



# **Food and Nutrition Security in the Context of COVID-19 in Zimbabwe**

## **CHIMANIMANI DISTRICT Response Strategy**

# Chimanimani District

## Manicaland



### Brief District Introduction

Chimanimani district lies in the South-Eastern part of Manicaland Province in Zimbabwe. It is characterized by a diverse terrain as well as extremely varied climatic conditions ranging from natural region one (1) to natural region five (5). The district is divided into two (2) constituencies, that is Chimanimani East and Chimanimani West and these are further divided into 23 wards. It is divided into three zones which has a direct influence on agriculture and land use. Zone 1 (Eastern Zone) covers the eastern half of the district (embracing Natural Region I) with high rainfall patterns. The eastern border mountains, for example, receive rainfall in excess of 2000 mm per annum. In sharp contrast the Western Zone (Zone 3) which includes Chakohwa, Chipise, Nyanyadzi and Changadzi wards record less than 300mm per annum and often experience prolonged periods of drought (typical of Natural Regions IV and V). Zone 3 is semi-arid, with low-lying areas which have good potential for irrigation. It has most of the district's irrigation schemes which depend on water from the Save Rivers, Odzi, Nyanyadzi and their tributaries. In between the east and west, is Zone 2 (Central Zone; Natural Regions II and III) which covers the Biriwiri, Mhakwe, Shinja, Mutambara and Cashel areas. Mainly the district is into livestock production, cropping, forestry farming and fruit and vegetable farming.

The district was the hardest hit by the Cyclone IDAI disaster which occurred in March 2019. The disaster claimed 173 lives, had 279 missing persons and injured 318 people. A total of 2252 households were directly affected by the disaster which left 4073 households homeless. The cyclone also destroyed a lot of infrastructure such as roads, bridges, school blocks, telephone lines and power lines among others. Since then a lot of work has been done towards reconstruction of the damaged infrastructure and assisting the affected households. However, the district still has 467 families that are in tents and are awaiting relocation to Bumba.

### IMPACT OF THE COVID-19

As of October 2020, the district had recorded 19 positive cases of the COVID-19 disease, of these 19 there were 3 deaths and 16 recoveries. The district was excessively affected by the effects of COVID-19 regulations, especially the lockdown period where 90% of shops and food markets were closed. This made it difficult for households to access daily food provisions. Fruit producers could not access markets for their product as it was difficult to travel from the district to other parts of the country. Thus fruit and vegetable producers lost a lot of potential income during the first phase of the lockdown period.

#### Negative effects of the COVID-19 Lockdown

##### Markets

- *Reduced village market sales resulted in low incomes*
- *Established customers were lost due to reduced market accessibility*
- *Prices escalated due to increased demand and reduced supplies necessitated by restricted intercity movements*
- *Movement of urban dwellers to rural areas resulted in a population boom and increase demand for scarce resources.*
- *Informal vendors usually found at bus termini were hit the hardest as they were not recognized by government support in the form of cushioning allowances as their access to customers had dwindled. This meant reduced profits and disposable income*

## **Child protection**

- *Child labour and exploitation was on the rise as some were now into full time vending.*
- *Child marriages rose exponentially.*
- *Sanitary hygiene was compromised by lack of disposable incomes to disadvantaged populations to buy supplies.*
- *Child abuse by parents and relatives was on the increase*

## **Disability**

- *There was utter neglect of people living with disabilities as they were not prioritised in accessing Personal Protective Equipment (PPE).*

## **Health and Gender issues**

- *Gender Based Violence (GBV) and divorce incidences increased.as well as divorces*
- *Access to medications not available locally was affected by limited movements due to lockdown restrictions Lack of access to contraception due restricted movements and lack of access therefore resulted in increase in incidences of unplanned pregnancies*
- *Reduced access to food, low disposable incomes, food insecurity resulted in poor dietary diversity.*
- *Depression, anxiety by breadwinners who were no longer capacitated.*

## **Livelihoods**

- *Rise in unemployment with maids'/house help workers'/ child minders severely affected.*
- *Other people who were surviving with vending or formal/informal trading failed to gain ground and return to business as their incomes were eroded by inflation and cost of living.*
- *Some farmers sold their livestock during the lockdown period driven by the need for urgent cash in January as it was the only source of income they had. This panic selling of livestock at low prices led to serious destocking and farmers are now struggling to get money to replace their livestock.*
- *Due to movement restrictions, a lot of farmers resorted to nutritional gardening. It helped in the household food and nutrition security status of many families.*
- *Farmers managed to save the little food they had as they were restricted to move around in search of food.*
- *Children who started full time vending during the long holidays and later found leverage dropped out of school as some started to record profits.*
- *Substance and drug abuse and crime rates by youths were on the rise.*

## **Interventions employed to address challenges brought about by the COVID 19 (mitigate effects of COVID-19)**

- *To address these effects the district established official fruits and vegetable markets as well as assist producers with travel letters to enable them to market their produce to other parts of the country.*
- *Initiatives such as Community treatment of acute malnutrition, family led MUAC and integration of malnutrition treatment with EPI outreach sessions were implemented.*
- *AGRITEX continued to carry out their day to day operations during lockdown. The department kept on advising farmers to obtain letters to permit them to take produce to the market.*
- *Farmers were also advised on post-harvest handling techniques and value addition so that they would keep their produce for long periods of time.*

## Recommendations and Lessons learnt

- *There is need to decentralize emergency preparedness funds so that they are readily available at the district level to facilitate emergency response.*
- *It is a good practice for individuals and communities to have multiple streams of income to shield them against impoverishment during emergencies.*
- *Digital technology proved to be a great asset and facilitator of communication (of health awareness messaging, situation report, socialising) and business even in lockdown situation*
- *Youth empowerment is critical and needs to be prioritized so as to increase the opportunities available to this age group and reduce crime and drug abuse.*
- *Conflict management and resolution was a social asset that was observed in this context.*
- *Subsidy on basic commodities was noted as very important in times of emergencies.*
- *There is an urgent need to strengthen child protection policies.*
- *Food security issues during the COVID 19 crises need to be prioritised equally so that sanitation and hygiene practices will not be the main interventions getting focus at the expense of other key response actions.*
- *The Pfumvudza concept, of plot pegging and holing out of planting stations were also done during the lockdown period so that farmers would obtain a good harvest from a small piece of land.*

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