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## **“And Me Too, Do Not Leave Me Out, Please!” Dynamics and Challenges of Food Aid Targeting and Distribution in Mutare District, Zimbabwe, 2000-2010**

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### **Abstract:**

*Many African countries have grappled with food insecurity for generations, and for Zimbabwe, the challenge flies in the face of near-empty proclamations by Government to guarantee food self-sufficiency to all its people by 2000. Realising that a significant number of households hardly meet basic food requirements for survival and succumb to diseases arising there from, Government has generally responded by increasingly accepting the role of charity organisations in mitigating the disaster, particularly in its rural communities. For instance, it has, in recent years, partnered with the World Food Programme of the United Nations, through Plan International-Zimbabwe and other Co-operating Partners like Care International, Catholic Relief Services or Christian Care, in executing emergency operations that are focussed on ameliorating growing effects of hunger in victim areas through identifying and extending relief aid to chronically food-insecure households residing in those communities. It is against this background that this paper examines complex dynamics of food aid targeting and distribution in contexts of recurrent deficits in Mutare. It argues that the task of reaching out to genuinely struggling households is not a simple one; some extremely needy cases have either been deliberately or inadvertently skipped during processes of beneficiary identification and targeting, apparently regardless of their undisputed eligibility. During distribution of relief items at various points, Plan International's Complaints Desks remained overwhelmed by non-beneficiaries seeking clarification on their exclusion. It is, however, amazing how these food-insecure households still made ends meet after such serious omissions, which is what this paper also unravels. Using fieldwork, including observation and interview methods, in addition to monthly reports compiled by field officers in Marange/Zimunya, this paper concludes by examining how and why some gate crashers made the show ahead of targeted recipients, highlighting ongoing efforts to ensure that food aid reached desired beneficiaries. It is hoped that this research will go a long way in articulating full-proof methodologies for development practitioners to reach out to targeted food aid beneficiaries in order to save succeeding generations from the scourge of extreme hunger and malnutrition.*

**Keywords:** Beneficiaries, targeting, identification, distribution, household, observation.

### **1. Introduction**

Scholars and development practitioners have dealt at length with debates surrounding operations of Non-Governmental Organizations (NGO) in communities struggling to raise food but failing to do so owing to a wide range of factors (Shivji, 2007; Moyo, Makumbe and Raftopoulos, 2000 and De Waal, 1997). However, there has been a gap in literature about the logistics of food aid targeting and distribution in areas of need. The food situation in Mutare district, Zimbabwe, can be understood more clearly by further examining the partnership and role of World Food Programme of the United Nations (WFP) /Plan International because of the time they have spent trying to reduce the food deficiency gap in Marange/Zimunya areas of Mutare. At least useful records kept at Plan International-Mutare and interviews derived from various stakeholders provide insight into the plight of residents firmly stark in unfortunate most food-insecure categories. This article builds on these issues but proceeds to analyse the mechanics of food aid targeting and distribution in Mutare district. This approach provides a much needed appreciation of the extent of challenges encountered by residents regarding access to donated food. The overall picture is one of desperation because, more often than not, food hampers earmarked for excessively struggling households may not reach them due to a number of variables, including double-dipping, political interference, swindling of food by people occupying positions of authority such as village heads or councillors and theft of commodities from point of dispatch to that of distribution.

## 2. Conceptual Framework

Many factors have been advanced by researchers to explain why famine and other such disasters continued to affect food security in parts of Africa, including Zimbabwe (Sen, 1981; Devereux, 1993, 2001; Iliffe, 1990; Vaughan, 1987; Watts, 1983; Walker, 1989; Franke and Chasin, 1980; de Waal, 1989, 1997). However, Devereux (2001:120) notes that there is still 'disagreement over whether famine should be conceptualised as a 'natural disaster', economic crisis or a 'complex political emergency.' While many theories attempt to explain food insecurity of varying magnitudes, Devereux emphasises, among other factors, sheer lack of political will and war as central to famine. It is his contention that;

The causes of contemporary famines are never purely technical; -crop failure, food price rises, and so on. All famines are explained by a combination of 'technical' and 'political' factors, where political factors include bad government policies, failure of the international community to provide relief, and war. African famines in particular have evolved from being triggered mainly by drought to being triggered mainly by civil war, and even when drought is the trigger, national governments and the international community are increasingly held accountable for failing (or refusing) to prevent the drought from developing into famine (Devereux, 2001).

Using this theory as the lens, not only to examine food security problems facing Mutare Rural, but also to assess why food earmarked for deserving beneficiaries eventually got to wrong recipients, it should be stated at the outset that many beneficiaries for whom food aid is designed remain vulnerable due to complications of targeting and distribution. The entry of NGOs to the food equation in Zimbabwe was sparked by the need to avert drought-triggered food emergencies from turning into famines. However, logistical challenges in reaching the intended beneficiaries continued to wreck the efforts of NGOs in fulfilling their onerous task. I examine the scheme of operation mounted by Plan International-Mutare to ensure food aid reached designated individuals, arguing that the process of food aid targeting and distribution is extremely complex and involving.

