additional recommendations are emphasised:

- the need for a SADC wide food security and nutrition knowledge and information system. This could be in the form of an online portal in which researchers, policy makers and national statistics offices, intergovernmental agencies and NGOs could contribute to strengthen data, knowledge best (and worst) practice around food security.
- revisit current estimates of food and nutrition insecurity and vulnerability in the region as current figures are highly underestimated for both urban and rural areas and establishing commensurate



financing targets to support food security for all vulnerable groups (low income households, unemployed young women and men, households with people with disabilities, etc).

- commit to providing comprehensive data for the World Programme of Agricultural Census in order to have clear data on the distribution of land holdings as well to identify land poor / land less communities for land redistribution programmes.
- Reduce socio-economic gender and age inequalities by redirecting public funding towards all sectors of the care economy, ending gender-based violence and providing women with economic security through decent work and economic opportunities.
- fiscal policies that reduce inequalities in the distribution of wealth/assets and incomes so that the benefits of growth are used for the wellbeing of all communities.
- accelerating moves to create decent work in the informal sector in line with ILO Recommendation 204 in concert with trade unions, informal sector associations, farmer movements and women's organisations. This must include ending criminalisation and victimisation of informal sector enterprises and traders.
- create a regional sustainable food security fund that aims at supporting the sustainable production of diverse foods by small holder, family and subsistence farmers with particular attention to women farmers and farming cooperatives, and targeted at creating employment opportunities and skills building in sustainable agriculture and farming for young women and men.

Austerity policies and cuts in spending under IMF/World Bank schemes have for decades starved SADC populations under the reasoning that 'there is no money.' These claims are categorically false: SADC has the wealth, natural resources and dynamism to completely eliminate hunger regardless of the challenges of climate change or the COVID pandemic. The African continent experiences net outflows of capital through debt servicing, repatriation of profits, tax avoidance and illicit financial flows.<sup>48</sup> In the meantime, it is African populations abroad that are keeping the continent's finances afloat through remittances which surpass overseas development aid and investment inflows.<sup>49</sup> At home, unpaid women's care and domestic work and community solidarity are often all that there is by way of a safety net for households experiencing economic shocks. It is high time to rebuild the social state backed by welfare policies that provide adequate levels of social protection, particularly targeted at young women and men who are seeing their opportunities for a better life fast evaporating in the COVID pandemic. Further still, SADC Member States must reconfigure themselves as developmental states prepared to use the region's resources to uplift its people rather than an instrument in the service of transnational capital.

## Civil Society Call to Action on Food Security and Nutrition in SADC-Recommendations

We firmly believe that the challenges COVID19 has presented can be reversed, with political will and commitment to an overhaul of economic models that continue to fail to deliver prosperity for the citizens. Regional intergovernmental coordination and democratised engagement with community and social actors in the neglected sectors of rural development, land and natural resource rights, agrarian reform, small scale and subsistence farmers and fishers, farmworkers and landless/land-poor communities is of priority. Prioritising the goal of food security for all in the region would further engender equality, strengthen human rights, create opportunities across the food value chain for rural and urban youth and break the endemic cycle of poverty, hunger and precarity that the region is locked into. Furthermore, promoting food security and nutrition is critical in safeguarding the development of the region's children, who suffer from unacceptable levels of stunting and wasting. In order to respond to the immediate socio-economic hardships caused by the COVID19 global pandemic, as well as to build a new foundation for sustainable, resilient, broad-based socio-economic recovery, we believe that SADC needs an updated framework to accelerate commitments to end hunger by 2025. To this end, we call upon SADC governments to prioritise enhanced regional cooperation and radically expand people centred rights based public investment in the following areas:

## Strengthen the ecosystem of support for smallholder, family and subsistence farmers

- Centre agricultural policies on supporting the smallholder, family and subsistence farming sector, with particular attention to the use of climate resilient agro-ecology methods and strengthening indigenous farming systems of knowledge.
- Expand access to land for smallholder, family and subsistence farming with particular focus on millions of households that currently have less than two hectares of farmland.
- Support land redistribution programmes with inputs, extension services and markets particularly for women and young people.
- Establish comprehensive public financial support programmes for rural small scale, family and subsistence farmers.
- Engage local businesses to support small scale, family and subsistence farming in strengthening local food value chains that are accessible, equitable and gender inclusive and environmentally friendly;
- Protect and promote the rights and participation of rural women food producers across the value chain, acknowledging that women provide over 50% of the agricultural labour force--frequently as unpaid contributing family workers--and are key in subsistence and household food production that improves nutritional outcomes in communities.
- Regulate the growing and excessive control of agribusiness transnational corporations in the region's food systems and value chains, including in input provision (seeds, fertilisers), and crack down on exploitative and anticompetitive business practices that dispossess and squeeze out local small farmers and markets

## Invest in the role of women in food security

- Put women and girls at the centre of the recovery efforts in the agricultural sector particularly by supporting rural women and women farmers' organisations and involving them in policy dialogue and decision making at national and regional levels.
- Adopt gender based right to food and nutrition framework in all future reviews of SADC food and nutrition policies and strategies.
- Adopt a participatory approach involving rural women in the development of mitigation and adaptation strategies to the effects of climate change.
- Eliminate gender, racial and ethnicity and class discriminations in the allocation of agricultural resources particularly land, through special programmes for female headed households which in some countries are over half of all households.
- Eliminate discrimination, violence and harassment of women cross border informal traders; acknowledge the undervalued under-estimated role of women informal cross border traders in food security and intra-regional trade through dedicated support measures.
- Reduce and redistribute the unjust burden of unpaid labour placed on women in food provisioning, particularly through public services such as energy, water, sanitation; innovative labour-saving technologies and social protection programmes.
- Food security policies should adopt concepts from feminist political ecology that strive for a balance between care and social reproduction, replenishment of natural resources and food and nutrition security.

## Involve youth in agriculture

- Establish specific and structured policy and support programmes for rural youth to provide access to means of production such as land loans, quality seeds and technical support.

- Expand free vocational training and education in agriculture, sustainable food production, natural resource management and related areas, particularly targeting the large proportion (20-30%) of young people currently not in employment, education or training (NEETs).
- Support the development of youth farming organisations and cooperatives, with particular focus on young women; support the establishment of a SADC wide networks and exchanges for youth in agriculture.
- Expand and improve free and low-cost internet connectivity services to rural areas to support access to information and markets, training and farming programmes for young rural women and men, and sharing best practices on farming innovations to fight climate change.
- Create job funds at the national levels to encourage local businesses and farming enterprises to hire and upskill young women and men in diverse farming related occupations.

#### Rebuild sustainable indigenous food systems

- Defend seed sovereignty through the promotion of quality, locally produced and indigenous seed varieties to avert the impact of climate change; rebuild sustainable indigenous food systems that eliminate waste of resources, soil and water depletion due to inefficient industrialised food production systems
- Prioritise the use of agro-ecology approaches by agricultural extension services and increase the number and gender of extension service workers, with particular focus on rural youth.
- Value the contributions of indigenous knowledge systems in food security, nutrition and health, as well as socio-cultural development and SADC heritage. In particular acknowledge the role of women in indigenous food, farming, conservation and biodiversity knowledge systems.
- Include learning about indigenous knowledge systems in school curricula at primary and secondary levels.
- Reallocate land to sustainable farming in order to transition out of intensive monocropping industrial agriculture in favour of production models that are resistant to climate change, support biodiversity, reduce scarce water consumption and prioritise local food needs.

