



**Full Length Research Article**

**AN ASSESSMENT OF THE EFFECTIVENESS OF FOOD AID IN HUNGER ALLEVIATION IN MUTARE DISTRICT: A CASE FOR WARD 29**

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**ABSTRACT**

This study was designed to assess the effectiveness of food aid in alleviating hunger in ward 29 of Mutare District through establishing the nature and assessing the benefits of food aid. A questionnaire was distributed to forty six (46) households in order to collect primary data for the study. Five (5) interviews two focus group discussions were done with five (5) headmen from different villages an average of six respondents per group respectively. The research was conducted April and August of 2012-2013 phase. From the results, food aid played a significant role in improving food security status of households. Fifty percent (50%) of the respondents were dependent on food aid and these highlighted that food aid has totally enhanced their food security status. The respondents could afford three (3) meals per day and had improved diets. Social improvements in form of increased school attendance were also noted. The study recommended that in order to reduce vulnerability to hunger, the aid implementers must also provide small grain seeds, which are drought resistant and more adaptable to the semi arid conditions of the study area.

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**INTRODUCTION**

**Background**

Food aid refers to food assistance that is granted to Governments, institutions or households to curb food shortages (WFP, 1998). It is the international transactions that result in provision of assistance in the form of food commodities in a country deemed in need of receiving such aid. It may be a government to government grant to make food importation cheaper or it may be a government or Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO) grant or donations to another NGO for free distribution. The main actors of food aid in Zimbabwe are a variety of NGOs operating under their mother body World Food Programme (WFP) and the Government of Zimbabwe reaching people through the Grain Marketing Board (GMB). The humanitarian intervention was necessitated by the call from the Government of Zimbabwe in 2000, for the need for external assistance to address the food problems facing the country.

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The goal of their programmes was to complement the government efforts of hunger alleviation. The Food Agricultural Organization (FAO), (2005) cited that, the purpose of the humanitarian intervention was to prevent loss of life, through provision of adequate food to the affected people in order to prevent deterioration of their nutritional status. Furthermore, this intervention was to preserve productive assets such as livestock. Mutare District has a bigger population in Manicaland province of Zimbabwe, has a bigger population than other district in the same province (Utete, 2003). This has caused a shortage of suitable land for agriculture and some people are now forced to live on the hills which were initially designated as grazing areas and for fetching firewood. The persistence of drought in the district has also contributed to higher levels of hunger in the area and food aid has been adopted as one of the hunger alleviation strategies. It is against this background that this research wants to establish the effectiveness of food aid as a strategy in alleviating hunger in ward 29 of Mutare District in the Manicaland province in Zimbabwe. This research therefore seeks to identify the nature and benefits of food aid in the area under study. It is hypothesized that food aid offers some benefits to the community of Mutare District; in particular

ward 29. The results of the study are useful in the establishment of grounds for improving hunger and poverty alleviation in the semi arid communal areas of Zimbabwe.

