

Impact of Structural Adjustment on Smallholders (Fao Economic and Social Development Paper) (No 103)

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Food Insecurity and HIV/AIDS in Low-income Households in Urban Zimbabwe

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Contemporary Zimbabwe illustrates the complex ways in which economic, political, social, environmental factors, combined with high levels of illness and early mortality as a result of HIV infection, produce a food crisis. In both rural and urban areas, people are increasingly dependent on national and international food aid agencies for survival. The criteria used by relief agencies to define vulnerability, however, provide little or no flexibility in dynamic and fluid situations. Drawing on research conducted in the east Zimbabwe city of Mutema, we describe the combined impact of drought, unemployment, and inflation on food security and the policy context affecting access to food. In particular, we describe the experiences of primary caregivers of people living with HIV/AIDS in low-income salaried households, who are ineligible for food aid, and the mechanisms they use to meet basic household needs. By drawing attention to the potency of the combination of economic, political, and natural disasters, we illustrate the importance of context in defining and responding to disaster.

Key words: food insecurity, HIV/AIDS, inflation, urban households, Zimbabwe

Introduction

Disasters illustrate the conjunction of multiple factors; they are the products of immediate, precipitating, and long-term causes, and shape the responses in a timely and appropriate manner to minimize human suffering. Poor infrastructure, institutional rigidity, structural inequalities, and shifts in social, economic, and political relationships all affect the ability of governments and people to act in times

of disaster. Food insecurity is a disaster in its own right and is also a consequence of other disasters: natural—the result of drought and crop failure, for example; sociopolitical, as evident in civil wars; and economic, following structural adjustment, unemployment, or de-industrialization, for instance. Food crises in poor countries such as Zimbabwe, Zambia, Malawi, Mozambique, Ethiopia, and the Sudan are the confluence of environmental stress, civil war, and structural violence. In these settings, identifying vulnerable groups and targeting food aid resources is routine for humanitarian crisis organizations. Where immediate intervention through food aid is imperative, the challenge for governments and relief agencies is to identify the most vulnerable groups to make optimal use of sparse resources. Increasingly, however, food security for all people has been eroded by macroeconomic and political forces, and it has become imperative to keep track of poverty trends as much as trends in rainfall and crop production to develop appropriate emergency and longer-term strategies (Andersson 2007; Boile, Downing and Watts 1994; Richardson 2007).

Zimbabwe, like much of Africa, has a long history of unpredictable food supplies, drought and floods, and accordingly periods of feast and famine. In her pioneer work, Audrey Richards demonstrates how the agricultural cycle evoked intense emotions among the Babemba of then North-Eastern Rhodesia, and how the onset of rain broke this suspense (Richards 1932). Recent work reminds us of the cyclicity of food insecurity and drought (Bonfiglioli 2007; Chigodora 1997; Hiffe 1990; Richardson 2007). Academic and policy concerns with drought have especially emphasized

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impact of trade liberalisation and domestic market deregulation Boussard, Jean-Marc, , The impact of structural adjustment on smallholders,. FAO Economic and Social Development Paper (Rome: FAO).Impact of structural adjustment on smallholders in Sub-Saharan Africa . Agreements (FAO commodities and trade technical paper; no. their economic, political, and social impact on developing countries. 4. and To this day the final draft is yet unknown, so 20% is in discussion but not necessarily coming into.

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