



Documentation of the Role of Traditional Leadership in Addressing Food and Nutrition Insecurity in Zimbabwe



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Acronyms

DA	District Administrator
FNC	Food and Nutrition Council
FNSC	Food and Nutrition Security Committees
IDI	In-Depth Interviews
MCBM	Multi-sectoral Community Based Model
OPC	Office of the President and Cabinet
PA	Provincial Administrators
VHW	Village Health Worker
NNS	National Nutrition Survey

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Introduction

Introduction

Currently, hunger and lack of vital food has been a major challenge in Zimbabwe. Zimbabwe's economy has been deteriorating and currently the food supply is available to partially satisfy the country's food demand (World Food Programme Zimbabwe Country Brief, 2018). A large part of Zimbabwe's population residing in provinces such as Masvingo, Matabeleland and Manicaland lacks sufficient food to ensure good nutrition and health. According to the 2018 National Nutrition Survey (NNS) there has been a decrease in the number of households consuming an acceptable diet from 67% in 2010 to 55% in 2018. As a result of facing food shortages, households are engaging in various methods of coping which have a devastating effect on the health of their children. These coping strategies include: selling one's land, begging for food, withdrawing children from school, selling assets and more livestock than usual. According to the Zimbabwe Vulnerability Assessment Committee (ZimVAC), 2017 Rural Livelihoods Assessment Report, 76 percent of the rural households are considered poor and households spend over half of their income on food and 33 percent suffer from food deprivation.

The food challenges in many provinces of Zimbabwe seem to be linked with high rates of stunting among children. In Zimbabwe, according to estimations from the World Health Organization (WHO), United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the NNS, from 2010 to 2018, stunting rates among children under 5 showed a large decrease. The 2018 national stunting average was 26.2%; representing an improvement from the 2010 levels (33.8%). Although the provinces have shown improvement from the 2010 levels, Manicaland (31.2% from 38.1%), and Masvingo (27% from 30.6%) provinces remain hotspots for stunting in Zimbabwe (NNS, 2018).

Measures to reduce stunting and food insecurity have been implemented in different provinces of Zimbabwe by the Government and different organisations (Operational Manual for Food and Nutrition Security Committees, 2010). The Multi-sectoral Community Based Model (MCBM) for addressing food and nutrition insecurity to reduce stunting has been implemented and promoted by the Food and Nutrition Council (FNC) since 2014.

Introduction

The programme was initiated in these 4 pilot districts (Mutasa, Chipinge, Chiredzi and Mwenezi) before it was scaled up to 32 districts since then to date.

The MCBM programme is community centred and takes a bottom-up approach to addressing food and nutrition security challenges. This programme was designed to improve the nutritional status of children under 5 years of age and women of childbearing age in selected vulnerable districts including Mutasa, Chipinge, Chiredzi and Mwenezi. These MCBM activities are coordinated by the established multi-sectoral Food and Nutrition Security Committees (FNSCs). These FNSCs were established from national level to sub district (ward and village) with representatives from different ministries (Operational Manual for Food and Nutrition Security Committees, 2010). Traditional leaders (chiefs, headmen, village heads) are also part of the structures from district to ward level. Hence, this report presents findings from a study that was done to determine the roles played by traditional leaders in reducing stunting and food and nutrition insecurity in their communities.

To review the progress attained by the MCBM approach, FNC organised a review and planning meeting (MCBM Review & Planning Report, 2018). The meeting was attended by different stakeholders who included traditional leaders, District and Provincial Administrators, members of the National, Provincial, District and Ward Food and Nutrition Security Committees, Development Partners and Non-Governmental Organisations. In this stakeholders' meeting, the traditional leaders from the four MCBM pilot districts gave testimonials on how they have championed the MCBM implementation in the four Districts.

Since traditional leaders are fully connected with their communities, their involvement as agents of change towards optimal food and nutrition security is fundamental to the MCBM approach. Documenting the roles of traditional leadership in reducing food and nutrition insecurity will motivate traditional leaders in other districts to also actively engage in all food and nutrition related activities. Hence, this report seeks to provide evidence of the roles played by traditional leaders in the four MCBM pilot districts in reducing stunting.



