









Report on Documentation of Multi-sectoral Food and Nutrition Security Interventions by Food and Nutrition Security Committees in Zimbabwe

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Documentation of Multi-Sectoral Food and Nutrition Security Activities in Zimbabwe

Introduction

The unprecedented investments in food and nutrition by the government of Zimbabwe have resulted in notable progress towards alleviating hunger and malnutrition in Zimbabwe. Key to the attainment of the Food and Nutrition Security Policy (FNSP) objectives is addressing hunger and malnutrition through promotion of co-ordinated multi-sectoral interventions by all relevant sectors concerned. As part of operationalizing the FNSP and enhancing coordinated efforts towards food and nutrition security, the Food and Nutrition Council (FNC) established the decentralized Food and Nutrition Security Committees (FNSCs) in all the rural provinces and 42 districts of Zimbabwe. The functions of the FNSCs include the coordination of food and nutrition security programmes; prioritizing food and nutrition security responses in line with the FNSP, monitoring allocation of resources and gaps, monitoring the implementation of programmes, providing technical advice to lower level structures (FNSP, 2010). Despite the old adage that: "If it is not written, it did not happen", these structures have been reported to do a lot of work as per their mandate, but with little documentation of their work. However, the bottlenecks/challenges hindering documentation of such invaluable work are not known.

The Food and Nutrition Council's (FNC) long term commitment to prioritizing food and nutrition security through multi-sectoral action has been supported by several stakeholders. FNC is coordinating implementation of different food and nutrition security programmes, which promote response to food and nutrition insecurity problems in Zimbabwe. These programmes involve multi-sectoral coordination, livelihoods assessments (food and nutrition assessments), Research, Food safety and Nutrition standards, Monitoring and evaluation and policy analysis (FNSP, 2010). Documentation of these FNC programmes gives substance to FNC's activities not only for donors or audits but also for rules and regulations. It also helps inform best practice replication and scale-up. The standard dictionary defines documentation as any material that provides official information or evidence, or that serves as a record (Griffith, 2004). Documentation comes in various forms, including written, visual and audio.

To effectively implement these food and nutrition security programmes and activities, FNC established multi-sectoral food and nutrition security structures from national level to sub district (ward-village). The Food and Nutrition Security Committees include representation from different ministries such as Ministries responsible for Labour and Social Welfare, Health, Agriculture, Finance and Economic Planning, Local Government, water and education. These Committees play a pivotal role between the national policy space and the community. Food and Nutrition Security (FNS) programmes and activities, in line with the FNSP, are being implemented by these committees but with little documentation of activities and success stories. It is the responsibility of the District Food and Nutrition Security Committees (DFNSCs) to document day to day FNS activities that will enable the FNS to measure success or impact of their programmes/projects.

Documentation of multi-sectoral food and nutrition activities by FNSCs has always been a challenge in Zimbabwe from National to Ward level. District Food and Nutrition Security committees established seem to focus more on work and less on documentation. However, to mobilize resources for multi-sectoral

This is because key assessments on programme success rely on documentation, for example audits, policy reviews, monitoring evaluation, among others. Thus, documentation provides the necessary evidence upon which valid justification of progress and a true reflection of the past lies. Documentation of food and nutrition security activities and success stories shows the relevance and significance of the committees to the government and funding partners, for their continued support.

There are several factors linked to poor documentation of multi-sectoral food and nutrition activities by the FNSCs. According to several studies done in other countries, the main causes of poor documentation are lack of willingness (motivation), capability, human, financial and material resources (Souza, etal, 2006; Griffith, 2004; Helm, 2003). Past research revealed that lack of social media gadgets was a major explanatory variable for poor documentation of food and nutrition activities (Griffith, 2004). Moreover, unspecified responsible person and the capability to document were also found to be associated with the unprecedented decrease in documentation of activities. Furthermore, lack of incorporation of documentation into project activities was found to be the major factor affecting documentation at all levels (Souza, etal 2006; Bierstaker, 1997).