Although its key mission is to haul disadvantaged children out of the pangs of extreme poverty, Plan International's intervention in matters of food aid stems from the realisation that household food insecurity seriously frustrated the organization's programme of action. For example, in providing infrastructure such as classroom blocks and stationery for school pupils to access basic education, Plan International's argument is that targeted children still found it difficult to attend school on hungry stomachs, hence, the need for an urgent intervention at the level of food provision. The revised mission statement below already captures this effort: "Plan is a humanitarian, child-centred community development organization which strives to achieve lasting improvements in the quality of life of deprived children by enabling them, their families and their communities to meet basic needs and to increase their ability to participate in and benefit from their society" (Plan International, 2010). As stated above, Plan International, therefore, partners with, and implements, UN-WFP Protracted Relief Operations as Co-operating/Implementing Partner, responsible for identifying and targeting vulnerable people residing in areas prone to droughts and distributing food hampers to them.

## 3. The Logistics of Distribution

Although fraught with various challenges, the method, timing and mode of dispatch of food rations are important logistics in the distribution of food hampers. The WFP/Plan International scheme of association clearly spells out duties of Implementing Partners (IPs), including to dispatch the much awaited foodstuffs to distribution sites where it is expected to arrive at a date announced in advance of distribution. While it is the responsibility of local administration, police and village heads to provide general security to donated food awaiting distribution, Plan International hires trucks to carry food from WFP warehouses to its respective Food Distribution Points. However, many problems are experienced at this stage and these include truck breakdowns, thefts of food items by truck drivers or at depots, late deliveries, and inaccessible roads especially during the rainy season and delivery of rotten food. Some of these problems are reflected in the co-operating partner's monthly distribution reports while others are reported by interviewees. From these reports, I get the impression that Plan International, though not succeeding in all cases, strove to improve its logistics and mechanisms in dealing with each of these distribution challenges in the period to 2010 (Plan International Annual Reports File, 2000-2010).

One of Plan International's targets during transportation of food items was to ensure that consignments were generally off-loaded during mornings in order to save sufficient time for distribution before nightfall. In light of this position, there were strict recommendations against late evening deliveries or distributions to avoid additional security challenges to both beneficiaries and allotments. However, transporters had their own schedules which sometimes mismatched those of Plan International. But the major factor hindering operations of many transporters especially in the 2000-2008 era of shortages in Zimbabwe was fuel unavailability. Referring to one particular case, for instance, the Programme Area Manager (PAM), Justin Kufakweimba, noted that "late arrival of some commodities at Maanhu and Mafararikwa Food Distribution Points meant that distribution had to be done in two phases. Distributions were delayed by a day due to unavailability of fuel at petrol stations" (Monthly Report, June 2003). In addition, Kufakweimba called for contingency measures to be "put in place to counter this" because "notification at some centres was not effective and some villagers arrived late for distribution" (Monthly Report, June 2003).

As noted above, fuel supplies in Zimbabwe remained erratic since 2003 to round about 2009 when hyperinflationary trends rocking the economy were eventually halted by dollarization. This critical fuel shortage resulted in transporters seriously delaying dispatches, hence, prolonging waiting time for beneficiaries anticipating to quench their hunger. Transporters were also reluctant to deliver food to some remote FDPs, citing poor road conditions besides shortage of fuel. In his January 2008 Vulnerable Group Feeding (VGF) Report, the Food Aid Manager, Titus Mafemba, stated that "some food went bad while being kept by transporters after failing to secure fuel for a number of days" (VGF Report, 2008:3). At Kuraone FDP in Mukwada Ward (29), it was reported that some maize

meal was unfit for distribution “as the commodity (about 196 bags) was rotten due to inappropriate covering by the transporter when it was raining” (Monthly Report, March 2003:6). Beneficiaries were also short-changed when one transporter, Nyco Ltd, kept commodities destined for Gwese and Dora FDPs at his garage for an extended period of time (over one week) under poor storage conditions, “resulting in rotting of 56 by 50 kg cereal and 24 by 50kg of pulses. Arrangements to destroy the food with all relevant arms of government are now in place” (Monthly Report, March 2003:6). Considering the emergency nature of the food aid programme, especially in 2008, which arose from, and in direct response to, socio-economic and political challenges in the country (Raftopoulos, 2009), it was rather insensitive for the transporter to ferry food after a week when loaded trucks were expected to deliver food within a day or two.

Theft of commodities by a number of players in the food distribution chain is also experienced, and, in some cases, this is perpetuated by truck drivers themselves. In the period under review, however, Plan International staff, as alleged in some quarters, were absolved of connivance with such unscrupulous lorry drivers in swindling beneficiaries of their much needed aid (Interviews with transporters, 2008). In such cases where staff was involved in a scam, Plan International swiftly investigated suspected field monitors nailed on such allegations. Vegetable oil was mainly targeted because of its unavailability on the market for the greater part of 2008. Reporting on prevailing trends of stolen commodities, the Food Aid Manager stated that “three cases of food theft by drivers in transit, besides theft of vegetable oil at FDPs by trusted community volunteer personnel, were reported” (Monthly Report, January 2008:2). This was one of the key reasons leading to discrepancies between planned amounts of food aid and actual food quantities distributed.