**Methods**

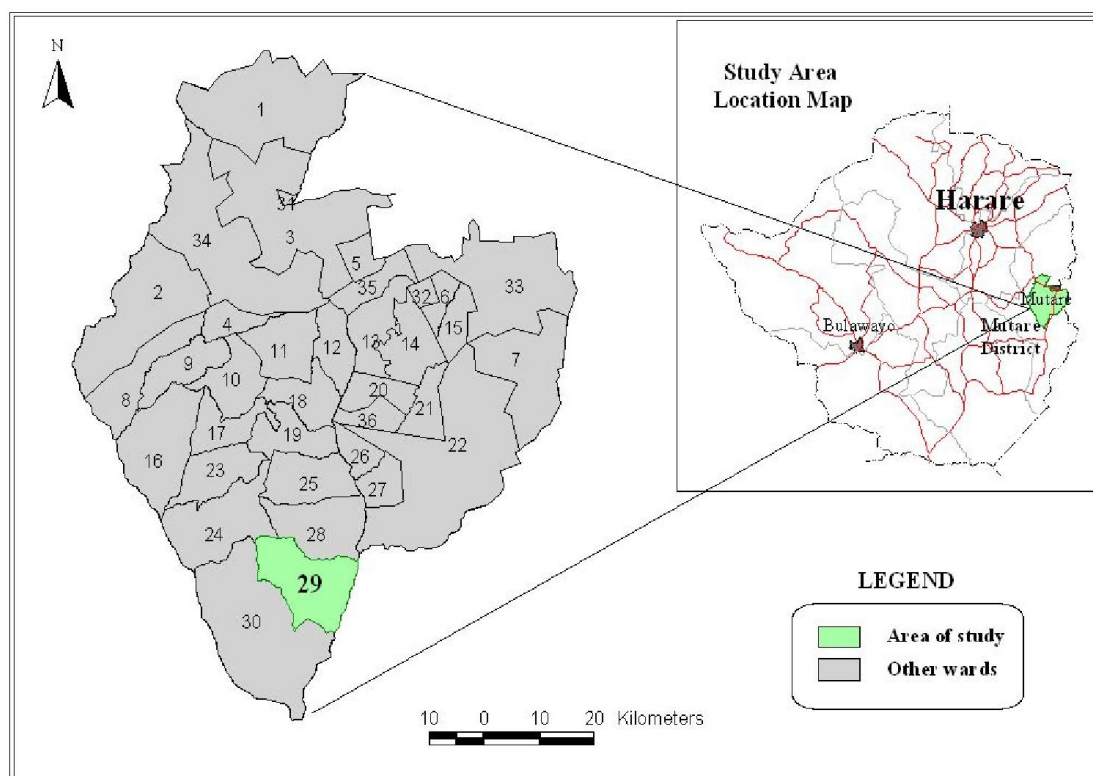
**Study Area**

Mutare District is found in Manicaland Province. The District lies to the north of the Bvumba Mountains and south of the Imbeza Valley. It can be divided into Mutare East (Zimunya) and Mutare West (Marange). Zimunya stretches from the East thus from Odzi River and stretches up to Save River (Figure 1). Most of the study area lies in the natural regions 4 and 5 of Zimbabwe (Vincent and Thomas, 1960). The dominant natural factor conditioning agricultural production is climate especially rainfall. Utete (2003) stated that these natural regions reflect the range from high to low quality of land and rainfall and crop production progressively deteriorate from region 1 to region 5. The ward is generally not suitable for cropping. Rainfall is erratic and generally 500 mm per annum. The rainfall pattern creates extensive variability in agricultural potential yet agriculture is the major activity in the ward hence the existence of hunger.

used in carrying out this research. It emphasizes on the importance of looking at variables in the natural setting in which they are found. Interaction between variables is also important. Detailed data is gathered through open ended questions that provide direct quotations. The use of both quantitative and qualitative research is to fill in gaps that are left out by one method using the other. For instance with qualitative research it will be easier to gain a better understanding of the target market because the types of questions that are asked during the research process begin with the word why. Dercon and Krishman (2001) mentioned that why is a much more powerful word than when, how much, and what that are used in quantitative research.

**Sampling Strategy**

A two stage sampling design was done for the questionnaire survey. The first stage was to sample the villages. Systematic sampling of villages ensured that villages with different socio economic characteristics were capture so as to ultimately have a fair representation of the population. The second stage involved, random sampling of respondents from a beneficiary register provided by Plan International. The two stage sampling design sought to minimize sampling errors and bias



**Figure 3.1. Map of the Study Area – Mukwada ward 29 (Mutare District)**

**Research Design**

A multi-method research methodology was adopted. The research that is the research used both quantitative and qualitative methods. This was done in order to gather all the necessary data for the study. Use of a single method often fails to explore all the components research is focusing on. Quantitative data is essential since it is statistics driven and can provide a lot of information. It makes it easier to compile the data onto a chart or graph because of the numbers that are made available (Word press, 2011). Qualitative data was also

by ensuring that the sample was as representative as possible. Five (5) villages were systematically selected from the sampling frame of ten (10) representing 50%. This was done to ensure that the selected villages are scattered evenly throughout the area of study. It also ensured that all micro characteristics were represented. At least four households were selected from any of the five sampled villages within that ward. A questionnaire was given to household heads. This was done to ensure that correct information was collected from breadwinners who know the prevalence of hunger in their families. Some of the questions included in the questionnaire

were the period one has been a beneficiary, the reasons why one was chosen and the sources of food of the families. The questionnaires were administered by the researcher who moved from one village to the other during the day.

**Table 3.1. Questionnaire Respondents, N=46**

Village Name	Total number of households	Sample size
Mukuze	113	11
Tandanai	80	8
Mukwada	101	10
Maenzanise	77	7
Chirara	100	10

The participants for the FGDs were selected using purposive sampling. Purposive sampling as defined by Shapori and Rosen (2004) is a non-representative subset of some larger population, and is constructed to serve a very specific need or purpose. In this case, the researcher chose the most influential people in the ward. These consists the councilor, kraal heads, village heads, village community workers, AGRITEX workers, business people and other influential people. However, it was not possible to specify the population since they were not all known, and access was difficult. The researcher attempted to zero in on the target group, interviewing whoever was available. The focus group discussions were conducted with heterogeneous members who were of different age groups, sex and economic status. The research involved two FDGs, with an average of six respondents per group. The targeted interviewees for the household included in the sample, were respondents who had shown their willingness to take part in the study after a brief description of the study by the researcher, which, according to Fals-Borda (1991), is democratic participation. The researcher explained the aims and objectives of the study and described the expected outcomes. Four interview sessions were held with five village heads who are also beneficiaries of the food aid programme in ward 29 in Mutare.