Moreover, many professionals view documentation of activities as predominantly donor-driven to increase interest in the project. Recent studies found the lack of a Monitoring and Evaluation framework for documentation as a key factor or bottleneck for poor documentation of activities (WHO, 2010). Other studies did not find financial resources (budget) to be significant when controlling for time and staff (Griffith, 2004, Souza, etal 2006). From the analysis of the literature in Zimbabwe, no conclusive evidence seems to exist regarding the factors affecting documentation of different FNSCs activities. Furthermore, numerous documentation reports were done in developing countries of South and Central America while reports based on Zimbabwe are limited, specifically for Food and Nutrition Security Committees (FNSCs). Hence, there is a need to substantiate context specific factors affecting documentation (visibility) of multi-sectoral food and nutrition activities in Zimbabwe.

Therefore, this paper seeks to report on the findings on challenges /bottlenecks affecting documentation of food and nutrition security programmes/activities in Zimbabwe, together with recommendations to further strengthen documentation of food and nutrition activities.

FNSCs Situational Analysis

The implementation and reporting of FNSCs activities span from Cabinet level, through a Standing Cabinet Committee on Food and Nutrition Security, right down to Sub-District Food and Nutrition Security Committees, with several multi-stakeholder co-ordination platforms in-between as indicated on the organogram in figure 1.0















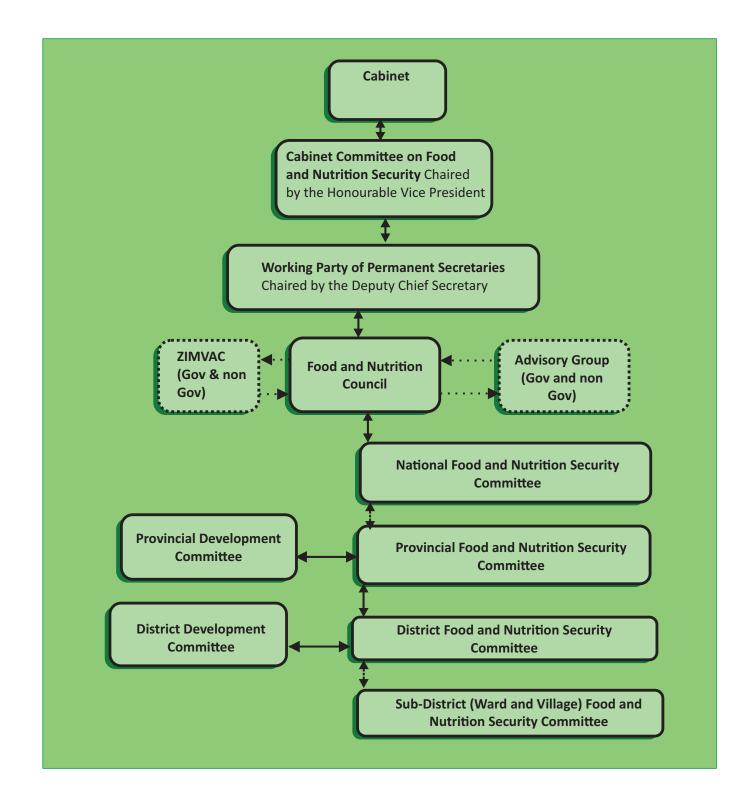


Fig 1.0 National Accountability Structures for Food and Nutrition Security Programming and Policy Implementation.

Source: Operational Manual for Food and Nutrition Security Committees, 2010

There are multi-sectoral Food and Nutrition Security Committees at Provincial and district levels. Provincial and District Food and Nutrition Security Committees (PFNSCs and DFNSCs) comprise of representatives from the Ministries responsible for: Agriculture, Social services, Health, Local Government, Women's Affairs, Gender and Community Development, Education, Youth, ZIMSTAT, DDF, EMA, NAC and Lands. These representatives work closely with additional senior representatives from Local authorities and traditional leadership, UN or civil society (NGOs) covering food and nutrition security, private sector and academia.

Currently there are 42 established and functional District Food and Nutrition Security Committees. In several districts, these committees have been cascaded down to ward and villages levels. FNSCs are responsible for the coordination of food and nutrition security issues; prioritizing food and nutrition security responses in line with the FNSP, monitoring allocation of resources and gaps, monitoring the implementation of programmes and providing technical advice to lower level structures. Roles of members of the FNSC differ with their sector mandate as outlined in the Guidance Manual for Food and Nutrition Security Committees (FNC Operational Manual, 2013). Individual officers are responsible for communicating work plans, progress and actions of the FNSC to their line departments and ministries. However, from the FNSP and roles of the key members of the structures, it is not clear on what, when and who is responsible for documentation of these day to day activities.