The problems of theft and rotting are more clearly outlined by Mafemba who reported that; “36 bags of cereal at Gwese and 20 bags of cereal at Dora FDPs were rotten. 12 bags of pulses at Gwese and 12 bags of pulse at Dora FDPs were rotten. 2 cartons of vegetable oil were short-landed by transporters at Chitakatira FDP and another 3 cartons of vegetable oil were short-landed at Mafararikwa” (Monthly Report, January 2008:2). These incidents contributed to a reduced tonnage vis-à-vis planned quantities; hence, placing beneficiaries at serious risk. Problems of this nature were usually, however, brought to the attention of WFP by Plan International through a waybill, that is, WFP’s main document for tracking and tracing commodities. Shortfalls arising from, among other variables, pilferage in transit and leaking container bags were carefully captured on the “sick” waybill which compelled Plan International to take investigative action in respect of mismatching dispatches versus received goods.

A notable challenge during the distribution stage of food aid targeting is the attempt to give food hand-outs to a few people amid a worsening food security situation. Sometimes harvests envisaged in a particular year completely fail to materialise and many more people go hungry overnight for prolonged periods. Since registration takes place far in advance of distribution, those who would have earlier been excluded in beneficiary registers also naturally become vulnerable over time and space. By the time distributions are ready, it becomes increasingly difficult to ignore them since their case would equally be genuine and they would be in conformity with targeting criteria and guidelines spelled by Plan International. The Project Manager, E, Mugore, noted this possibility as early as March 2003 when he stated that: “The food security situation is worsening daily in most areas, particularly those in the Marange area where there is almost nothing to harvest and more and more potential beneficiaries continue to request for assistance” (Monthly Report, March 2003:4). It proved very difficult to deal with these unfolding challenges.

The livelihoods of individuals and families are severely threatened when they fail to cope with the stresses and shocks of drought (Zhira, 2002). The need to continually identify and verify who these distressed persons are in Marange is underscored. A study of reports on response mechanisms by non-beneficiaries reveals a saddening scenario; “The most common coping strategies witnessed in the second quarter of 2003 included emigration or border jumping, prostitution, diamond panning, sale of livestock at ridiculous or derisory prices and consumption of baobab and tree roots” (Interview with Magaya, 2004). Many people in the lower-to-middle income band and those who owned limited livestock sometimes found it increasingly difficult to purchase food in the face of acute crop failure. Since *sadza* (thick porridge) is the staple food which in normal circumstances is served twice a day in each household, the consumption of fruits and other alternative foods to cope with hunger did not satisfy affected people. The extent to which villagers longed for *sadza* could be reflected in the opening prayer offered by the village head of Mafararikwa Ward before commencement of food aid distribution;

*Tinotenda Mwari nekutuma vanhu vePlan International; Kugurawo musuwa wesadza here, kwaakumwe mvura!*  
(We are really grateful to God for sending Plan International employees to us with food; It is actually unimaginable, but thrilling, to note that we are now going to lay our hands on sadza and throw morsels into our mouths, followed by a glass of water!) (VGF Monthly Report, October 2008:06).

To therefore distribute food to only a handful of people in light of this volatile situation is a challenging task for Plan International. A huge outcry for food ensues at distribution points where only a few people benefit when the rest fail to get access.

One of the reasons for exclusions is to do with projected beneficiary figures that are done early in the year by the Zimbabwe Vulnerability Assessment Committee (ZIMVAC) but which double or multiply as the year progresses. This complicates the distribution process because the FDPs will be inundated by whole communities seeking food aid but who apparently do not appear on initial registers. Since it is impossible for Plan International to temper with the ration so that it is shared amongst both new and targeted beneficiaries, non-beneficiaries are forced to resort to all sorts of survival tactics, some of which have long-term negative effects. For example, consumption strategies can be used such as reducing the number of meals per day, consuming leafy vegetable alone and taking seasonal fruits such as guavas as meals and reducing pot sizes or quantities of meals per day. On the social front, some girls and married women sell sex for food. Begging and cheating become rampant alongside theft of food and other things for sale from homes and gardens. Over and above all, people go to greater lengths in trying to save whatsoever little money they may have through excessive sacrifices. For example, they reduce or halt expenditures on non-food items, walk unusually long distances to

save on transport in search of food in distant communities or arrange early marriages for their children in exchange for food, in the process compounding the hunger and poverty cycles for these teens who are married off.

Generally, the above scenario affects whole households, especially if ZIMVAC figures, which are utilised by WFP, are poorly projected. WFP may find itself trapped in situations where donors' pledges fail to meet projected figures; hence, the call for exclusion of some already registered beneficiaries. Plan International faces this sympathetic scenario, being the one operating on the ground and witnessing these incidents unfolding, but for which they have little or no control Bertina Nyamutswa, Programme Coordinator for Plan International-Mutare, confirms this difficulty;

The significant development for the month was the reduction in caseload from 71 326 people who received food in December 2009 to 60 070 beneficiaries following recommendations and/or findings of the ZIMVAC in October 2009. The reduction of 11 256 beneficiaries or 15.78% was quite drastic given the peak hunger period in the food distribution calendar starting September to March annually (Monthly Report, January 2010:01).

She further reported that when ZIMVAC carried out its assessment in June 2009, it found Mutare district relatively 'food secure'. However, when crops failed to mature because of the dry spell in January, many households were immediately rendered vulnerable. During distributions for January in Marange, excluded people visited FDPs to get food but this was in vain. Nyamutswa noted that people swarmed Help Desks like bees, expressing dissatisfaction when they 'discovered that their names were not on the food distribution lists (following the downward adjustment in the number of people deemed food insecure by ZIMVAC)' (Monthly Report, January 2010: 01).