### Secondary data collection

Secondary data from periodic and evaluation reports of the WFP, Plan International and government departments such as the Ministry of Women Affairs, Gender and Community Development were also used both as an alternative source and as a complementary source. They provided quantitative data on the magnitude of the food aid in terms of number of beneficiaries, the percentage of the total population targeted and quantities of food distributed. The specific objectives, activities and benefits were also analyzed in terms of whether due attention was given to enhancing the capacities of the community to be self-sufficient and self-reliant. Zimbabwe Vulnerability Assessment Committee (ZIMVAC) reports provided information on the food security situation in Zimbabwe as a country, Mutare as a district and for Ward 29 in particular. They provided statistics for district, provincial and national cereal production, estimated population figures, food requirements, food availability, food access, estimated food deficits or surpluses, food insecure populations, crisis coping mechanisms, geographical and household targeting for food aid and period when interventions were required and the benefits associated with food aid.

## RESULTS

In assessing food aid as a strategy in alleviating hunger there is need to consider the demographic characteristics of the respondents. This is so because, for a research to yield effective results, the selected sample must consists of diversified demographic characteristics to make sure that all population groups are represented.

**Table 4.1. Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents, N=46**

	Sample of Respondents	Total Number of Responses	Percentage%
Gender	Females	28	60
	Males	18	40
Marital Status	Married	16	35
	Single	30	65
Educational Level	Educated	21	45
	Not Educated	25	55
Age	Below 25 years	18	40
	26-40 years	14	30
	41-60years	9	20
	61 + years	5	10

### Gender of the Respondents

The above table shows that the total of 46 people was selected in 5 villages, sixty percent (60%) were females and males constitute forty percent (40%). This shows that there were twenty eight females and eighteen males respectively. This was because the WFP/Plan food aid programme was mostly targeting women. The implementers of the food aid programme argued that females are ones who are highly affected by the prevalence of hunger since they are caregivers of the family.

### Age of the Respondents

From table 4.1 above it can be noted that the vulnerability of people to hunger varies with age. The age group of 0-25 years has a higher responds rate of a total of eighteen people which makes up 40% of the sample. This is mainly because this age group consists of those children who are still going to school and some are heading families. This is due to HIV/AIDS pandemic. These suffer most from the prevalence of hunger since most of them are young and are supposed to be in school. However most of them have dropped out of school since there is no money and the need to take care of their siblings whom they feel they need their care since they are much younger. The numbers of respondents tend to decrease as the age increases largely because older people have better sources of food as compared to children who are dependent.

### Marital Status of the respondents

From table 4.1 of demographic characteristics above, it can be seen that singles have a higher respondent's rate of 65% as compared to couples who constitute 35% of the sampled population. These ones carry the burden of hunger on their own due to the absence of the other partner either by death or dumping. From the research, it was discovered that in this category, women suffer more than men because women are the ones who are usually left with children in the case of a divorce or separation.

### Educational Level of the Respondents

Level of education of people in rural areas is significant in this study because it determines the main economic activities of the household and the effectiveness of their livelihood strategies. Furthermore, level of education is crucial since it allows diversification of rural agriculture in the area. It also enables the effective use of chemicals such as fertilizers for higher yields in order to alleviate hunger. The sample shows that there are more uneducated than educated people in ward 29 of Mutare District. This has a negative impact on the prevalence of hunger in the area since it reduces the livelihood strategies that can be adopted in a bid to alleviate hunger. Education allows one to lead a health life using the obtained knowledge hence lack of it results in contradicting efforts to alleviate hunger. Educated people are able to diversify their livelihood strategies. Amongst the few educated in ward 29 of Mutare District are found a few who are formally employed at the nearby mines.