Methodology

The consultant employed a qualitative design to get insights on the challenges/bottlenecks affecting documentation of FNSC activities, and related recommendations to strengthen documentation. Forty consenting FNSC representatives from 5 districts out of 42 established districts participated in 5 Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) with 8 people each. FGD lasted from 45 to 60 minutes. The FGDs were held from 25 March to 30 March 2018, utilizing monthly DFNSCs review meetings as an opportunity to meet all the potential participants.

Sampling and Data Collection

The Consultant designed a focus group discussion questionnaire that was send to 40 consenting FNSC representatives in five districts with established DFNSCs with assistance from Food and Nutrition Council. Data was collected using an English FGD guide developed, pretested and modified according to pretest responses, by the Consultant. The DFNSCs conducted FGDs and send back their responses to Food and Nutrition Council through the district secretariat. Guided by the principle of saturation in conducting FGDs (collecting information until no new insights are emerging), the total number of FGDs conducted reached five (5).

Ethical Consideration

Participation in the survey was purely voluntary. The purpose of the survey was explained to all potential participants through the email, and verbal informed consent was sought by the before each FGD session. Use of ID numbers instead of names; and use of password protected storage of electronic participant logbook, we tried to further ensure confidentiality by bringing together FGD participants from diverse sectors and















districts in every FGD session. Through the email, participants were ensured that their responses were only to be used for the purpose of addressing challenges/bottlenecks affecting documentation of FNS activities in order to address them, and not targeted on their individual responses.

Data Management and Analysis

Data collected from the FGDs conducted at district level were sent back to the consultant through the email and stored in form of FGD notes. Results from the FGD were combined onto a logbook consisting of a table that enabled data to be organized according to topics of interest before analysis. The transcripts were then marked and coded according to various areas of interest.

Concerning data analysis, the consultant employed thematic data analysis. This involved identifying, examining and recording themes (patterns) within the data. Findings were presented according to emerging themes and excerpts were used to illustrate expressed thoughts, emotions and experiences by participants related to challenges/bottlenecks in documentation of FNSCs activities, and recommendations to improve the situation.

Challenges/bottlenecks Affecting Documentation of Food and Nutrition Security Activities in Zimbabwe

The survey sought to identify challenges affecting documentation of food and nutrition security activities in Zimbabwe, and to provide recommendations on how best the documentation of multi-sectoral food and nutrition security activities can be strengthened. The survey found that, though there exist various food and nutrition security activities by FNSC and its implementing partners in Zimbabwe, such activities are usually not fully documented, or not documented at all, due to various challenges discussed in this section. The consultant performed thematic data analysis of information obtained from both literature and from focus group discussions with various FNSCs from 5districts in Zimbabwe, to come up with themes on the challenges or bottlenecks affecting documentation of food and nutrition security activities in Zimbabwe.

Below is a summary of the background information of FNSCs which participated in the survey, selected from the 42 district FNSCs which are operational:

Background information of FNSCs which participated in the FGD survey

| Ministries/sectors | District FNSCs |
|--|--|
| Ministry of Health and Child Care Ministry of Finance & Economic Planning Minister of Lands, Agriculture and Rural Resettlement; Ministry of Social Services Ministry of Local Government Minister of Women and Youth Affairs DDF, EMA and NAC | MutasaMbireChipingeChiredziMwenezi |

The consultant collected data for FGDs guided by the principle of saturation (collecting information until no new insights are emerging), and our total number of FGDs reached five (5). From our findings, we can confirm that non-documentation of food and nutrition security activities is real and widespread in most of the 42 district FNSCs which are operational. Though all participants generally showed adequate understanding of what documentation was, together with its benefits/significance, they reported several challenges which hinder them from documenting their activities. We emphasize that challenges/bottlenecks identified in our survey are interrelated and interconnected in that the presence of one challenge influences occurrence of the other challenge, and that all challenges/bottlenecks need to be fully addressed if true documentation of food and nutrition security activities is to be realized. Following thematic data analysis, the following themes emerged as main challenges affecting documentation of food and nutrition activities in Zimbabwe:

1. Perceived Significance of Documentation

There was a general understanding of the meaning of documentation and its benefits among FGD participants. However, most respondents based their justification of progress in their work merely from their experiences and reflective thinking, and not based on any recorded information. Program outcomes are not based on 'truth' but on 'proof'. Though some appreciated the significance of documentation, most however perceived it as a time consuming activity which could not be prioritized over performing actual field activities, against the old adage that: 'if it's not written down, it did not happen'. Documentation provides written evidence/facts to justify claims of program success or failure; is a resource of reference for future generations; and saves as a basis upon which improvements can be made. However, people usually tend to resist change if they do not appreciate its significance, and if they perceive it to be an unnecessary or extra burden to their work.