Overall Objective

The overall objective of the report is to document the role that the traditional leadership is playing in food and nutrition interventions in their respective districts.

METHODOLOGY

Study Design

To get more comprehensive insights on the role played by traditional leaders in mitigating food and nutrition insecurity in their areas, a qualitative method to data collection was employed. Data collection was carried out from 14 August 2018 to 20 August 2018.

Study Setting

The study was conducted in 4 MCBM pilot districts namely Mutasa, Chipinge, Chiredzi and Mwenezi. The first two districts are located in Manicaland province and the latter are in Masvingo province. In each district, one chief was selected and interviewed.

Sampling Procedure

The MCBM approach is being implemented in 32 districts of Zimbabwe. Out of 32 MCBM districts, the study purposively selected 4 MCBM districts. These districts were selected because the MCBM approach was first implemented in these districts before scaling up to 32 districts. In each district, one chief was purposively selected per district except for Mutasa district in which the respondent was the headman. The 4 who were purposively selected from these four districts were among the traditional leaders who attended the MCBM review and planning meeting in May 2018. They were selected to share their experiences since they have been involved in the MCBM program and activities for long. Also interviewed were one villager and one farmer per district.

Data Collection

Four in depth interviews (IDI) were conducted with the 4 chiefs from selected districts. All the discussions with the chiefs were guided by the interviewer guide and audio recorded.

Data Management and Analysis

For the qualitative data, transcription of all the recordings was done. After that, all transcripts were translated to English. First, an analysis plan was developed based on study objectives. A coding scheme and themes were developed. Quality assurance was ensured by translating the IDI guide to the appropriate local language.


Ethical Statement

Permission to proceed was sought from the Provincial Administrators (PA), Office of the President and Cabinet (OPC) and District Administrators (DA). Verbal consent was sought from the study respondents (Chiefs) before conducting interviews. The respondents were also assured that the information collected was to be used for report writing only.

Below is a summary of the background information of chiefs which participated in the survey, selected from the 4 pilot MCBM districts.

Table 1.1: Background information of chiefs selected

Names	District
Chief Chigume Negari	Mwenezi
Chief Mapungwana	Chipinge
Chief Tshovani	Chiredzi
Headman Nemaunga	Mutasa



Data was collected on the roles of traditional leaders in food and nutrition guided by interview guide, and the total number of IDI reached was four (4). From the findings, it can be confirmed that chiefs are playing a crucial role in the implementation of food and nutrition security activities in the MCBM districts.

Roles of Traditional Leaders (chiefs, headmen and Village Heads) in the Implementation of Food and Nutrition Interventions.

The following emerged as the main roles played by chiefs in championing food and nutrition issues in Zimbabwe:

Educating Communities

With the assistance of Agricultural Extension Workers (AEW) and Village Health Workers (VHW), the chiefs in the four districts are facilitating community education meetings on topics such as: importance of diverse diets, exclusive breastfeeding, environmental management, cattle rearing, child marriages, water and sanitation. Most chiefs educate and encourage their communities on the methods of diversified crop production, sustainable soil management, water harvesting, and animal husbandry (including fish farming, cattle rearing, and bee keeping). The community members interacted with confirmed that they were taught by their chiefs and agricultural extension workers about feeding the soil. They were also taught on the importance of consuming a 4 star diet on their health and wellbeing. *One villager mentioned, "we had lessons from our chief (during our ward assembly/ village assembly- dare; inkundla and field days) on the four food groups to show the importance of nutritional diversity to help bring an end to the unacceptable rates of malnutrition."* At the chiefs' residence visited, there was a display of harvested crops, including beans, pumpkins, maize, sorghum, millet, potatoes, and many other traditional foods of Zimbabwe. In addition, chiefs are providing community education on water and sanitation. The chiefs are encouraging their subjects to avoid open defecation, build toilets, wash hands after using the toilet and proper disposal of litter. On the issue of preventing open defecation, the chiefs are encouraging everyone in their communities (including the new residents) to build even temporary toilets. Chief Mapungwana said, *"I am encouraging those without toilets to build a temporary toilet through digging a latrine and making four walls (using grass) and this does not need money to complete"*.