In concluding her report, Nyamutswa also hinted briefly on the serious impact of the dry spell on anticipated harvests. She highlighted that the crop situation in Marange was extremely bad in the period under review, with stunted maize plants 'flowering at less than half a metre tall', adding that some crops under the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) Zero Tillage Project wilted due to insufficient rains needed to quickly dissolve and neutralise the basal fertilizers that had been applied. The most affected areas were Mafarikwa, Zvipiripiri, Chiadzwa and central and other parts of Matanda (Monthly Report, January 2010: 12). The report confirms earlier findings about the agro-climatic zone in which these communities are located which require long-term solutions to chronic problems of food security. Indeed, it is stressed that during the season; "Agricultural activities in the fields, including gardening, were long abandoned due to the long dry spell of four to five weeks.... Crops in red and dark deep soils were wilting with no hope of good rains coming early" (Monthly Report, January 2010:12).

In its ambitious, but noble project on tillage, FAO appears to miss the point that cropping in Marange could only be improved by a reliable water supply. Although Marange is not a homogenous entity regarding its soil structure and rainfall patterns, the underlying picture is one of aridity. There are some wards with sandy soils such as the ones north of Mutsago which include Mafarikwa, Ngomasha, Nyachityu, Nhamburiko and Mukuni where crops generally thrive under conditions of light rainfall trickles. However, in areas such as Chiadzwa, Mukwada, Kurauone, Chirasika and Banda, the soils are rich enough to support crop cultivation but the rains are generally erratic and unable to support crop life year-on-year. Reporting in the period 1<sup>st</sup> to 31<sup>st</sup> March, 2009, the District Food Aid Manager for Marange, Virgil Chibvuri, noted how desperate villagers from these communities were for food aid in the face of routine downscaling of WFP-assisted Vulnerable Group Feeding programmes. It is worthy to capture his remarks at length: "This is the final monthly narrative monitoring report under the current WFP- VGF programme which ended on 31 March 2009 amid indications of continued severe food insecurity at household level as a result of immature field crops and/or failure" (Monthly Report, March 2009:01). Ending emergency operations aimed at mitigating the negative impacts of hunger under such circumstances of great need was itself weighing heavily on the hearts of affected villagers seeking to survive through the food aid programme to the next 'harvest'.

The situation regarding struggling crops in Marange remained unchanged since time immemorial. Even before the advent of the VGF programme, Government almost always received reports concerning the deteriorating food security which required a comprehensive programme of action. While the above report captures the crop and food situation in the 2009/2010 agricultural season, Plan International observed a notably negative trend right from the organisation's inception in 1986. Reporting in 2003, the Project Manager reiterated this anomaly by pointing out that;

Post Distribution Monitoring was also conducted in the district by WFP and Plan staff in Chitora, Masasi and Chirasika, among others. Findings confirmed that the food security situation was worsening on a day-to-day basis, hence the need to continually advocate intense community participation to identify the households, considering the foreseen pipeline breaks (Monthly Report, March 2003:02)

In this case, anticipated pipeline breaks referred to programme exit every March when WFP and its Implementing Partners assumed that people had harvested something to guarantee food security for a time. But all reports available virtually pointed to poor harvests throughout seasons, especially the "red zones" of Marange area (Annual Reports, 2000, 2003, 2005, 2008, 2010).

#### **4. Women and the Political Economy of Food Aid Targeting and Distribution**

One of the attempts made by Plan International at effective distribution is, therefore, to actively involve women at all levels of design and implementation of food aid beneficiary targeting, selection and distribution. Women's networks and groups are used to disseminate information about an expected food delivery. Plan International assesses where Food Distribution Points could best be located to allow women to collect rations themselves. This also helps to avoid burdensome and unsafe travel to FDPs. But the underlying reason why the programme puts women first is to do with effective targeting because, traditionally, women are the ones in charge of household food preparation and management. This is why even at Help Desks, women are engaged to receive, handle, and

deal with all sorts of queries and complaints from beneficiaries or non-beneficiaries in ways that demonstrate a high degree of fairness, neutrality, comprehensiveness and transparency. However, some of these responsibilities result in women being overloaded with work and the whole attempt at empowering them runs into problems. For example, reporting to WFP in 2007, the Food Aid Manager, Mafemba, complained that:

The major concerns were “on and off” mobilisations done in anticipation of promised deliveries that did not take place as planned ... due to adverse weather conditions. Some beneficiaries eventually failed to turn up on time to assist in offloading trucks and helping in stacking food. This tended to overburden women with hard work of handling bags to the store rooms and stacking places (VGF Report, December 2007:04).

However, Plan International strove to reduce those challenges by especially conducting effective pre-distribution meetings in which a public announcement about the expected food was done, at least three days before the food arrived at the FDPs.

