



HUNGER BITES : THE STATE OF MAIZE AVAILABILITY IN ADMARC MARKETS IN MALAWI



Front Cover Picture: Chiwengo Admarc in Kasungu. Photo: Emmanuel Muwamba

FOREWORD



Mervis Phiri, 11 years old, is a standard five pupil at Kavunguti Primary School in Kasungu district. When she met a team from Oxfam in Malawi and Civil Society Agriculture Network (CISANET), undertaking a rapid assessment of the state of maize availability in Agriculture Development and Marketing Cooperation (ADMARC) markets in her area recently, this is what she said: “There is no food at home and I take porridge from school so that my siblings have something to eat. We often sleep on an empty stomach. It is really tough.”

According to the assessment, the ADMARC market nearest to Mervis’

parents, is Chamama. However, ADMARC officials there, told the team that their last maize stock sold out on January 1, 2016. This is the maize the facility bought from farmers after last year’s harvest. The team heard that government has never sent any consignment to this market. The assessment team brought home a load of stories resulting from the unavailability of maize in most ADMARC markets – many people are surviving on *nsima ya madeya* (maize bran), children are absconding classes to either help their parents hunt for food or because they can’t concentrate in class. Then, women complained of abuses when buying maize in some ADMARC markets.

The country is in a hunger crisis. And, from the findings of the assessment, the worst is yet to come because the prolonged dry spells being experienced across the country, have already affected crop production, massively. By now, people would have turned back to their gardens for the *greens*, but a quick survey in most of the districts visited, revealed a scary sight. One can hardly see pumpkin leaves, cucumbers and green maize in people’s gardens or being sold along the streets, as is the norm during this time of the year. They have all wilted and even if it rained again, chances of such crops surviving, are almost nil. This growing season is lost, for many.

The unavailability of maize in ADMARC markets, has forced the grain prices to go up on the parallel market. The assessment found that private traders are selling a 50kg bag at between MK12, 500 and MK15, 000 in the five districts the team visited. These are, Chitipa, Kasungu, Machinga, Balaka and Mulanje. With the kwacha performing badly, against major currencies, and the prices of goods including maize rising, most Malawians have resorted to selling assets, livestock and doing piece work. It is clear that the crisis has affected people’s livelihood and many are being thrown back into a state of vulnerability.

It is my hope that the government and all relevant stakeholders will take this assessment as a mirror of the reality on the ground that calls for an urgent action. The recommendations made in this report, have been well thought through. I believe that, if we act accordingly, in unison, we have chances to reverse the situation and save lives.

Thank you.



Rex Chapota, CISANET Board Chairperson

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Agriculture Development and Marketing Cooperation (ADMARC) is entrusted with the responsibility of buying and selling agricultural produce from farmers in Malawi, among its other functions. ADMARC becomes very vital to consumers in times when the country is experiencing food shortages.

According to its functions, ADMARC is supposed to “ensure easy accessibility of staple food, maize cross the country through its vast market network”, including during the lean periods. However, there had been media reports indicating that most of ADMARC depots had no or little maize stocks available in their stores. Local media reported that people, especially women, spent nights at ADMARC markets waiting to buy the maize and when it is available, an individual can only purchase a maximum of 20Kg.

CISANET and Oxfam staff while in the field for their normal duties, had also observed similar trends. The situation had many implications on vulnerable groups. For example, it could breed sexual and other forms of violence against women, girls and other vulnerable groups, as they try to access the maize.

Further, speculations were that maize scarcity in the ADMARC markets, was due to bulk buying by private traders, (and it was alleged that they usually purchase it through non-transparent means, by conniving with some ADMARC workers/authorities) and eventually sell it to ordinary poor citizens at exorbitant prices. The unavailability of maize in ADMARC markets, is a violation of people’s right to access food, and the reported conditions people go through to access the maize, robs them of their dignity.

In view of this CISANET and Oxfam in Malawi, commissioned this study to critically analyze the maize unavailability in ADMARC markets, and come up with evidence to inform dialogue with government, in addressing the situation. The study took place from 2nd – 6th February, 2016. Members from CISANET, Oxfam and the media participated in the assessment. During the rapid assessment, 20 markets were visited in the five sampled districts of Chitipa, Kasungu, Machinga, Balaka and Mulanje. Only six markets visited, were found selling maize which had arrived the previous day. In most cases, all was being sold within a day. The rest of the markets had run out of stock. Of the six markets that had maize being sold, two were in the hard to reach areas, as opposed to 4 in the easy to reach areas. The results are also in line with the findings that Catholic Development Commission of Malawi (CADECOM) found in a separate rapid assessment on maize availability in the country.

Hard to reach markets, are the selling points that were situated in rural areas away from the tarmac road, where as the easy to reach markets were those situated at the central district or along the tarmac roads. On average, the ADMARC selling points at the boma (district headquarters), took eight days to be replenished, as opposed to those in the hard to reach areas which stayed 25 days without stock, on average. Examples of such hard to reach markets visited were Chamama in Kasungu, Misuku in Chitipa, Utale in Balaka, Wanama in Mulanje and Ngokwe in Machinga.

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The situation had many implications on vulnerable groups. For example, it could breed sexual and other forms of violence against women, girls and other vulnerable groups, as they try to access the maize.

For 37-year-old Chiwaula Kabwere from Dziwe area under Traditional Authority Nsamala in Balaka district, continued remarks from government and ADMARC officials, that the corporation has enough maize to take the nation to the next harvest season, is an insult.