Chief Mapungwana

The chief also outlined the benefits of avoiding open defecation on their natural water bodies such as rivers and springs or 'zvinyuka' in Shona. Springs and rivers are open to groundwater runoff and are unlikely to provide sanitary drinking water since they are easily contaminated or poisoned by surface runoff. Hence, these water sources need to be protected from tampering by avoiding open defecation and use of dangerous chemicals. The chief mentioned that building toilets allows appropriate disposal of human excreta and it keeps their drinking water (in rivers and 'zvinyuka' or springs) clean. This also prevents transmission of diseases such as diarrhea.

Addressing Myths and Misconceptions

Three of the chiefs mentioned myths and misconceptions as a major cause of malnutrition in their communities.

- In some areas in Chiredzi district, unmarried women, pregnant women and uncircumcised men were not allowed to eat eggs and chicken. Given that eggs and

- chicken are some of the affordable sources of animal protein, the health of the mother and the unborn child might be at risk. Chief Tshovani said, *"there was a perception in our community that young girls and pregnant women were not allowed to consume eggs and chicken until they give birth or get married."*
- Other chiefs in some districts used to view stunting as a sign of being bewitched and therefore believed in faith healing and traditional medication in solving the stunting problem. This had led to poor health seeking behaviours among the communities. The chiefs are now working with Village Health Workers to identify households with stunted children and refer them to the clinic.
- Some adults still have misconceptions that stunting runs within the family (genetic).

Most chiefs are now playing a pivotal role in providing the community with facts to correct these myths and misconceptions regarding malnutrition. They are telling their communities during their ward assembly meetings that good nutrition should begin before a child is even born. Malnutrition's most devastating impact is in the womb, when the foetus can fail to develop properly, and during the first years of a child's life, when it can hamper physical and mental development. Chief Tshovani mentioned that, *"we (traditional leaders) are instructing elders in our community to allow young girls and pregnant women in particular to eat nutritious food (such as eggs, chicken etc.), as it is the cornerstone for the future of their own children."*



Consumption of a 4 star diet in Mutasa

Enhancing Community Participation in Food and Nutrition Initiatives


The chiefs are encouraging people in their communities not to become overly-dependent on handouts or wait for donor agencies to do things for their communities. They are urging them to take the initiative to be proactive for their own community development. Since the traditional chiefs have the respect of their people, the community members are likely to participate in activities which the chief proposes because they trust his concern for their welfare. Moreover, the chiefs said communities are likely to respond if the initiatives address their needs and priorities. In Mwenezi, the chief and the community members initiated the construction of Muzezegwa dam. Chief Negari played a crucial role in solving disputes that would arise during construction and provided punitive measures to those who were not coming to construct the dam. The dam was built by the community to provide a supply of water for livestock, irrigation and household use.



Chief Negari

The construction of Muzezegwa dam led to the development of community gardens and household gardens. These gardens have offered great potential for improving household food and nutrition security and alleviating micronutrient deficiencies. The community members are now growing diversified crops throughout the year.

These gardens have played an important role since communities have limited income-earning opportunities and poor access to markets. Moreover, these community and home gardens are also becoming an increasingly important source of food and income for poor households in these rural areas.



The traditional leadership in Mutasa district supported and encouraged the community initiative to start a greenhouse garden. The idea was shared through the ward and village assembly and the traditional leaders motivated and encouraged people to take the idea of greenhouse gardens back to their communities. This initiative is now being implemented in various villages to improve health, ensure year-round food security and help reduce poverty.

Revival of the Zunde raMambo as a Strategy to Reduce Food Insecurity

Most chiefs mentioned that they revived the Zunde raMambo to assist vulnerable people in their communities with food for supplementary feeding. “Zunde” is a Shona word which means an informal, inbuilt, social, economic and even political mechanism (University of Zimbabwe, 2000). The concept of Zunde is centred on ensuring food security for the villagers. The implementation of the *Zunde* differs from place to place depending on the respect accorded to the chief and the level of sensitization of the community. In 3 of the visited districts, the chief designated a piece of land for cultivation by subjects. The harvest was stored in the chief's granary (*Zunde raMambo*) in his compound during normal times as well as times of stress, whether natural or man-made. In some districts, the chiefs encouraged villagers /households to produce food for supplementary feeding in their communal plots and contribute small portions of grains to the chief.