2. Lack of Documentation-Related Equipment, Tools And Budget

There was commonality of responses among the five FGDs all pointing to the lack of equipment, tools and budget, affecting documentation of food and nutrition security activities. Participants reported that documentation of their activities requires equipment and tools to enable data capturing/collection and documentation. These include media gadgets like smart phones, tablets, memory sticks, cameras, stationary, airtime, internet, programme-specific vehicles, and solar chargers for power, among others.

Again, participants also suggested that there be a budget set aside for documentation to purchase some of the equipment identified above, or other requirements that promote documentation. There was general consensus among FGD participants that resources tend to be channeled more towards meetings, allowances and assessments, and less towards documentation-related requirements. This, they reported, results in demotivation of FNSC members and little commitment on documentation of their activities due to such inadequacies.

It also emerged that where some of the equipment is available, some people did not have the necessary skills to operate or use the equipment/tools, for example, tablets, cameras, internet thus negatively affecting documentation. Again, intermittent supply for some items required in data collection and documentation was reported to lead to irregular documentation, thus affecting the quality of documentation.















3. Unclearly Defined Member Roles And Responsibilities

Poorly defined membership roles, was another often-mentioned factor affecting documentation of FNS activities. Participants reported that they were not clear about sector-specific activities falling under the FNSC member. This, participants reported, causes confusion on what tasks each cluster is responsible for, thus leading to overlapping and replication of tasks, or even neglecting of some. The required scenario is when roles and responsibilities for each and every member are clearly defined and delegated, activities when laid out and communicated to everyone within the FNS cluster, for the purposes of accountability, committee efficiency and reporting.

It surfaced that there was either irregular or little support and supervision exercises to ensure documentation of food and nutrition security activities in rural provinces and districts. The success of any policy implementation relies on sensitization of stakeholders about its objectives, and a continuous process of monitoring and evaluation of activities aimed at supporting the policy. It appeared that such sensitization wasnot conducted in a manner that emphasized documentation as a priority, or that such support and supervision seldom emphasized on the importance of documentation.

4. Inadequate Documentation Competences and Skills

Lack of competences and skills in documenting both qualitative and quantitative information related to their activities was an often-mentioned factor affecting documentation of FNSC activities. Documentation requires relevant knowledge and skills, so that information recorded is ordered; easy to communicate/understand; as well as easy to store and retrieve when needed. Examples of skills needed include those like photographing skills, audio-recording, reporting and documentation skills, which rely on training and mentorship. Without the necessary competencies and skills, data capturing and reporting can be poor in quality, with possible chances of missing and conflicting information, undocumented activities and incomplete reports within and between committees. Though most were knowledgeable about food and nutrition security, it appeared that most require support and training in documenting activities related to their responsibilities.

5. Inadequate Monitoring and Periodic Reporting

After extensive discussion sessions with district FNSC members, lack of monitoring and periodic reporting was an often-mentioned challenge affecting documentation of FNSC activities. It appeared that though these committees have adequate representation from all key ministries which are pivotal to national food and nutrition security efforts, there is generally inadequate monitoring of committee member roles and responsibilities by the secretariat, coupled with absence of periodic reporting of executed activities. Consistent and accurate documentation relies on information sharing between stakeholders through periodic reporting, proper monitoring of committee member roles by the secretariat, and joint accountability through process indicators. From our survey, it appeared that there is a general lack of awareness/knowledge about monitoring/progress indicators for FNS activities, coupled with irregular reporting, all stemming up from what most respondents called inadequate monitoring of documentation by the committee secretariat.