If there is enough maize as it is said, Kabwere, a father of three, challenges ADMARC and government to distribute it across the country, especially in rural areas where people are going to bed without eating.

“You see, every day we hear ADMARC or government saying there is enough maize in the country, but there is no maize in rural areas. That is an insult

and a mockery to me and millions of people who are struggling to survive.”

Mpirisi ADMARC, which is closer to Kabwere’s home, last sold maize on January 13, 2016, and Kabwere just bought 10kgs of the grain because officials at the depot, were rationing to ensure that many people in the area access it.

“How long would a family of five like mine eat 10kgs of flour, how long? If there is enough maize, why sell us 10kgs? Is that not a contradiction?” he queries.

Kabwe was found at Mpirisi ADMARC depot on February 8 at around 3pm, where he said, he had been since 5am that day, waiting to see if maize would come.

“I have been doing this for about a week now, coming here in the morning, at lunch going home and returning in the afternoon just to ensure that when a consignment of maize is arriving, I do not miss it,” he says.

The study made the following recommendations:

Short Term Recommendations

- Government should declare state of disaster in selected parts of the country especially in the southern region in particular the Lower Shire and other districts heavily affected by the dry spells.
- Lifting up import bans on food related products and ensure availability of import license through a transparent process.
- Government should with immediate effect, articulate a clear, transparent, and accountable policy for SGR maize stocking, allocation, and release, prioritising needs from now throughout the coming 2016/2017 El Nino influenced lean season .
- Allocate additional funding towards public maize procurement and importation, ensuring that funding mechanisms are linked to weather, crop and vulnerability assessments
- Government should collect and make available key market information, strengthen regulation of the sector and only consider buying maize from the private traders locally as a last result to uphold duty bearer responsibility.
- ADMARC should prioritise hard to reach areas in maize allocation and introduce an accountable policy for prioritising sales when supplies fall short.

- Government should put in place redress mechanisms for women who are abused or violated in ADMARC markets.

b) Intermediate Term Recommendations

- Government should initiate local partnerships with organized groups of farmers, private sector and individuals for winter growing of maize to assist in filling up the SGRs. It is very important to note that the government has already started doing this and should ensure that a lot more stakeholders participate in this initiative
- Government should adequately and timely fund ADMARC to enable it buy maize from farmers.
- Government should make sure SGRs are stocked to a minimum of 60,000 MT at any one time.
- Government and national partners should work together to better understand and support sources of resilience occurring throughout the food market system in Malawi (for example informal cross border imports)

c) Long Term Recommendations

- Government to prioritize in irrigation farming by increasing resource investment in green belt initiative and in agricultural research and development
- Separate vote for the Department of Disaster Management
- Ensure resources for emergency response to function at district level
- SGR to consider stocking other food items in addition to maize, and to explore risk layering options such as weather insurance, crop procurement options, and other mechanisms.
- Government should ensure funding ADMARC before harvesting season for 2016/17 so that ADMARC is able to fairly compete with the Private Traders at the time of harvesting than buying the grain in July after 2016/2017 funding approvals.
- Malawi Government should explore other options of food so that Malawi is departing from the Maize Problem and focus on diversified food for survival.
- Government should regulate the maize marketing of the private sector so that maize is released into the market to avoid hoarding.
- There is need for restructuring of NFRA to have two sections, one dealing with commercial maize, where ADMARC, humanitarian organizations and UN agencies can procure from. The other section should deal with SGR maize, where there should be high level agreement / authority for its release.
- Government should regulate the buying of maize in the communities. The buying of maize should be licensed after meeting a set of criteria.

ACRONYMS

ADMARC	Agriculture Development and Marketing Corporation
CADECOM	Catholic Development Commission
CDSS	Community Day Secondary School
CISANET	Civil Society Agriculture Network
DoDMA	Department of Disaster Management Affairs
DPP	Democratic Progressive Party
CONGOMA	Council for Non- Governmental Organization
ICN	International Conference on Nutrition
INGOs	International Non- Governmental Organization
MCP	Malawi Congress Party
MFERP	Malawi Floods Emergency Recovery Project
MVAC	Malawi Vulnerability Assessment Committee
NFRA	National Food Reserve Agency
NGO	Non- Governmental Organization
PAC	Public Affairs Committee
PP	People's Party
SADC	Southern Africa Development Commission
SGR	Strategic Grain Reserves
STAM	Seed Traders Association of Malawi
WFP	World Food Programme
UDF	United Democratic Front

1.0

BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

Oxfam in Malawi interests on ADMARC dates back when structural adjustments were introduced and started to be implemented in Malawi where ADMARC was required to be privatised. In July 2002, Oxfam in Malawi carried out a study with an aim to look into what can be done in order to improve the impact of ADMARC on the poor. It was meant to investigate the likely effects of privatizing ADMARC on the poor and providing alternatives which could then be used by Oxfam and other civil society institutions in advancing the interests of the poor. Among others the study established that ADMARC no longer plays a crucial role it played in providing smallholder farmers with better markets for their produce. However, ADMARC still remained very relevant as a source of affordable maize in times of need as prices charged by the private traders were usually high. The study also established that ADMARC still played an important role in supplying farm inputs to the farmers. The study further revealed that total privatization of ADMARC would have adverse effects on the poor.