These contributions are stored in the Zunde raMambo and will be used to support vulnerable populations. Sometimes, the Chiefs use the Zunde raMambo to support school feeding programmes. In some areas, communities had little understanding of the objectives of the *Zunde*. Chief Mapungwana said, *"it is important to sensitize people to fully understand the Zunde concept, rather than for them to simply adopt it because they respect their chiefs. Without adequate sensitisation, some community members felt that perhaps they were producing food for the chiefs, particularly where the plots for such farms were provided by the chiefs."* Most chiefs requested support from the Government and non-governmental organisations for the development of *Zunde* farms in the form of loan for seeds, fertilizers and other agricultural implements. The chiefs encouraged their fellow traditional leaders to propagate the concept and start implementation since this proved to be one of the great opportunities for the development of food and nutrition security programmes in their communities.



Leading by example: Bumper maize harvest at Headman Nemaunga's homestead

Encouraging the Growing and Consumption of Small Grains.

Chiefs in different areas are teaching the communities the benefits of growing millet and other drought resistant crops. Most chiefs mentioned that their areas continuously face insufficient rainfall, and a high number of people are facing prolonged periods of hunger and meal-skipping. To fight hunger in their districts (Chiredzi, Chipinge and Mwenezi), chiefs are encouraging farmers to plant drought-resistant crops, including millet and sorghum.

It was highlighted that previously, everyone in these areas preferred to grow maize, and nobody was producing significantly because of low rainfall. This caused food shortages and families had to spend their meagre savings to buy food to keep their families afloat. A shift to producing small grains has seen most households producing better harvests. Chief Chigume Negari said, *"I expect to harvest every time I plant small grains, even in the seasons when my village receives little rainfall."* It was highlighted that the villagers also like feeding their children with small grains (millet and sorghum) because they fill them for a long time and give them energy for the whole day. Headman Nemaunga said, *"the children also look strong and healthy and they perform well in school."*


Moreover, chiefs outlined that small grains (sorghum and millet) are not only a source of food for the communities; they also provide a constant supply of cash. When they need money, they can sell some of the crops. *“Sorghum is my bank. When I have sorghum in the house, I don't worry about money. I can cash it in anytime I want,”* says Chief Tshovani.



Chief Tshovani at his homestead with recently harvested small grains in the background

Providing Punitive Measures to Offenders

Traditional leaders (chiefs, headman and village heads) have the role to chair the village assembly (dare; inkundla), make local by-laws in relation to cultural norms and values, set penalties and set up implementation strategies for by-laws enforcement. They derive their authority from the Traditional Leaders Act. All these leaders have an important role in safeguarding and protecting the health of children and women in their areas of jurisdiction. The chiefs are playing a pivotal role in assisting officers working on child marriages, domestic violence and other law enforcing agencies in apprehending law offenders in their areas of jurisdiction. Chiefs are encouraging local people to report to the headman, village head and or ZRP any domestic violence issues, child marriages and environmental offenders.



These traditional leaders have the responsibility of setting penalties or fines in the form of goats or cattle depending on the magnitude of the case. These penalties/ fines are effective and are playing a critical role in reducing cases of child marriages, domestic violence and home deliveries. This has had a huge impact in reducing stunting and child deaths within their communities. Chief Mapungwana said, *"we fine all perpetrators of domestic violence and keep record of their names. We also fine all parents associated with child marriages and home deliveries."* Also to fight the issue of child marriages, Chiefs are encouraging all children in their communities to have birth certificates. This helps prevent child marriages by proving the age of a girl who intends to get married.

Acting as Community Role Models

In many areas chiefs act as community role models. A role model is a person whose behavior, example, or success is or can be emulated by others. Since chiefs are respected, most community members are likely to emulate what they do and say. Chief Chigume Negari said, *"It is important to lead by example to establish trust among the subjects, gain respect and develop the systems to get things done."* In their areas, most chiefs are growing drought resistant crops and they are also building toilets to decrease the spread of disease by reducing the amount of human faeces in the environment. They are also initiating nutritional gardens and water harvesting.