### Household Size of the Respondent

The bigger the household size the more the food required by that particular household to overcome the burden of hunger. Big family sizes entails that there will be more labor force in the field due to a higher number of people available. However, given the harsh climatic conditions in ward 29, the advantage does not yield any results since they do not favor effective agricultural activities. This implies that big family sizes are increasing the burden to aid providers since they require more food. The sample from the survey shows that the average household size in Mukwada is six which is a manageable number in implementing food aid. However, there are also a few household sizes that are beyond eleven (11). These constitute 20% of the sampled population

Household size

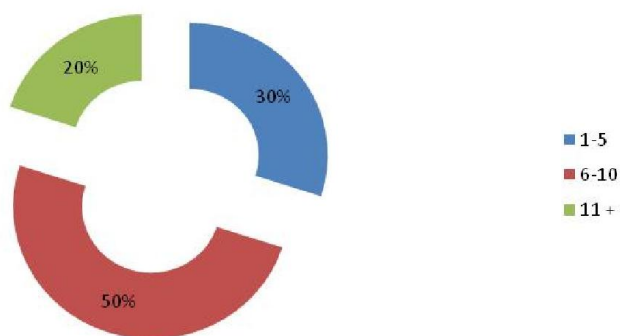


Figure 4.1 Household size of the Respondents, N= 46

### Nature of food aid

The main aim of food aid, as discussed at the U S Food Aid and Security Convention held in Washington DC in January 2014 is curbing global hunger and building security in areas plagued by chronic food shortfalls thereby saving lives. This is especially so where food aid reaches those who are too poor to buy food at the market. The whole idea behind the selection criteria that was adopted by WFP and Plan International was to choose those people whom they believe were mostly affected by hunger and starvation (Chara, 2013).

The food aid beneficiaries were chosen through ranking. People were grouped in their respective villages with one field monitor from Plan national to guide them in the process. The local leadership was also crucial since they helped to maintain order and curbing corruption since they knew their respective villagers. The villagers were the ones who ranked themselves in terms of the severity of hunger they were experiencing. This was based on the assumption that since they live together in the same village they know each other better that is they know who is better off than the other as far as hunger is concerned. This method of participation was meant to ensure that every food insecure household had access to food (Jeremy, 2010). The first thing that was done before ranking of people was to identify indicators of hunger. These vary from village to village since villages are different. Some of the indicators were the same throughout villages for example having only one meal per day. This was very effective since it allowed participation of all the villagers regardless of their status in the society. Every villager had the chance to choose anyone whom she or he thought was hunger stricken.

### Period of benefiting

It was noted that those who have benefited from food aid ever since it started are the ones who are still benefiting today. This is so because food aid targets the most vulnerable population in the society hence they are the ones who are benefiting. However, concern was raised by other villagers who complained that instead of curbing hunger food aid is promoting laziness since these people are now dependent on food aid. Other villagers argued that the beneficiaries who were continuing to benefit from food aid are no longer involved in their livelihood activities since they now know that they will benefit from food aid every year. However, the above argument can be dismissed arguing that Mukwada ward largely rely on agricultural activities for survival yet there is no adequate rainfall. It is therefore difficult for the vulnerable people to survive without food aid since food aid ensures their food security.

### Quantities of food received by households

In a bid to achieve its main objective which is to alleviate hunger and minimize suffering, the WFP food aid programme had a specific ration meant for each person. The type of food given to people was cereal in form of maize or mealie meal, beans and cooking oil. The ration of twenty kilograms mealie meal, two liters cooking oil and two kilograms of beans was given to one person after a period of one month. This had a benefit of ensuring food security hence hunger alleviation since the ration is average of what a human being can eat in a period of one month.

### Household Sources of Food

Table 4.2. Household Sources of food, N=46

Source of Food	Number of users	Percentage of Users
Own Production (Agric)	28	60
Purchases	6	15
Borrowing	5	10
Barter	6	15

The table above shows that a larger percentage of the sample largely relies on their own production which is agriculture. This increase the vulnerability of people to hunger since agriculture is highly affected by harsh climatic conditions. The remaining forty percent rely on purchasing, borrowing and barter trade. Although this can be independent from climatic conditions, they are not totally independent since they can be affected. Some of the goods that are purchased, borrowed or traded can be agricultural produce. It can therefore be noted that agriculture is the main source of food of the people in ward 29 of Mutare District hence the prevalence of hunger in the area.

### Other strategies Adopted to end Food Shortages

Besides food aid there are also other strategies adopted by the people in Mukwada to end food shortages in Mukwada area the mining companies operating at Chiadzwa Mine adopted social responsibility. This is whereby companies in the area realize the suffering of the people in the area which they are operating in and decide to help them. During the peak hunger periods thus December to March the Mbada Diamonds and the Marange Resource Companies decided to intervene and rescue people in the four wards of Mutare Rural District of which Mukwada is one of them. This was very effective since people were able to survive regardless of the prevalence of hunger in the area.