In 2014, Oxfam in Malawi together with its partners carried out a campaign on Access to Agricultural Markets for the smallholder farmers in Malawi. This campaign was informed by a study that Oxfam in Malawi commissioned and conducted by Centre for Agriculture Research and Development (CARD) of Lilongwe University of Agriculture and Natural Resources in *December 2013* which revealed that for smallholder farmers to access profitable agriculture markets, government and key players should provide; structured markets; a functional and profitable ADMARC and the development of a comprehensive standalone agriculture marketing policy. This campaign sought commitments from the aspiring candidates who were competing in the May 2014 tripartite elections to provide ready markets for the smallholder farmers. Four presidential aspirants including the incumbent president, Professor Arthur Peter Mutharika of the DPP, Dr Lazarus Chakwera of MCP, Atupele Muluzi of UDF and Dr Joyce Banda of PP signed the pledges. In addition 177 aspiring MPs also committed to this call

In March 2015, Oxfam commissioned another study on ADMARC in order to establish the ideal budget for ADMARC to effectively buy smallholder farmers produce especially in hard to reach areas. Based on the computations of smallholder farmers annual marketed quantities, the study found that for the major crops such as maize, groundnuts, soy beans, and beans, average of nearly 30% to 50% of the national budget would have been required to purchase such crop produce from the smallholder farmers across the country.



Empty Admarc warehouses: Due to inadequate funding, Admarc fails to buy enough grain from smallholder farmers.

The study noted that between 2004/2005, and 2013/2014, ADMARC funding share to the agriculture sector budget had been around 1% of the agriculture sector budget, with minimum being 0.3% in 2008/2009 and the highest being 6 % recorded for 2004/2005 when the country had a food security crisis. This is far much lower when we compare to the ideal financial requirements for purchasing major crops. The consistently low funding levels to ADMARC over the years was attributed to the restructuring programme under which the Malawi Government committed itself to stop sub-venting parastatal organizations, including ADMARC.

As we started 2016 within the months of January, February and March there have been media reports on the critical shortage of maize in ADMARC markets in the country. Local media reported that people especially women spend nights at ADMARC markets waiting to buy the maize and when the maize is available an individual could only purchase a maximum of 20Kg. This situation has safety and protection implication on vulnerable groups as it can breed sexual and other forms of violence on women, girls and other vulnerable groups as they try to access the maize. Speculations were that maize scarcity in the ADMARC markets was due to bulk buying by private traders, (and it was alleged they usually purchase it through non transparent means by conniving with some ADMARC workers/authorities) and eventually sell it to ordinary poor citizens at exorbitant prices. Oxfam feels the unavailability of maize in the ADMARC markets is a violation of people's right to access food and the conditions which people go through to access the maize robs them of their dignity.

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In Kasungu, all the markets sampled, had no maize during the assessment. However, it was reported that when maize was available, it was usually not adequate to meet the demand.

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The ADMARC markets also need renovation as some of the structures are not conducive for maize storage.

With that status, Oxfam in Malawi joined forces with like-minded organisations such as CISANET and CADECOM to critically analyse the availability of maize in ADMARC markets and come up with evidence that informs dialogue with government and stakeholders and key messages for any advocacy work. In this line therefore, Oxfam, CISANET and CADECOM undertook the current study in order to achieve the following major objectives;

1. Establish the current status of availability of maize and other important food stocks in ADMARC markets throughout the country through
2. Establish the availability of maize and other important food stocks at all the National Strategic Grain Reserves
3. Establish the underlying barriers and reasons leading to maize unavailability in ADMARC markets (funding, logistical, availability of the grain at national level)
4. Establish private trader pricing of maize and other important food items and compare them with the government controlled prices.
5. Explore the gender dynamics and effects on women, girls, children and other vulnerable groups as a result of the unavailability of the maize and other important food stocks at the ADMARC markets
6. Capture case studies that show people's access or lack of it to food items given the current situation food stocks in the ADMARC markets

2.0

THE ROLE OF THE STATE IN ADDRESSING NATIONAL FOOD INSECURITY.

The Constitution of Malawi (Section 30, [2]) recognises that access to and utilisation of nutritionally adequate and safe food in the right quantities, is a right of each individual. This will enable them to lead an active and healthy life. Improving the living standards of the people of the country has for a long time been an immediate need.

Building on the Vision 2020, the Malawi Poverty Reduction Strategy was launched to realize the aspirations of Malawians, which include sustainable food and nutrition security. The Malawi Government also has obligations to international agreements and commitments that have a bearing on food and nutrition security. These include the following: The World Declaration of the 1992 International Conference on Nutrition (ICN); The United Nations Millennium Development Goals; The World Food Summit declaration of 1996 re-iterated in the African Union Declaration on Agriculture and Food Security in Africa (July 2003); The Sirte declaration on the challenges of implementing integrated and Sustainable Development on Agriculture and Water in Africa, (February 2004); The Comprehensive African Agriculture Development Programme (CAADP) (July 2003) where African governments committed to allocate at least 10% of their national budgets to agricultural development, and The Dar es Salaam Declaration on Agricultural and Food Security in the SADC region (May 2004). Government, therefore, needs to endeavour to comply with the obligations under these agreements or instruments.

The Malawi Vulnerability Assessment Committee (MVAC) results (2015/16), had showed that the total number of people that would not be able to meet their annual food requirements during the 2015/2016 consumption period, was 2,833,212 (representing 17% of national total population of 16,310,431). The affected districts had annual food deficits ranging from three to six months, and during the Food Cluster meeting held on 25 February 2016, MVAC announced an extension of one month of April of food and cash support to those affected.