Supporting School Feeding Programmes

The chiefs and other local farmers are working very hard to support the school feeding programmes. The programmes provide on-site meals meaning, food is distributed to children while at school during the afternoon meal. The Government of Zimbabwe provides the primary schools with maize grain (sadza) but without relish. The chiefs, local farmers and community members assist the schools with vegetables, beans, tomatoes and onions so that the meals will be balanced. The chiefs mentioned that the programme has provided both educational and health benefits to the most vulnerable children.



Headman Nemaunga

Headman Nemaunga said, *'the school feeding program has contributed to increased enrolment rates, reduced absenteeism, and improved nutritional status.'* Chief Tshovani together with local farmers in Chiredzi district have established nutrition gardens from which they provide local schools with beans, maize and various vegetables with the intention of improving nutritional status of children.

Recommendations

In light of the findings from this study, the following are being recommended:

Development of a Traditional Leaders' Toolkit

A number of traditional leaders are taking a stand in addressing gender based violence (GBV), harmful cultural practices, and stunting at community levels. To effectively address these issues, there is a need to develop traditional leaders toolkit. This toolkit will provide information and training guides on malnutrition and gender-based violence, the role of cultural practices, and the linkages between all three, and equip traditional leaders on how to advocate for services for their community, and how to make referrals. This toolkit will contain resources that will help community-based programme implementers, traditional leaders, and other audiences to engage and support traditional leadership to champion the prevention of stunting, harmful cultural practices and GBV. It will also contain resources and tools that can be used by traditional leaders to build their understanding and capacity around food and nutrition security and GBV prevention. Also in this toolkit the community programme implementers and managers will find information and training guidelines on how to engage traditional leaders in their programmes, and how to build the capacity of traditional leaders to address stunting, water and sanitation issues and gender-based violence.



Boosting Zunde raMambo Productivity through Provision of Inputs and Skills Development

To improve the food and nutrition security of vulnerable households in Zimbabwe, the Government and other NGOs need to support the *Zunde raMambo* through provision of free agricultural inputs. Inputs assistance will increase agricultural production and productivity that will contribute to the reduction of poverty and chronic malnutrition in Zimbabwe. However, the provision of free inputs approach must be designed to promote the transition from short-term humanitarian input distribution approach to longer-term developmental approaches of building sustainable food, nutrition and income security.

Provision of agricultural inputs alone is not sufficient to improve agricultural productivity (*Zunde raMambo*). There is a need to mobilise all available agricultural expertise, including university departments of agriculture, to provide technical advisory services and training to the farming community. Also, the agricultural extension workers must avail their expertise to mentor, train and provide technical support to the chiefs and *Zunde raMambo* workers.

Traditional Leaders Preventing GBV in their Communities

It is important that traditional leaders form contacts and links with people and services in the community which can help them to prevent GBV and support survivors. Traditional Leaders have a very important role to play in speaking out against GBV and creating a culture of zero tolerance for violence. Things that traditional leaders can do to help prevent GBV include:

- Acting as role models for community members and living by their own message of non-violence.
- Holding men (or women) accountable for their decisions and actions – no excuses for violence!
- Emphasising the role of men as protectors.
- Getting the message out about 'zero tolerance for violence'. At community gatherings, traditional ceremonies and rites, traditional leaders can talk about Gender Based Violence.



Conclusion

The engagement of traditional leaders is an important aspect in ending food and nutrition insecurity which deserves greater attention. Engagement and involvement of traditional leaders can help sensitise and mobilize communities to embrace food and nutrition programmes from government and other relevant stakeholders. Although messages about the role and importance of chiefs in food and nutrition interventions are gaining increasing visibility in MCBM districts, it is important that approaches towards engaging and involving chiefs in the longer-term are grounded in a clear understanding of their key roles in ending food and nutrition insecurity.

The study noted the different roles the traditional leadership is playing in the implementation of food and nutrition interventions in their respective communities. The traditional leaders help us to enhance community participation and encourage growing and consumption of small grains. The study also found that traditional leaders are spreading the message of zero tolerance for GBV in their communities, and refer community members to social services, hospitals or the police in cases of reported or suspected abuse. To effectively address GBV, child marriages, food insecurity, harmful cultural beliefs and stunting, we recommend the development of a traditional leader's toolkit. The toolkit will help community-based programme implementers, traditional leaders, and other audiences to engage and support traditional leadership to champion the prevention of these issues.



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