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Food Security in the Southern African Development Community States

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The 1995–96 cereal harvest in the Southern African Development Community (SADC) is the best within the last ten years. Provisional assessments project a regional maize surplus of 2.08 million tons, a 72% increase in production over the previous year's harvest. Overall cereal production substantially increased in all countries except Tanzania, where the current cereal forecast of 3.73 million tons is a 14% drop from last year's output of 4.34 million tons. Of special note are the exceptionally large increases in the area planted in cereals in war-ravaged Angola and Mozambique, for the first time in many years. Production trebled in Botswana, doubled in Zimbabwe, and ranged from 21% in Malawi to 85% in South Africa.

Although all the SADC states harvested a normal to above-normal crop, only Zimbabwe, Zambia, and South Africa have the capacity to export. The other countries need to import grain from these three to augment strategic grain reserves, especially maize.

Anticipated opening stocks for the 1996–97 marketing year are critically low despite the optimistic cereal supply expectations for the year. Cereal supplies during the period leading to harvest time remained less than satisfactory, particularly in Mozambique, Swaziland, Zimbabwe, and Malawi, because of inadequate import plans and slow delivery rates.

Angola

For the first time in many years, Angola recorded one of the best harvests against a background of war. An FAO/WFP Crop and Food Supply Assessment Mission indicates a 78% increase in cereal harvest, from 273,000 tons in 1994–95 to 485,000 tons in 1995–96. The upswing in production is due to increased plantings following encouraging results of peace talks between the government and the opposition group RENAMO.

Despite the shortage of inputs (seed, fertilizer, and tools), maize production rose by 69%, from 235,000 tons to 387,000 tons. Sorghum production more than doubled, from 38,000 tons to 97,000 tons. Cassava production rose by 21% to 1.43 million tons, compared to the 1994–95 season's harvest of 1.20 million tons.

Though the cereal supply shows improvement, localized food shortages are expected. A domestic cereal deficit of 517,000 tons is projected during 1996–97. Food shortages are expected in most of southern Angola. Central and northern parts of the country harvested some marketable surplus, but much of the surplus is in RENAMO-held territory and therefore inaccessible to people from the south. Emergency food supplies are needed for rural people in the south.

Botswana

Botswana is normally a drought-prone and food-deficit country. The country received exceptionally good rains this year. Cereal production more than trebled, from 22,000 tons in 1994–95 to 88,000 tons this year. However, the country still has an overall cereal shortfall of 215,000 tons. Import requirements have been reduced from a projected 273,000 tons last year to 215,000 tons this year, the lowest since the bumper harvest of 1987.

According to the SADC Early Warning Unit, the food security situation is very satisfactory as the cereal import delivery program initiated in 1995 was on schedule. In fact, 75% of planned imports were already in the country by the end of March 1996.

Food relief and feeding programs are continuing under community-based development programs. A total of 572,000 people are under these programs.

Lesotho

Preliminary forecasts indicate that the country expects about 145,000 tons of cereals. Despite the above-normal harvest, the country still has a cereals deficit of 285,000 tons.

Community-based relief programs continued well into June and benefited up to 600,000 people. In addition, 56,000 children under the age of five are receiving free food.

Malawi

Malawi is a potentially self-sufficient cereals producer. In fact, the country has been a maize exporter for some years but has experienced serious deficits in recent years. The 1995–96 cereal harvest is projected at 2.06 million tons, compared to 1.66 million tons last year. Production could have been much higher had it not been for the low uptake of improved seeds and fertilizers. Flooding in the Nsanje and Karonga districts destroyed a significant amount of crops.

The country's food security situation remains satisfactory despite a 77,000-ton cereal shortfall. Food-for-work programs are still available to vulnerable groups.

Mozambique

The improvement in the security situation in Mozambique also marked a significant increase in the hectarages under cultivation. The country harvested about 1.32 million tons of cereals, compared to 1.09 million tons last year. However, despite the increase in the crop harvests, localized food shortages are still widespread, particularly in the southern provinces, as a result of floods that destroyed crops.

Poor roads are making it difficult to transfer food from the north to the south. The country is expected to import about 490,000 tons of maize and rice. A recent FAO/WFP Mission estimated that about 141,000 tons of cereals are needed as program food aid to help people affected by floods in Maputo and other towns.

Namibia

Namibia, like Botswana, is a net food importer. In 1995–96, it recorded a cereal harvest of 86,000 tons, a 51% rise compared to 1994–95. The current production situation leaves a 117,000-ton grain shortfall that has to be imported. The food security situation is reported to be satisfactory, though. The government's Drought Relief Programme continues to provide free food rations to about 163,000 people.

South Africa

South Africa is one of the three countries in the SADC reporting grain surpluses. Its maize surplus of 1.29 million tons is more than enough to cover the combined maize shortfall of all the SADC states.

Swaziland

Crops were severely affected by waterlogging, weed infestation, and nutrient leaching as a result of heavy rains that pounded the whole country. Though a net importer of grain, the country has achieved near self-sufficiency in recent years. The 1995–96 season was characterized by heavy rains, but cereal output remains on average.

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Food deficits are reported in the lowveld and the dry middleveld. The food security situation remains satisfactory. Relief programs are continuing in food deficit areas.

Tanzania

Tanzania is normally marginally self-sufficient in food, with maize and rice surpluses in some years. The country has serious problems in internal distribution because the road network is in bad condition. This year Tanzania has to import about 635,000 tons of cereals despite recording a surplus the previous year. Total domestic needs are assessed at 4.3 million tons against the estimated current supply of 3.81 million tons.

Though the food security situation is reported to be satisfactory, the number of people who require food aid is expected to rise to more than 620,000 people, mainly because of the large cereal deficit projected for the 1996–97 marketing year and the influx of refugees from Rwanda and Burundi.

Zambia

Like Tanzania, Zambia is marginally self-sufficient in food supplies, with irregular maize surpluses in some years. The 1995–96 harvest is projected at 1.63 million tons, an 85% increase over the previous year. The food security situation is reported to be satisfactory, although localized shortages are expected along the Zambezi in the northwestern province, where floods destroyed crops.

Zimbabwe

Zimbabwe is normally the region's major maize exporter, but has to import some of its wheat. This year the country is one of only three SADC states that recorded a cereals surplus. The country recorded a maize surplus of 210,000 tons, and this maize is expected to be exported. The country's Grain Marketing Board is expected to cancel outstanding import contracts.

Although more than 70% of the country received above-normal rain, localized food shortages in Matabeleland and some parts of southern Masvingo province are expected.

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