The total humanitarian staple food needs to support the affected population was estimated at 124,183 metric tons of maize, equal to a cash equivalent of MK18.6 billion (if sourced locally). There were 25 out of 28 districts that had been reported to be affected. These were: Balaka, Blantyre, Chikwawa, Chiradzulu, Chitipa, Dedza, Dowa, Karonga, Kasungu, Lilongwe, Machinga, Mangochi, Mchinji, Mulanje, Mwanza, Mzimba, Neno, Nkhatakota, Nsanje, Ntcheu, Phalombe, Rumphu, Salima, Thyolo and Zomba. National crop production was severely affected by a combination of hazards ranging from late onset of rains, prolonged dry spells, floods, to early cessation of rains.

In the State of the Nation Address during the 46th Session of Parliament (6th November, 2015), His Excellency, the President of the Republic of Malawi, Professor Peter Mutharika, assured the nation that the country will have enough food for all. We quote, in part: “Mr Speaker sir, we will have enough food for our people”. During the same address, the President was quoted saying “I repeat that no single person will die because of this hunger under my leadership”. The president had listed strategies that NFRA was procuring 25,000MT to supplement the 66,000MT of maize available in ADMARC markets.

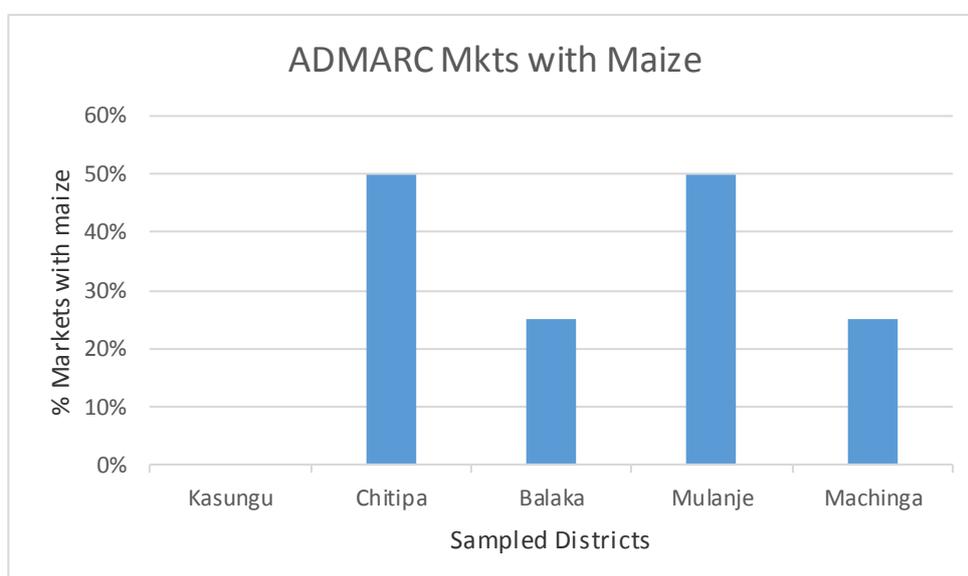


Mutharika said no single person will die because of this hunger

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THE STATUS OF MAIZE AVAILABILITY IN SAMPLED ADMARC MARKETS.

During the rapid assessment, 20 ADMARC markets were visited in the five sampled districts of Chitipa, Kasungu, Machinga, Balaka and Mulanje. The graph below summarises the markets that were found selling maize on the particular day of study visit. On overall, only six out of the 20 sampled markets had maize being sold on day the market was visited. Out of the six markets that had the maize, only two markets were from the hard to reach areas. However, in all the markets where maize was found being sold, the stocks lasted just a day, with many people returning without accessing the maize.



In Kasungu, all the markets sampled, had no maize during the assessment. However, it was reported that when maize was available, it was usually not adequate to meet the demand.

Due to high demand, ADMARC sells 20Kg per person, which, according to the people we interviewed, is not enough to sustain their families, for a month. From the people living near ADMARC markets, the assessment revealed that depending on the number of family members, which ranged from 6 to 11 per household, a 20Kg bag of maize sustains them for a minimum of three days to a maximum of 3 weeks. Unavailability of maize in ADMARC markets, has led to people buying maize from private traders. In most parts of Kasungu, a 20Kg bag of maize is sold at K5000 which compares unfavorably to K2200 in ADMARC selling points. The situation has placed a huge burden on the majority of people in Kasungu, most of whom survive on doing piece work in farms and running small-scale businesses. If money is not available for purchasing maize, some people decide to go to bed on an empty stomach or reduce the

number of times they eat, a day.

In Chitipa, maize was available in two ADMARC depots – one in the hard-to-reach area, the other in the easy-to-reach. The maize that was available, however, was not sufficient to serve all people who had queued waiting to buy.

Due to unavailability of maize in most ADMARC depots, people in Chitipa are mostly sleeping on an empty stomach and a lucky few are surviving on bananas and sweet potatoes. The ADMARC markets also need renovation as some of the structures are not conducive for maize storage.



Braving the rains: regardless of a rainy weather, people in Chitipa queued in search of the staple grain

It is February 4 2016, around 4pm, and it is raining heavily around Mwamkumbwa area, about 30 kilometres away from Chitipa Boma; Eight tonnes of maize arrive at the community's Admarc depot.

With the heavy downpour, officials at the depot decide that the staple grain be sold the following day, but hundreds of people have already crowded the place.