6. Insufficient Influence Over Documentation, and Poor Stakeholder Commitment

It emerged that one of the key challenges hindering documentation of FNSC activities is lack of influence within committees, and poor member commitment at district levels. Again, despite the importance of a skilled and well-staffed secretariat in providing the necessary operational mechanism and influence over documentation of committee member activities, survey participants reported that the DFNSC secretariat is usually changing in structure and represented by poorly skilled personnel delegated to represent the rightful focal persons, with less influence in monitoring the documentation of activities. As a result, the overall committees end up being constituted of delegated focal personnel, who are usually not well sensitized about the goals of the FNSP, thus negatively influencing committee momentum and inter-sectoral collaboration. It was learnt that secretariats and other FNS focal personnel with the relevant skills and experience to contribute meaningfully in committees are usually not committed, and give excuses thus delegating their subordinates instead. As a result, these committees end up comprising of ever changing representatives who are not well sensitized about the concept of food and nutrition security and thus do not perceive the importance of documentation. Findings from literature show that delegation of roles and absence of fixed and sensitized focal persons from some partners could result in inconsistent and poor reporting which can again affect documentation (Griffith, 2004).

Recommendations

From our findings, we can conclude that the responsibilities of FNSCs are worthwhile in meeting FNS policy objectives in Zimbabwe. We note the numerous irrefutable benefits brought by documentation, including providing a basis upon which progress indicators can be measured; as well as informing monitoring and evaluation of programs and activities, among others. However, the challenges affecting the prevailing non-documentation of food and nutrition security activities need to be addressed, for what is not documented is presumed not done. We therefore make the following recommendations towards the strengthening of documentation of multi-sectoral food and nutrition activities:

1. Capacity Building of FNSC Focal Persons/Members

The success of the FNS policy, like any other policy, relies on programmes and activities that are implemented by well capacitated and skilled personnel from grassroots level upwards, together with proper documentation of all related activities. Participants in our survey reported lack of adequate capacities and skills required in documenting their FNS activities as required. We therefore recommend that all FNSC members be capacitated on documentation through training on photographing, audio recording, use of cameras and other visual gargets such as Dictaphones, computers, local radios and tablets. In addition to that, members also need capacity building in the area of quantitative and qualitative data collection and reporting according to FNS standards and requirements, and the training information much be made accessible to all, for continuous referencing.















2. FNS Policy Sensitization, Retraining Of Staff, or Mentoring of New Staff

Further to capacity building of members, we recommend that sensitization of stakeholders about the FNSP be conducted on regular basis, to create opportunities for clarifying and emphasizing the significance of documentation of activities as a basis upon which the overall policy will be evaluated. This will present opportunities for misconceptions to be identified and corrected, and will create an opportunity for support and supervision of focal persons with regards to documentation of FNS activities.

Refresher training of members is also recommended as it creates opportunities to identify challenges and address them, as well sharing information on new changes. New members or those without adequate documentation skills have to be identified and organized in such a way that they are mentored with those already with the competencies and skills.

3. Standardized System of Documenting/Recording Across Sectors and Development of Clearly Defined Committee Member Roles

We recommend the establishment of a standardized system of documenting activities within and between FNSCs in all rural provinces and districts, and their partners. This will make it easier to use and share the information within and between partners and sectors, and will as well solve the problem of missing information from some committees, thus further improving information consistency and comprehensibility across committees and partners. Therefore, such items as units of measurement, time periods, structure and design should be as uniform and consistent as possible on the information to be documented, so that progress indicators for various activities can be evaluated and compared easily within and between committees and partners involved in food and nutrition security.

Again, the roles of committee members should be clearly defined, agreed upon by the committee and well communicated, to avoid duplication or overlapping of tasks, confusion over responsibilities, missed tasks, and consequently non documentation of tasks. This will result in a documentation framework, where each sector knows their responsibilities, and what they have to document and report to the committee.

4. Encouraging Exchange Programmes and Information Sharing

Exchange programmes between the various DFNSCs and other provincial and national structures must be encouraged for the exchange of information and ideas on documentation of activities. This helps to strengthen consistency in documentation within clusters and across committees. Again, we recommend the utilization of ICT in information exchange aimed at promoting and strengthening documentation of FNS activities within and between committees, or even between district committees, and provincial and national levels. The use of internet and technologies like social media platforms, and emails present as a cost-effective and efficient method through which information exchange aimed at promoting documentation between members can be ensured. Therefore, we recommend that there be investments towards the use of technology in promoting documentation of FNS activities, especially including the use of context-specific alternative innovations to ensure uninterrupted documentation, for example, use of solar energy for power.