One of the most baffling challenges during distribution of food hampers is exclusion of some critically needy households or removal of already registered recipients from feeding registers. For instance, in an interview with Esther Sigauke, an aged informant at Mukwada Ward 29 FDP, an incident was highlighted in which her colleague, Ethel Dara (70+ years) was denied access to food aid on unclear circumstances. She narrated Ethel's ordeal who, soon after being denied food, rose to the Help Desk with a saucer and danced in front of Plan International staff. She was replicating what her elders used to do during a drought, traversing the length and breadth of the countryside, begging for food until they filled their sacks with grain. She repeated the dance and song session until Plan staff asked why an elderly woman, so advanced in age would stoop so low to do that. This is when they were told that she had been excluded from the feeding register during both registration and verification because the village secretary had lied that her name had been entered. As a temporary solution, she was given a unit of share from each of the cereal bags of beneficiaries until her own bag was filled. Her name was also immediately reinstated in the feeding register for the following month (Interview with Sigauke, 2009). But this is only one known case. The majority of those omitted would not brave the challenge of dancing and singing for food in spite of being equally food insecure. They try to appeal to Plan International through the Help Desk but sometimes solutions to their plight may not be forthcoming.

In a related case, Zvemunoita Mupfuva, again of Mukwada Ward, a widow so advanced in age, also stood up to ask what else she would do to prove that she was in need of assistance. She had not been entered into the feeding register because the village secretary wanted her to produce her identity document which she said she had misplaced. She had walked a distance of about seven kilometres for almost three hours from Betera Primary School to Mukwada Food Distribution Point to receive her anticipated food parcel. She publicly launched her complaint and, as a resolution, all beneficiaries were persuaded to take out a little ration from their share to contribute to Mupfuva. She was also immediately registered for succeeding distribution sessions, while the unscrupulous village secretary was grilled for misleading her (Interview with Sigauke, 2009). Another complainant from the Wendumba FDP in Nhamburiko Ward 11 pointed out that food assistance was denied to him because the household had a well-built brick house which was unique for its beauty. He stated that: “Vetting on grounds of one's property was rather misleading. His father built a brick house in the 1970s but died in 1989, leaving his mother and the rest of the family vulnerable. But the household was denied food aid simply on grounds of residing in an attractive house (Interview with Shepherd Mandiringana, 2009). However, Mandiringana supported Plan International staff's random visits and Post-Distribution Monitoring exercises designed to get first-hand experiences of households. These visits, done without the knowledge of village heads and secretaries, revealed serious anomalies and unfair practices in the targeting and distribution process. The Mandiringana family was eventually added onto the beneficiary register for the following months.

Apparently, a more disturbing feature of the distribution process pertained to alleged failure by beneficiary communities to report cases of rotten food to Plan International when such situations arose. Probably, the reason could have been that some people discovered this way later after distribution and at point of consumption. Plan Food Monitors were also to blame as they were expected to detect rotten food items before any dispatch was done. The same could be said of the WFP warehouse personnel who were expected not to make arrangements to dispatch rotten food items to beneficiary communities. Regarding food that went bad whilst in the custody of transporters who kept it under suspected poor storage conditions, it was the responsibility of WFP and its IPs to determine what course of action to take. This is because, on the balance of probabilities, some extremely desperate people could partake of such food which showed signs of deterioration with a view to ameliorating their condition. Already this was evident in some monthly reports which indicated that beneficiaries were unwilling to disclose to Plan International the bad state of some food items that they received. For example, in the January 2008 monthly report, it was revealed that some villagers only opened up to Plan International well after the food had been consumed and during Plan International's routine Post-Distribution Monitoring exercises. The report stated that: “The major blemish was failure by community representatives to acknowledge and indicate the high volume of rotten food commodities on the waybills. The Co-operating Partner made follow ups and was constantly told that the food was safe when in actual fact it was not” (Monthly Report, January 2008:06). The whole idea was to survive the threat of extreme hunger looming in these communities.

There is evidence, however, in the above-cited report that some food decomposed while under the custodian of transporters who might have received it in a sound state from WFP but whose delivery might have been delayed. Many factors have been advanced to explain those delays, including a combination of fuel shortage and bad road conditions, particularly during rainy seasons. The report, however, sends conflicting signals about Plan International's response to these unfortunate occurrences. It is rather misleading because, at some point, it is stated that, following the “rotting of 56 by 50 kg cereal and 24 by 50 kg of pulses” destined for Gwese and Dora FDPs, “arrangement to destroy the food with all relevant arms of government are now in place” (Monthly Report, January 2008: 03). At

some other point within the same report, it is stated that, “Unfortunately, the community representatives who received the food did not indicate the rotten quantities but to the contrary received all bags as sound and in good condition” (Monthly Report, January 2008:02). This implies, therefore, that the food had already been distributed and possibly consumed. It is difficult in these delicate circumstances to appreciate what really transpired on the ground because of the contradictory nature of this particular report. Perhaps, the impression that this report aimed to give was one of awareness by Plan International of WFP laid down procedures for disposal of decomposed or damaged commodities. Pursuant to the need to maintain its image, Plan International had no alternative but to lay the blame on recipients. But the irony of the matter is that community representatives who received food on behalf of beneficiaries worked under the supervision of Plan staff and in some cases with WFP field staff as well. In such an event, all concerned parties were expected to share the blame.