Among them are Grace Nakipezge 38, Grace Nyondo 66 and Meshina Mfungwe 32, all from Zingalupiri village, Traditional Authority Mwaambia in the district, who decide to spend the night under a tree outside the depot, fearing that they may miss buying the grain if they go home.

But throughout that night, while being socked in the rain, the three women start wondering why they decided to sell their maize to Tanzania just after harvesting in the 2014/2015 growing season.

Nakipezge, who has a family of ten, says her household sold 15 bags of maize weighing 50 kilogrammes (kg) each to Tanzanian vendors. She sold at 800 Shillings (about K2266) per 20 litres bucket, and yet now, she has to brave the rains to buy maize.

"We needed money to pay fees and buy other necessities. There was no other crop to sell, or any there economic activity that would have brought us money, so maize was the only option," she says.

Nakipezge adds that her children have stopped going to school. She says there is no food at home and they have to help her in searching for the same.

"How will they go to school? Would you concentrate in class when you are hungry? So some will be joining me shortly so that we buy maize here, and then they can think of going to school," she fumes.

Her colleague, Mfungwe, a mother of five, corroborates:

"Actually when we were selling that maize, we never thought things would reach this state. It has been a habit and we all thought if there is no more maize, Admarc will come to our rescue but it seems the institution is failing to bail us out of these problems."

While she regrets selling maize to Tanzanian vendors, Mfungwe says the Admarc in her area does not buy maize on time, and even the prices offered by vendors from Tanzania are better off.

"Even if Admarc officials were buying maize, we would still sell to vendors in Tanzania because they offer better prices. Admarc officials also delay in purchasing maize, they start buying when vendors have already bought much of the grain," she explains.



Some women in the areas visited, complained about mistreatment by officials and some vendors around the place who, they said, push them on the queue and some pay double the recommended maize price, just to be served faster. People have to wait in line for a maximum of 2 days to get served; some come early in the morning and still return home without maize, until, if lucky, the next day when they also have to get up early, spend the night at the market, to access maize.

In Balaka district, only one sampled ADMARC selling point had received maize, the day we visited, ready for sale the next day. There were people lined up in anticipation of buying the maize, however, some of the people interviewed were not optimistic. Previously, some of them had queued but failed to buy the grain. The ADMARC selling point at Mpulula village, was situated at the house of Group Village Head. People complained that relatives of the chief, easily buy the maize than other members of the community. There were also complaints of vendors having easy access, just like in other districts. Some vendors were being helped by community members who wanted to buy the maize, but had no money. Apparently, through this, they earn a little something for their own food.

The assessment also observed that ADMARC selling points situated in the hard to reach areas, were not being stocked as often as the ADMARC selling points along the main roads or at the boma. As a result, people had to travel longer distances in search of maize in ADMARC markets closer to the central district. An example of such markets, is Utale ADMARC market in Balaka, which had no maize for more than three weeks, during the time of the assessment.

In Mulanje, out of the four sampled ADMARC markets, two – one from the easy to reach area, the other considered hard to reach – had just received 150 bags of maize each. At Mbiza ADMARC, considered hard to reach, maize was being sold for the first time after 28 days. To match the demand, officials had resorted to selling 10 kgs per person. Member of Parliament for the area, was present to help bring order at the ADMARC market.

There were reported cases of some of the maize being sold to vendors the previous time the selling point was stocked, hence the intervention of the MP. Some members of the community alleged that even the councilor of the area, previously bought 20 bags of maize from the ADMARC market, in what people said were dubious circumstances.

“There were about 2000 villagers who wanted to buy maize, but it was enough for 700 people only, at 10kgs each,” said the Member of Parliament. Some of the people had walked for three hours just to buy the 10 kilograms of maize, which would last for only four days, for an average household of 6 members. Those who could not buy from the ADMARC market, turned to vendors whose prices were as higher as K13,500 per 50 kg bag. When vendors hear that beneficiaries



In order to match demand with supply, Admarc sold 10 kilogram to each buyer

of the social cash transfer program have been paid, they raised their prices to as high as MK17, 200.00. There were reports that two people had been killed within the community, while stealing sugar cane for their survival. In the area, one of the coping mechanisms was eating sugar cane that was not even mature. There were also reports that some vendors were buying rice from Mozambique where it was reportedly, cheaper than that of Malawi.

Cycling 40 kilometres in search for food



Edna Geremu, 60, from Wanama area under Traditional Authority Nkanda in Mulanje left her home on Sunday, February 7 2016, cycling to Makaula village which sits at about 40 kilometres away to beg for food from relatives.

But just like her home, she found relatives at Makaula with no food to share. They gave her something though, Cassava leaves popularly known as *Chigwada*, and sugarcane.

The single mother of five children says it takes her ten hours to cycle to Makaula, and while disappointed that she found no food, she says she is still happy she got something.

“I left home because we had stayed for three days without eating nsima, we were just eating two bananas each day. While I was away, I left my children with *kalingonda* (wild beans) which I bought at the nearby market at K200.

“My three children which are still in secondary school have stopped learning because they cannot continue going to school with an empty stomach and have no fees,” she bemoans.

According to Geremu, cycling for about ten hours to Makaula was meant to find relief.

“I hoped that I will find maize or at least some flour, but the situation at Makaula is also bad. Better off our friends have sugarcane which they can sell to find money, not with us, we have to do piecework in farms or else we starve,” she says.

Her old age is also a problem: “At my age, I cycle and rest a lot that is why it takes me all that time. When I got to Makaula on Sunday night, I was in great pain, my legs could not support me and I spent the following day resting,” she adds.

