



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

## **MATOBO DISTRICT Response Strategy**

# Matobo District

## Matabeleland South



### Brief background

Matobo District lies at the west of the country sharing border with Botswana. It is one of seven districts in Matabeleland South province with an estimated population of 94,000 settled over an area of approximately 7220km, half of which is uninhabited state land.

The district falls under agroecological region 4/5 with intermittent rainfall of 400-450mm on an average. Temperatures range from 26 to 38 degrees Celsius in these regions which makes it highly unfavourable to agriculture particularly maize crop production. Matobo National Park is the major tourist attraction in Matobo district providing the residents a seasonal income from tourism. Matobo districts has only one tarred road that links them with Bulawayo.

### Thematic overview

**Nutrition** - As a result of food insecurity there was an increase in the number of children suffering from global acute malnutrition (GAM) which was recorded as exceeding acceptable thresholds (5%) in the district (ZimVAC,2019). Several negative coping strategies have been observed in the district which include; reduced number of meals eaten per day, limited portion sizes, resorting to less preferred foods and reducing adult consumption so children have more food. Families are dependent on a limited range of foods which, whilst available, does not provide the diversity that households need for adequate nutrition.

**Health** - Generally, the district's access to basic services including health are limited. This has been coupled with natural disasters like drought and the emergent scourge, COVID-19 pandemic putting children in the districts at higher risk of illness.

**Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH)** - The recurrent natural disasters have reduced safe water supply in the district. Water points have dried up, the water table is significantly lower than in previous years and only 30% of rural boreholes are functional. This means that communities, especially women and girls are forced to travel long distances in search of safe drinking water. Communities are collecting water from nearby rivers as the alternative safe water sources are more than 5km away.

**Child protection** - Children have become increasingly vulnerable as this complex emergency worsens. The pressure on households to provide food is already leading to negative coping strategies for livelihoods, which includes school drop-outs, early marriage, transactional sex, hazardous child labour, crime, migration and reports of child trafficking.

### Key Recommendations

**Impact of COVID-19 on Livelihoods** - Rural households have suffered reduction of income sources, reduction of food sources and failure to access basic commodities as a result of the pandemic. There is need for the development of a holistic and multi-sectoral response to the pandemic to ensure that policies being implemented to mitigate the spread of the disease, such as lockdowns do not inadvertently increase household vulnerability.

**Food Insecurity** - Extreme droughts and COVID-19 are among the key drivers behind the cereal insecurity. In light of the projected prevalence of cereal insecurity, there is need for urgent food distribution or cash based transfers to food insecure households in order to avoid a worsening situation.

**Enhanced Food Access** - There is need to continuously monitor market access and prices as the volatility presented by the evolving COVID-19 pandemic may impact negatively on food access.

**Shocks and Hazards** – While cash shortages and drought among others are recurring shocks, the COVID-19 pandemic is an emerging shock which has further compounded households' vulnerability. This calls for the development of holistic strategies to respond to both the existing and emerging shocks.

## COVID-19 Response Strategies

- *There is need to step up communication and advocacy initiatives on COVID-19 so as to reach the majority of the population.*
- *There is need for the National task force on COVID-19 to make wider consultation with stakeholders to strike a balance between improving overall access to essential services and products with curbing the spread of COVID-19.*
- *Capacitate community centred and outreach provision of essential health services such as Vitamin A supplementation, immunisation and ART counselling.*
- *Implementation of Telemedicine initiative to minimise referrals.*
- *Ensure markets are functional and accessible to communities to enable them to access adequate food and other household supplies.*
- *Ensure the transport industry is capacitated to deal with the pandemic and improve transport availability across the country.*
- *Support the training of Environmental Health staff, WASH Partners, community health volunteers in potential hotspot areas on case definitions and their contribution in the prevention of the spread of the disease.*
- *Capacitate Rapid Response Teams (RRT).*
- *Promote hygiene at point of entry with non-food items for handwashing and support in the setting up of handwashing points in institutions and marketplaces.*
- *Develop behavioural change communication towards community members for improved hygiene practices;*
- *Advocacy towards resourcing for preparedness and response for COVID-19,*
- *Support coordination mechanisms including coordinating the social mobilization arm to ensure consistency in the information/knowledge dissemination.*
- *Integrate COVID-19 prevention messages in existing WASH activities.*
- *Support the health delivery system to deliver appropriate care to all communities.*
- *Support mass media campaigns on COVID-19 prevention using various channels of communication (billboards, radio shows, radio jingles etc).*
- *Improving on food and nutrition security through initiatives and capacity building of extension staff on command agriculture, Intwasa concept, various strategies under climate smart agriculture and proper Irrigation cropping programme.*
- *Increase coverage for Command Livestock to restore losses due to poverty deaths.*
- *Hay cutting and bailing- Government to continue with cutting and bailing of hay. The hay is availed to the farmers on cost recovery basis, at subsidised prices.*
- *Climate smart agriculture initiatives to be strengthened.*

- *Irrigation establishment in areas with adequate water sources and the necessary infrastructure.*
- *Extension messages focusing on, Fattening and de-stocking, encouraging farmers to purchase survival feeds for supplementing livestock, Farmers encouraged to barter livestock for stock feed.*
- *Intensifying capacity building programs for both farmers and extension staff needed.*
- *Solarisation of boreholes and construction of water troughs at boreholes for improved water availability for livestock in selected districts.*
- *Identification and resettling of illegal settlers (particularly those settling in grazing lands) that is currently ongoing ensures that more grazing land is available for livestock.*

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