Due to the interest that the treatment of rotten foods generates, it might be useful to briefly examine the WFP minimum expectations should such challenges occur. The procedures for disposing of rotten food are themselves lengthy, complicated and almost unworkable. On a theoretical level, these procedures are not only sound, diligent and sensitive, but are also professional and exhaustive. A quick look at the nine key steps taken once a commodity is suspected of being unfit helps to clarify this argument;

A public Health Officer (PHO) should be called in to assess the condition of the Cargo. If found to be unfit for human consumption, a condemnation certificate must be issued by the PHO. The original certificate is to be sent to WFP Country Office Harare, Attention; Head of Logistics. WFP Country Office will then apply to ZIMRA (Customs) for authority to destroy the commodity as it is duty – free. On approval from Customs, the documents must be sent to the Country Director for written approval to destroy the commodity. The approval can then be sent to the IP/WFP for destruction arrangements to be made. The IP/WFP will apply to local Municipalities for an appropriate site and the best method to destroy the damaged food commodities. Upon destruction, a WFP/IP, PHO or Ministry of Health representative and representatives of Local Government, Zimbabwe Republic Police (ZRP) and Customs (if they insist) must be present as witnesses. A certificate of destruction endorsed by all parties present and stating method of destruction, must be issued and then sent to WFP Country Office- Harare. Photographs of the destruction process should be taken (WFP Food Aid Targeting and Distribution Guidelines, 2003: 101).

From selected interviews held with beneficiary and non- beneficiary communities, this approach has not been used in Marange/Zimunya (Group interviews with crowds at Mafararikwa, Kuraoune, Chiadzwa, Chitora, Chinyauhvera, Nengomasha and Muwangirwa Food Distribution Points, January-February, 2010). One reason could be that the food was, in most cases, generally delivered in its sound state. Damaged commodities could be fewer and insignificant to warrant destruction of whole caseloads. In such cases, *ad hoc* measures were used to dispose of consignments. In other cases, recipients of food aid encountered isolated instances of rotten materials or damaged food items when they were in their homes and these were considered ‘natural’. For instance, Pheobe Muchacha of Masvaure Primary School FDP in Kugarisana Ward 25 stated that she identified broken metals in her sorghum consignment as she was meshing it before grinding it. After cleaning the whole 50kg package, the impurities weighed more than 2 kilograms. She did not suspect any foul play because when she consulted with other beneficiaries, she found out that this was only an accident, especially given that she had received the food items on her own at the FDP (Interview with Pheobe Muchacha, 2010). What this means, therefore, is that WFP is expected to leave its Cooperating Partners with a relative degree of flexibility and independence in making on-site decisions regarding disposal of damaged or decomposed caseloads and only implement the lengthy disposal procedures quoted above where big consignments are involved.

In Africa, debates have also arisen about the quality of food aid brought into the country by donor communities and the Government of Zimbabwe has stood firm against importation of certain foodstuffs on the argument that they pose a health risk to its population and environment (Walters, 2006; Voice of America, 2015). For instance, in the early years of the WFP-VGF programme in Manicaland and other provinces, there was a wide talk against Genetically Modified Organisms (GMOs). Government was torn between accepting GMO foods perceived to have long-term negative effects if consumed and their entry regardless of woes of food insecurity across communities was denied. Where a decision was passed to reject food aid on those and other related grounds, distribution failed to take off in the manner planned. One Monthly Distribution Report which was prepared by E, Mugore, Project Manager at Plan International-Mutare, clearly shows this dilemma;

Mutare district had planned to feed 69 566 beneficiaries with 834, 792 metric tonnes of maize grain. Actual achievement for October was 4 502 who received food rations totalling to 91 582 tonnes. The reason for the large discrepancy on tonnage received and number of beneficiaries fed is the impasse experienced over appropriateness of the food which was available for distribution (Monthly Report, October 2002:03).

Proceeding to distribute such food would definitely confirm Walters (2006)’s conclusion that ‘forcing GMOs on a nation that does not want them might be looked at as criminal behaviour under international law.’ While it could be true that GMOs were detrimental to health in the long-term owing to their potential toxic nature, it is equally possible to argue that during the period under review, the ZANU-PF Government was becoming increasingly averse to European and American aid for political reasons. The country was gravitating into chaos following the Protracted Land Reform Programme; commonly known as the ‘Fast-Track Land Reform Programme’ (FTRLRP) which saw the invasion of commercial farms by people believed to be war veterans and other ZANU-PF backed hooligans. The participation of donors from these continents was akin to exposing the weaknesses inherent in the ruling party considered to be failing to feed its hungry population.

The formation of the Movement for Democratic Change in 1999 was misperceived as western-backed, with the 'express aim of toppling the Mugabe Government' (The Herald, 18 April 2000). This turbulent political scenario was to shape the manner in which food aid was to be handled. The reality which prevailed was one in which farm invasions disrupted agricultural production, leading to an acute shortage of food, hence, prompting the need for food aid. Distributions, therefore, depended on whims of the ruling party which became neurotic in the face of unprecedented loss of parliamentary seats to the MDC in the 2000 Harmonised Elections. The MDC got all sorts of labels, chief of which was that it was pliant to foreign interests, and this characterisation cascaded down to WFP food aid. Hence, distributions were suspended or halted altogether from time-to-time due to serious political interference. Mugore further reported that; "Food deliveries to Mutare district had to be suspended for the larger part of October. This affected largely the maize meal commodity. The impasse was centred on GMO foods" (Monthly Report, October 2002:03). Disruption of targeting and distribution by political elements became rampant, particularly when some party officials sought to be identified with WFP, posing as custodians of solutions to acute food shortage reeling across Marange. Clearly, WFP and Plan International were opposed to this type of interference. This unfortunate attempt at taking charge of targeting and distribution could not be condoned, with powerful politicians desperately forcing suspension of distribution of delivered foodstuffs, arguing that they were genetically engineered, all this to ensure beneficiaries would miss out altogether, thereby compounding their vulnerability, and hopefully force them to realign their political affiliation if found to be at cross-purposes with their party.