The ‘food stuff’ collected from Makaula will take her three days, she says, and whatever happens thereafter is in the ‘Hands of God’.

At Mulanje Central ADMARC depot, it was reported that maize was delivered once a week in quantities of 300 bags. Since the market opened, there had been 20 deliveries and people were sold in 20kg rations. It was, however, reported that in most cases, several people failed to access the maize due to high demand. Unlike other districts, people are not allowed to sleep at the ADMARC market in Mulanje, but there had been several people visiting the selling point to check if maize was delivered. Some people, mostly women, sleep within the central district in anticipation to be the first to buy, in case maize was being delivered to the ADMARC depot.

In Machinga, only Machinga ADMARC depot had maize, out the four sampled. A visit to the nearby Liwonde ADMARC market, however, showed that rice was in stock but there was no demand for the commodity, probably because the MK600 price tag, for a kilogram of rice, was beyond the reach of most rural communities. Elsewhere, a hard-to-reach Ngokwe ADMARC, had stayed without maize deliveries for over 90 days. Since October, 2015, the next supply was delivered in February, 2016.

Makwinja Kamfosi, maize bran seller from Traditional Authority Ngokwe, Machinga boasted of selling 32 bags of maize bran in a single day. Maize bran is cheaper when compared with prices of maize. Yet maize is also scarce at Ngokwe ADMARC market. A 5 litre bucket of maize bran, is sold at K500.00, while maize in the same quantity is valued at K1, 500.00. Many people are opting to buy the maize bran not only because it is cheaper, but because it is also accessible.

“But to feed this family is always a challenge. Maize is not readily available in ADMARC markets and vendors are selling at exorbitant prices. Just imagine a 5 litre bucket of maize is selling at K1, 500.00? It only lasts two days. But we are the lucky ones because I am a beneficiary of the social cash transfer. If I were not, I really don’t know how my family would have survived.” Eunice Time, from Traditional Authority Mkula, Machinga.

The communities in Machinga are finding it hard to access maize from private traders whose prices range between MK12,500 and MK15,000 per 50 Kg bag, such that families of six are buying as little as 2kg, just enough for a day. Others have resorted to buying madeya as they are perceived to be cheaper than maize.



People do not have enough money to buy the staple grain hence resorting to madeya

At Gawanani ADMARC market, it was alleged that an official had diverted a truck with 200 bags of maize meant for the market, sold all to a private trader, reconciled the money with ADMARC and took the profits for himself. During this time, people were waiting for another delivery. The officer had since been fired, but was not arrested. In Machinga, while people are going hungry, there is no hope in sight in the maize fields. Most maize has wilted due to prolonged drought that has hit several districts in the southern region of the country.



Maize field hit by dry spells

The first crop estimate for 2015/16 growing season has further painted a gloomy picture to the national food security situation, with maize yields expected to drop by 2% from the final estimated figures for the 2014/2015 growing season. As dry spells persist in most districts in the southern region, the second estimate may produce results worse than the current picture.

The scarcity of maize in ADMARC Markets had also caught the attention of other players in the country. The Council for Non-Governmental Organizations in Malawi (Congoma), an umbrella body for over 900 NGOs, recently issued a press release (The Daily Times, Friday February 19, 2016). Congoma, among other issues, called on Government to stop the rhetoric and maize politics but immediately exert authority on the National Food Reserve Agency to flood the markets with maize and let market forces take their rightful role to crowd out vendors' market share. A youth organization in Mzuzu has added its voice and marched against the present hunger situation as filed in the picture below:



Source: The Nation, Monday, 22 February, 2016

The Public Affairs Committee Conference that was held in Blantyre, Mount Soche Hotel from 16th -18th February, 2016, had the current maize situation in the country under spotlight. Members felt the Government was not being honest enough about the maize situation in the country, amidst Malawians suffering from hunger. Participants to the conference asked Government to explain whether maize is really available, and do everything possible to save the people from dying of hunger.



The Daily Times, Friday, February 19, 2016.

4.0

STATUS OF MAIZE IN STRATEGIC GRAIN RESERVES

It was reported during one of the SGR meetings held on 9th February, 2016, that the strategic grain reserves across the country had 20,000 metric tonnes of maize, in stock. However, the World Food Program (WFP) had requested to withdraw 18,000 metric tonnes for the MVAC response during the month of March. This in essence would leave the strategic grain reserves with a mere 2,000 metric tonnes, against the recommended 60,000 MT at any one time in the SGR.

It was further reported during the same meeting that the World Bank had pledged USD6 million for the replenishment of strategic grain reserves. In view of the maize scarcity in the country, as well as the region, it would be important to know where this maize would be sourced from to replenish the SGR with urgency, to maintain the minimum allowable quantities for the SGRs. The private traders under STAM were reported to be keeping 68,000 metric tonnes of maize, however, most of this maize was not trickling into the market to meet the demand but was rather being held for more profits in the midst of the prevailing hunger and scarcity of the maize grain. ADMARC was, as of the 10th of February, 2016, reported to have about 9.2 metric tonnes of maize. With the prevailing demand for more maize across the country, this amount was by any measure, below the demand for the grain.

During the opening of the Parliamentary session (22nd February, 2016), Minister of Agriculture, Dr Allan Chiyembekeza, presented a ministerial statement titled: “Towards Sustainable Food Security in Malawi”. The statement focussed on what the Ministry of Agriculture is doing to respond to the food deficit the country is experiencing and what the Ministry intend to do to mitigate yet another food deficit emanating from the effects of El Nino which the country is experiencing this planting season.