### Benefits of Food Aid

The need to aid those suffering from hunger has been commonly recognized universally. Kinsley (2010) noted that feeding the hungry when one has resources to do so is the most obvious of all human obligations. It is necessary for a transition to a state of human society in which people will not suffer from hunger. Food aid in Mukwada has brought a lot of benefits in the area. Of much importance is the ration offered by the donor to the people in the area under study. The people received cereals in form of maize and beans and cooking oil. This had a major impact on the people's diets since it means that the little money obtained from selling nyii and working in the mines can no longer be used to buy cereal but rather other food items thereby ability to have a balanced diet which, according to Government of Zimbabwe (2005) is essential for a healthy life. In addition, food aid enabled people in the study area to regain their lost meals. Prior to food aid, people in Mukwada have been having mostly one meal a day. This situation was improved by food aid which saw a lot of people regaining their three meals a day that have previously been stolen by the prevalence of hunger.

### Food Aid Contribution towards Household Food Security

Food security, as defined by Kinsley (2010) is a measure of ensured access to essential nutrition. It refers to a household's ability to provide future physical and economic access to sufficient, safe, and nutritious food that fulfills the dietary needs and food preferences for living an active and healthy lifestyle. It is a measure of resilience to future disruption or unavailability of critical food supply due to various risk factors including droughts, shipping disruptions, fuel shortages, economic instability and wars among other factors. According to ZimVac (2012), the nation's annual food insecurity levels

were high thus more than 1.6 million Zimbabweans were unable to access sufficient food during the peak hunger period, January – March 2013. This is the highest level of food insecurity in the past three years. WFP responded with a Seasonal Targeted Assistance programme to help food-insecure households in 40 of the country's 60 rural districts in which Mutare is one of them. According to ZimVac (2012) the programme is an emergence humanitarian assistance that helped people to escape the trap of hunger. Food aid beneficiaries were able to regain their number of meals that have been disrupted by lack of food.

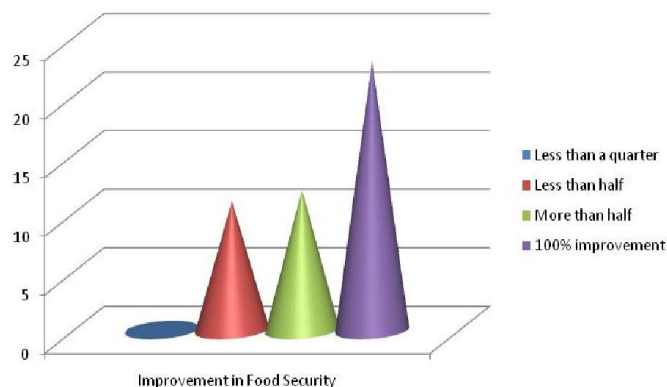


Figure 4.2. Improvements in Food Security, N=46

Figure 4.2 above shows that most of the beneficiaries were able to regain their food security status which they had lost due to the prevalence of hunger. It was noted that half of the respondents twenty three (23) highlighted that food aid has contributed about 100% towards their household food security. This shows the significance of food aid in hunger alleviation. However it is crucial to note that although the food security status was regained it was just for the small period of the four months thus December to March every year when households receive food aid. This implies that food security status will decline after this period when food aid ceases waiting to come back the following year leaving households vulnerable to hunger. As noted by Moyo (2009) one of the disadvantages of aid is that it serves a specific purpose at a specific time leaving people vulnerable to more problems during its absence in the future.

### Conclusion

Food aid is an effective tool that was implemented to alleviate hunger in the area. It must be noted that the research has established an improvement in their food security status after receiving food aid. The provision of food aid offers food relief to people, which gives the people a sense of food security and the people start to engage in other areas of life which are important such as sending their children to schools. Generally the provision of food aid means that the diet of the people is enhanced thereby promoting positive dependency. The diet of the people was improved since the rations offered were able to cater for the part of people's meals increasing their ability to purchase more diversified food. Food aid supplements social safety nets by providing insurance for people who are not insured, that is without access to support during crisis. Food aid has also been seen promoting unity in the recipient community. The various meetings held by the food aid providers brought unity and integration amongst the people as

they would be having one goal, that of receiving food aid to alleviate hunger and they could put whatever differences they had aside. There can be improved relations amongst people in the receiving community who allow them to work together and achieve one common goal of alleviating hunger. However, food aid should be coupled with direct support to livelihood strategies. Inputs for food crops which are suitable for the region such as drought resistant small grains of mhunga, rapoko and millet should be distributed to beneficiaries when they receive their food rations. This seems the only way of ensuring that the households produce their own food thereby building resilience to further shocks as a result of drought. Households need to abstain from concentrating on producing maize crop which is unsuitable because of harsh climatic conditions.

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