##### **5. "Who Then Should Be Left Out and How?" The Practicalities of Food Aid Distribution**

Plan International has always had to look directly at the elephant in the room; the continued uncertainty over implementation of actual distribution of available food in an environment of excessive demand. The practical distribution modalities posed challenges in more ways than one, particularly on what specific hassle-free methodology to be followed. Generally, Plan International preferred the scooping method to distribute food using scooping utensils available but this method was disliked by WFP<sup>1</sup>. In his October 2002 Report, the Project Manager registered his complaints against denial by WFP to give some autonomy to Plan International regarding distribution modalities, given that it was the one right in touch with the realities on the ground. He pointed out that when Mutare district received a consignment of both maize grain and mealie – meal, Plan International carefully prepared tools appropriate for the application of the scooping method. But these tools which were found to be suitable for maize grain in terms of calibrations designed by Plan International were rejected by WFP. As a result;

Graduation of tools proved slow due to lack of scales. The sponsoring partner; WFP, was pushing the Implementing Partner to use the group distribution method while Plan, the Implementing Partner, preferred to use the scooping method. Time was taken to get an amicable compromise. The group distribution method was used at some centres due to lack of appropriate tools while the scooping method was also utilised at some centres (Monthly Report, October 2002:05).

Apparently, the group distribution method became popularised over time because it was consistently hailed in succeeding reports for its efficiency (Monthly Reports, January 2003, October 2004, and March, 2009). Indeed, this method remained in use thereafter owing to the autonomy it granted to villagers to share amongst themselves. On a visit to Kurauone FDP in January 2010, I was impressed to see villagers receiving and sharing their food allotments in their groups in an efficient and time-saving manner. The group method was later to be praised by Kufakweimba, reiterating its effectiveness at lessening time spent in allocating food rations to beneficiaries: "Distribution at a centre could now be conducted in a single day" (Monthly Report, June 2003:03). Of course, this fast distribution process was enhanced by the fact that recipient communities were alerted far in advance of distribution through pre-distribution address and posters placed at strategic places for easy identification. Though regarded as fast and participatory by its very nature, the group method did not guarantee accuracy of ration per beneficiary. There were isolated incidents where influential members formed particular groups aimed to manipulate the process in their favour, especially where cooking oil was involved, leading to brawls in some instances. This was particularly common where it was to be determined who would take the remainders.

But, the most unfortunate challenge regarding food aid targeting and distribution was the allocation of food items to undeserving individuals who found their way onto registers at the expense of genuinely deserving cases. As noted earlier on, many reasons led to this scenario, chief of which was manipulation, without Plan International's knowledge, of feeding registers by village heads or their secretaries, or in combination with each other. In other cases, food obtained on behalf of absentee beneficiaries did not reach targeted persons in whose name the allocations were received as it was swindled on the way. In an interview with Mtetwa, one of the long-serving drivers at Plan International, it was revealed that Plan International uncovered a scam where food collected on behalf of an orphan in Marange did not reach him. The one who had signed for him purporting to be his neighbour could not hand over the food items to this orphan who was attending school when distribution was taking place. The matter only came to light when the child was

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<sup>1</sup> I accompanied beneficiaries to Kurauone FDP in January 2010 to get first-hand information on distribution logistics employed by Plan International. He also made numerous other trips to FDPs such as Mukwada, Mutsago, Masvaure and Chiadzwa, where registration or distribution exercises were observed. The scooping method entailed dipping a standard container and pouring food items, be it beans or corn, into each beneficiary's receiving bag, repeating the exercise until all food was distributed uniformly. The group method involved allocating portions of foodstuffs to groups of people for them to share equally among themselves using their own criteria. Throughout the fieldwork period, I resided in Mukwada Ward 29 whose FDPs were Mukwada and Kurauone Primary Schools.

urged by angry villagers to raise the matter with Plan International field officers. Plan International got news of this when they were on a Post Distribution Monitoring exercise having been tipped about it. The culprit was immediately deleted from the feeding register for the remaining months before programme exit. However, Mtetwa criticised WFP's demand for birth certificates as prerequisites for entry into feeding registers. He pointed out that: "It was sometimes difficult to get all beneficiaries producing birth certificates, especially from orphans and vulnerable children. Some of them required the Registrar of Births' assistance in procuring those documents; and, in the meanwhile, they remained afflicted by the twin evils of poverty and hunger as their parents either died or abandoned them" (Interview with Mtetwa, 12 June 2010).

Mtetwa hailed Plan International's mapping system which allowed it to carry out home visits even without notifying village heads in advance. This helped Plan International staff to reach out to families that were often overlooked during registration and distribution, most likely with the machinations of village authorities. In this mapping system, households in a particular ward are indicated for easy follow-up by field officers. Many instances of denial of access to food aid by village heads are discovered in these verification programmes. But, it is also true that undeserving individuals are caught in this process, sometimes through informants. The usual action taken by Plan International is to delete such people from registers and immediately replace them with new deserving cases. Where cheating is rampant and with high proportions at village level, Plan International suspends distribution forthwith. For example, when some villagers connived to steal oil at Chitora FDP in Zimunya in January 2003, the whole FDP was suspended until February of the same year when the culprits were apprehended by the Zimbabwe Republic Police investigating the matter. The Project Manager, Mugore, stated that "the number of people who received food aid for the month of January 2003 is not what was planned for because there were no distributions at Chitora Primary School which was suspended after oil theft." Mugore stated that, "distribution was done at Chitora (in February 2003) because the suspension was lifted after a date was set for trial of the apprehended people" ((Monthly Report, March 2003:03). These are some, but nonetheless all, of the challenges inherent in the process of food aid targeting and distribution for which Plan International was obliged to redress in its pursuit of more accurate ways of reaching the needy.