The Minister reported that the SGR carry-over stock, as at 1st July 2015, was 46,623.229mt, and in the course of the year, the National Food Reserve Agency bought 39,785.040mt of maize. This maize was bought using funds from Government coffers and the World Bank through the Malawi Floods Emergency Recovery Project (MFERP) which the August House approved during its sitting in June, 2015. Thus, a total of 86,408.269mt was available in the SGR. During the year Government authorized drawdowns totalling to 61,796.871mt of maize to support the 2.83 million food insecure people that the Malawi Vulnerability Assessment Committee identified.

The first authorization and approval was made in September 2015 that allowed the National Food Reserve Agency (NFRA) to release 26,753mt to the World Food Programme (WFP) for humanitarian support. The second lot of 25,000mt was approved in November 2015, again, released to WFP. The same month of November, 2015,

Government allowed another draw down of 3,000mt from the SGR for the Department of Disaster Management Affairs (DoDMA) in readiness of any eventuality as the rain season commenced. On 9th February 2016, Government approved another draw down of 18,000mt to support the identified food insecure communities until March this year. WFP managed to source 14,681mt from partners, globally. This complemented the Government of Malawi's maize from the SGR. In addition to this, there have been some cash transfer arrangements as a MVAC response component. The World Food Program is supporting 431,221 people while a consortium of International Non -Governmental Organizations (INGOs) is supporting some 448,896 people through this MVAC Response component of cash transfer. With this, the projections are that the country needs additional 18,630mt of maize for the month of April to support the affected population.

The Ministerial statement further claimed that in view of the declining maize stocks in ADMARC, and the need to ensure that less privileged people have access to food, ADMARC has recently secured a second lot of 50,500mt of maize from within the country and from Zambia. Based on the demand projections, ADMARC plans to distribute this maize as follows: 25,250mt in the Southern Region, 16,833mt in the Central Region, and 8,417mt in the Northern Region.

5.0

IMPACTS OF MAIZE UNAVAILABILITY ON LIVELIHOODS

4.1 Higher maize prices

Most of the people in the rural areas earn their living through piece work in people's fields and running small-scale businesses. This means that the unavailability of maize in ADMARC markets has placed a huge burden on them as they have to buy the grain from vendors at a higher price. Vendor maize prices are as high as K13, 500 per 50 kg bag in Machinga; K12, 500 in Kasungu and MK15, 000 in Mulanje, which compares unfavourably to the MK5, 500 price of 50 Kg bag at ADMARC. As private traders' maize prices soar, most rural communities are surviving on maize bran. A 5 litre basin of maize bran is sold at K500.00, while maize of the same quantity is valued at K1, 500.00. Many people are flocking to buy the maize bran not only because it is cheaper, but because it is also accessible. In Mulanje, the story is similar as poor households who cannot afford the price offered by the private sector, have resorted to buying maize bran. Some are mixing with a little maize when available, to be able to sustain their families for a longer period. A lucky few in Chitipa, are surviving on bananas and cassava. If money is not available for purchasing the commodity, some people decide to go to bed on an empty stomach or reduce the number of times they eat, a day.



Maize bran on the market at Nkando in Mulanje

In Chiradzulu, Nation Newspaper, reported similar incidences as captured below:



1.2 Low productivity

Most people in these areas, depend on farming for their survival, but due to maize scarcity, many of them have abandoned their fields, spending time in search of food. When maize is available in ADMARC markets, people have to wait in line for a maximum of 2 days to get served; some come early in the morning and still return home with no maize until the next day when they also had to get up early or spend the night at the market to access the staple. The long hours queuing waiting for maize, has also affected their day to day economic activities. Most of them no longer have time for piece work, after all, they cannot do the manual work on an empty stomach. This also tells of the level of poverty in these areas and the misery the maize scarcity has brought.

1.3 High dropout rates in schools

Schools had not been spared the pangs of the current maize situation in ADMARC markets. The Headmaster of Malepera Primary School in Kasungu district, near Kapaladzala ADMARC market, reported of an estimated 50% school dropout rate, with girls being the most affected. He attributed the development to hunger in most homes. Pupils fail to go to school, instead they go to look for piece work to help supplement food for their families. Some go to ADMARC markets hoping to buy some grain for the family. According to the Headmaster, 70% of learners at Malepera CDSS have not paid their school fees yet, because most families have used money for fees to buy maize for food in their households. In lucky situations, families school going children resort to doing piece work after school, to support their parents raise money for food. The scarcity

of food at household level, has raised conscious among school going children. Some of them attending schools with feeding programs, are taking porridge from school to feed siblings at home.

1.4 Violence to vulnerable groups

Some women in the areas visited complained of mistreatment by officials and some vendors who push them on the line and some pay double the price for the maize just to be served faster. There is loss of dignity as women and men equally fight for places in queues. The weak fall down and are hurt in the process. It was also observed that men buy maize faster, even if they come late, because they easily squeeze themselves in the line. Despite ADMARC officials explaining that pregnant, lactating women and the elderly be given priority, this is not happening in most areas. This violates rights of the vulnerable and can cause harm if no measures are taken, immediately.