5. Performance Based Contracting

The concept of performance contracting is recommended as a useful way forward in strengthening documentation of food and nutrition security activities. Under this strategy, individuals will plan their activities and write them down in form of planned activities, achievements, time and resources needed, for; the previous year/month; current year/month; as well as for the following year/month. This concept saves as both a management tool, and a self-evaluation tool for personnel and organizations, for it will show the activities that are expected to be done, those activities done, and those that have not been done, including relevant statistics for specified time periods. The performance contracting can be done at individual level, and those individual performance contracts can be compiled to obtain an organizational record of activities conducted together with progress made in achieving set targets.

6. Availing Budget for Documentation Purposes

Respondents pointed to the lack of a specific budget allocated for documentation-related needs as another major factor negatively affecting documentation of FNS activities. Documentation is facilitated by various media gadgets like smart phones, tablets, memory sticks, cameras, and other necessary items like measuring devices, stationary, airtime, internet, training, programme-specific vehicles, and solar chargers for power, among others. For uninterrupted documentation of activities, it must be ensured that these resources are always readily available. Thus we recommend that there be a budget set aside for all resources needed to document FNS activities as appropriate.

Measures have to be put in place to curb misuse of funds/resources and promote accountability and transparency on the use of resources.

7. Ethics in Documenting

Issues to do with ethics in documenting food and nutrition activities need special attention. Issues to do with privacy and confidentiality always arise in the documentation of some information, thus personnel need to be sensitized of the importance of privacy, confidentiality and respect for persons in capturing, reporting, storage and disposal of information.

8. Strengthen Use of FNC Website

FNC to strengthen use of its website to disseminate products (e.g. photographs, videos and success stories) from the FNSCs. In addition, FNC to provide assistance with the publication (printing, editing) of the various outputs.



9. Strengthening Monitoring and Evaluation of Projects and Activities, As A Continuous Process

Monitoring, support, supervision and evaluation of projects activities is key to ensuring progress in documenting food and nutrition security activities. These processes entirely depend on documented information, and if they are made the principles in food and nutrition security activities, then documentation will be ensured, improved and strengthened over time.

ANNEXES

ANNEX 1: FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION GUIDE

Background

Many multi-sectoral food and nutrition security activities are taking place in the districts where DFNSCs have been established but little has been documented. Hence, there is need to identify the bottlenecks /challenges hindering the documentation process of these activities and provide recommendations.

Methodology

Focus Groups Discussion per district will be conducted to provide descriptive information about the factors affecting documentation in their district. Group size must range from a size of 8 to 16 participants and must last from 45 to 90 minutes. Each focus group must be heterogenous in that it represents every member within the FNSCs. Using an open-ended FGD guide below, focus groups discussions must be facilitated by FNSCs chairperson with the assistance of the consultant.

- 1. What do you understand by the term documentation?
- 2. In your practice, do you document, if so, what activities?
- 3. Who is responsible for documentation of FNS activities?
- 4. What challenges are you facing in documenting FNS activities?
- 5. What are the benefits of documenting activities implemented by the FNS committees?
- 6. Do u have a standardized documentation format in place for documenting your work activities? If yes/no, explain.
- 7. What equipment do you use in collecting data/human interest stories/photographs/audio visual? What would you prefer to use?
- 8. Have you been trained on documentation of FNS activities?
- 9. How can we strengthen documentation of FNS activities?
- 10. Are there any other issues you would like us to discuss?









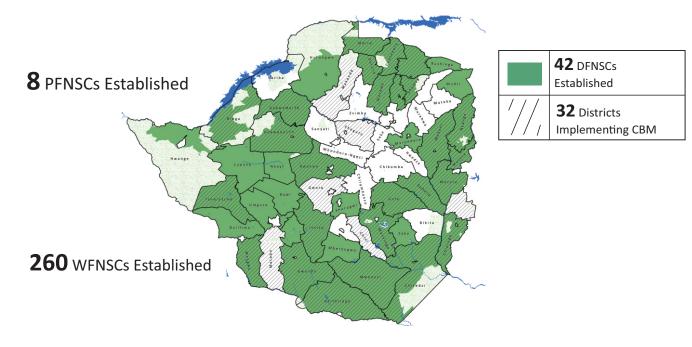






ANNEX 2: ESTABLISHED DISTRICT FOOD AND NUTRITION SECURITY COMMITTEES

Established FNSCs in Zimbabwe



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