#### **6. "The Paradox of Poverty Amid Plenty": Chiadzwa Diamonds in the Context of Food Security in Marange**

Presenting a case about Burkina Faso's economic performance between 1994 and 1998, economists Michael Grimm and Isabel Gunther (2007) argue that the country appeared to be on a pro-poor growth path, following positive structural reforms, but the gains did not cascade down to the population which still remained vulnerable to various shocks. Several explanations can be given for such a paradox in Zimbabwe. The food security situation in Marange remained critical years after diamond mining operations kicked off in 2006. The wheel has come full circle regarding lack of government commitment to dealing with food security in Chiadzwa and other wards. While Government points to unavailability of funds to monitor and implement long-term sustainable projects in Marange using proceeds from diamond mining, profits from mining operations in the area have been siphoned out without the slightest effort at accountability.

Instead, Government strongly opted to hastily relocate local inhabitants to a disused farm, Agricultural Rural Development Authority (ARDA) Transau, diminishing prospects for compensation forthwith. In fact, food security came under renewed threats following public media announcements in 2009 by ZANU-PF appointed Governor for Manicaland Province, Chris Mushowe, that people within the vicinity of Chiadzwa diamond fields were expected to comply with urgent calls for relocation. Between 2008 and 2009, soldiers manning diamond fields also scheduled meetings with villagers at Chiadzwa, Betera, Mukwada, Chirasika, Chishingwi, Kurauone and Chipindirwe to address them on the imminent relocation.

The 2009/2010 agricultural season was, therefore, a wasted one as households within the radius of Chiadzwa were informally warned not to cultivate crops since they were expected to have vacated initially by 12 November, and subsequently, on a continually postponed date. With the psychological feeling of communities in transit, most wards around Chiadzwa failed to put the land available to them under cultivation. This exacerbated the food insecurity situation already in existence in Marange. Some households had, between 2007 and 2010, already sought alternative 'homes' in response to perpetual threats from the Governor and resident Minister about resettlement, amid disharmony and victimisation occasioned by security forces dotted around Chiadzwa. Given the amount of preparation needed towards cultivation, both psychological and physical, the zeal to work the land was perpetually worn out by the volatility surrounding the Chiadzwa issue.

In addition to this, the on-and-off panning activities that characterised Chiadzwa diamonds since June 2006 resulted in unusually high numbers of people in need of food. The problem arising from these numbers was linked to illegal panners, commonly known as 'gwejas' (male panners) or 'gwejelines' (female panners), who walked across people's fields, gnawing down their crops, especially during the night as they sneaked into diamond fields (Headman Mukwada, 2015; Nyamunda and Mukwambo, 2010; Nyamunda, Mukwambo and Nyandoro, 2012). At times, they helped themselves to watermelons, cucumbers or anything available from these fields that quenches their hunger and thirst. Combining all this with the effect of erratic rainfall patterns and weak soils, the future of food insecurity is not guaranteed. Already villagers have not only scaled down on their ambitions to improve their condition because of the proposed programme of relocation but have also become increasingly suspicious of the government's intention in displacing people whom it neglected for years.

Indeed, when displacement is poorly handled as is anticipated, with lessons drawn from the Fast-Track Programme, '*Operation Murambatsvina*' (Clean-up) and '*Operation Dzikisa Mutengo*'. (Reduce Prices), all of which were violent. Severe impoverishment and social disintegration ensued. The plight of women is already worsened because of these malicious speculations and there is increased physical and social stress of having to provide food for families while no longer having access to their fields and gardens. By August 2010, the official position regarding these issues of resettlement was still unclear. People have shelved long-term plans for



investment or sustainable food production, awaiting their fate to be decided. Meanwhile, the government has promised whole panoply of social and economic improvements attached to relocation to which the villagers are justifiably sceptical.

## 7. Conclusion

The immensity of food security challenges encountered in many parts of Africa has been appreciated through the Marange/Zimunya case study in which distribution of food hand-outs to starving people remained a daunting task, especially where food consignments did not correspond with targeted populations. It has been noted that it is one thing to have sufficient quantities of food hampers delivered to save hungry beneficiaries but the actual distribution of food aid to targeted households is quite another. In some instances, intended beneficiaries were inadvertently excluded. Some unscrupulous and influential people diverted food aid away from deserving cases, resulting in chaotic scenes where the objective to feed vulnerable members of communities was frustrated as the food ended up in wrong hands. In some instances, registers were manipulated by village hands behind Plan International's back to include relatives or friends. The distribution process was complicated by transport problems, poor roads and theft of commodities. More research still needed to be done on how to improve the distribution process so that food deliveries to points of distribution were timely carried out to extinguish hunger and to minimise diversion of food to undeserving members.

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