#### Public financing for food security

- SADC should stop the net capital outflows of gains from its vast natural resources and considerable wealth to urgently operationalize the Agriculture Development Fund that is to support the implementation of Regional Agricultural Investment Plan.
- The Agriculture Development Fund should have a dedicated Food Sovereignty and Nutrition Fund aimed at supporting the sustainable production of diverse foods by smallholder, family and subsistence farmers with particular attention to women farmers and farming cooperatives, and targeted at creating employment opportunities and skills building in sustainable agriculture for young women and men. Smallholder, family and subsistence farmers, particularly those in food production, should be the beneficiaries of the largest part of these Funds.
- SADC Member States should ensure that they have open, transparent monitoring and reporting frameworks accessible to the public to show how funds have been allocated and the impacts on achieving the right to food for all, gender equality, youth empowerment, and supporting smallholder, family and subsistence farming. Public investments and agricultural finance should have clear gender equality/women's empowerment benchmarks at the SADC level which governments should monitor and report on.
- Increase overall national budget allocations to meet existing Malabo Declaration commitments to invest in (i) food security and nutrition rooted in frameworks of sustainable food systems and community-based food sovereignty, (ii) fighting climate change and natural resource depletion, (iii) eliminating inequalities in access to the means of production, (iv) supporting the care economy, social reproduction and reproductive justice (v) ending gender, class, race, ethnic and other forms of discrimination and inequality, and (vi) empowering the region's youth with education and skills, decent work and livelihood opportunities (v) building rural development

and infrastructure including access to the internet, access to health, water and sanitation, housing and education.

- SADC Member States should reverse the corporate capture of agricultural input support programmes which now prioritise increasing agribusiness profits rather than food security and nutrition, environmental sustainability and biodiversity, small scale producer welfare and equity in the allocation of public resources. Create fiscal space for public investment by ending unjust tax policies, tax avoidance and evasion, capital flight and illicit financial flows. Further SADC countries should mount coordinated efforts within intergovernmental forums towards measures such as debt cancellation, unfair trade and investment regimes and international financial transparency.
- SADC should reject the imposition of IMF/World Bank austerity conditionalities, particularly as regards cutting public spending for critical public goods and services such as health care, education and training, rural transport and infrastructure, water and sanitation, agricultural subsidies and support. Public reinvestments in these areas will rapidly reduce economic precarity and food insecurity and support COVID19 response measures.

#### Institutional frameworks and regional cooperation

- SADC Member States should recognise the right to food in all national legislative frameworks and strengthen SADC emergency and long-term policy and programme coordination around achieving the right to food, food security and nutrition beyond issues of trade and overall agricultural output.
- SADC should put in place a centralised multi-stakeholder food security and nutrition information system to strengthen data, knowledge, learning and information sharing on best (and worst) practice around food security and nutrition. This could be in the form of an online portal that collates data from research institutes, national statistics offices, intergovernmental agencies, NGOs, small scale farmer associations, community-based organisations and other civil society formations.
- Fast track the implementation of a SADC wide universal social protection floor consisting of “basic social security guarantees which secure protection aimed at preventing or alleviating poverty, vulnerability and social exclusion. These guarantees should ensure at a minimum that, over the life cycle, all in need have access to essential health care and basic income security” as per the UN definition.
- SADC should aim to be a continental and global leader in creating participatory, inclusive consultative mechanisms around food security, nutrition and sustainable food systems, particularly by putting small-holder farmers, subsistence farmers, rural women, and marginalised groups at the centre of this mechanism. We reiterate our call for SADC to urgently operationalise Article 5, 16A and 23 of the SADC Treaty and ‘bring SADC to the people’ through the establishment of a SADC institutional mechanism for engagement with Non-State Actors.

While COVID19 has been extremely disruptive we believe it is an opportunity to address many weaknesses in the region’s food systems that have become structural and endemic. The new SADC Regional Indicative Strategic Development Plan should be an instrument to transform our food systems towards models of food security that end hunger and secure citizen’s rights to development and self-determination. Achieving these goals must be people and State driven, rather than left to market or external forces. We commit our resources, energies and knowledge to support policies and programmes to work with relevant SADC organs, Member States, and all likeminded stakeholders to turn this dire situation around for the long term. The time is now. More often blessings are hidden in misfortune.

Link to data tables used in this document [SADC Research | Food Insecurity](#)



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