Women in Mulanje queuing for Maize at ADMARC Selling Point

1.5 Challenges posed by ADMARC staff

While we commend hard work and dedication to duty, shown by some ADMARC staff in serving starving Malawians, there are some who are cashing out on the struggling Malawians. The rapid assessment team in Mulanje decided to confirm these abuses as they passed through Chanakanaka ADMARC selling point. It was disheartening to realize that most people were being robbed, as their maize bags were underweight. A 20 kg bag of maize people paid for, weighed between 15 and 18 kilograms.



This man paid a 20kgs price for this 16kg bag

The ADMARC officials at the selling point blamed their scale for the mess. We helped those with underweight bags to re-weigh their quantities for redress. As indicated in 2.0 above, some ADMARC official in Machinga diverted and sold 200 bags of maize meant for Gawanani ADMARC as a private trader and returned to ADMARC the equivalent of what would have been sold under ADMARC selling point. The official has since been sacked by ADMARC, however he was not arrested. People had waited for maize for days for the reported truck of maize, only to be told that the truck was not coming.

1.6 Private traders seizing the opportunity

The absence of maize in ADMARC markets has made Malawians to scramble for Zambia maize flour. It is not the best option, nor is it cheap, but as it is said, *Mbewa zikatha amanona ndi Siswiri* (utilising what is available in the absence of the preferred commodity/service), maize flour from Zambia has become the ‘saviour’ for many Malawians in border districts of Kasungu and Mzimba. Without maize in ADMARC depots and vendors selling the commodity at exorbitant prices, cross-border traders have found business in importing maize flour from Zambia, which is selling out at high speed. The imported flour namely, Africa, Banja, Continental, Pembe and Mushe, is going at a minimum of K7,500 and maximum of K9,000 per 25 Kg bag at Malepera and Chamama markets in Kasungu. The Zambian flour packed in 1kg bags, popularly known as *Wokomani* is sold at K350. At Jenda in Mzimba however, the 25kg bag is going at a minimum of K6,800 and a maximum of K8,000.



Maize Flour from Zambia

Spot checks in Blantyre show that a 5 kg bag of Sunshine maize flour is going at K1,828, Super Ufa weighing 25kgs is at K9,500 while HMS flour weighing 50kgs is going at K18,000.

6.0

CONCLUSION AND POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Generally, the study has established that there is no maize available in most of ADMARC markets in Malawi and there is insufficient stock at the national SGRs. For the most common Malawians, ADMARC is the most reliable and affordable source of maize in lean periods and as such the unavailability of maize in the ADMARC markets has had many negative impacts on the vulnerable Malawians. Some of the impacts identified from the study include soaring up of maize prices, anticipated low productivity as people left their fields in and spent much of their time in search of the maize, violence to vulnerable groups and some ADMARC officials taking advantage of the situation. It is therefore, imperative that policy and legislative framework be put in place in order to come up with sustainable measures of addressing the country's perennial food problem, which is likely to grow if no such measures are adopted. Climate change and ElNino phenomena will continue to exert more pressure on the country's national food security.

It is highly commended that Government has taken some steps in addressing the situation such as lifting import ban on maize flour and securing private partnerships in winter irrigation.

The study has in the short run recommended that Government should declare state of disaster in selected parts of the country especially in the southern region in particular the Lower Shire and other districts heavily affected by the dry spells as it will assist development partners to come in and respond to the food crisis the country is facing; Lifting up import bans on food related products and ensure availability of import license through a transparent process; Government should with immediate effect, articulate a clear, transparent, and accountable policy for SGR maize stocking, allocation, and release, prioritising needs from now throughout the coming 2016/2017 El Nino influenced lean season; Allocate additional funding towards public maize procurement and importation, ensuring that funding mechanisms are linked to weather, crop and vulnerability assessments; Collect and make available key market information, strengthen regulation of the sector and only consider buying maize from the private traders locally as a last result to uphold duty bearer responsibility; ADMARC should prioritise hard to reach areas in maize allocation and introduce an accountable policy for prioritising sales when supplies fall short; Government should put in place redress mechanisms for women who are abused or violated in ADMARC markets.

In the intermediate term, the research has recommended that Government should initiate local partnerships with organized groups of farmers, private sector and individuals for winter growing of maize to assist in filling up the SGRs. It is very important to note that the government has already started doing this and should ensure that a lot more

stakeholders participate in this initiative; adequately and timely fund ADMARC to enable it buy maize from farmers; make sure SGRs are stocked to a minimum of 60,000 MT at any one time; Government and national partners should work together to better understand and support sources of resilience occurring throughout the food market system in Malawi (for example informal cross border imports).

Finally in the long term the research has recommended that Government to prioritize in irrigation farming by increasing resource investment in green belt initiative and in agricultural research and development; implement a separate vote for the Department of Disaster Management; ensure resources for emergency response to function at district level; SGR to consider stocking other food items in addition to maize, and to explore risk layering options such as weather insurance, crop procurement options, and other mechanisms; ensure funding ADMARC before harvesting season for 2016/17 so that ADMARC is able to fairly compete with the Private Traders at the time of harvesting than buying the grain in July after 2016/2017 funding approvals; Malawi Government should explore other options of food so that Malawi is departing from the Maize Problem and focus on diversified food for survival; regulate the maize marketing of the private sector so that maize is released into the market to avoid hoarding. There is need for restructuring of NFRA to have two sections, one dealing with commercial maize, where ADMARC, humanitarian organizations and UN agencies can procure from. The other section should deal with SGR maize, where there should be high level agreement / authority for its release. Finally Government should consider regulating the buying of maize in the communities. The buying of maize should be licensed after meeting a set of criteria.

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