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**Promotion and protection of all human rights, civil,  
political, economic, social and cultural rights,  
including the right to development**

## Visit to Zimbabwe

### Report of the Special Rapporteur on the right to food\* \*\*

#### *Summary*

The Special Rapporteur on the right to food, Hilal Elver, conducted an official visit to Zimbabwe from 18 to 28 November 2019, at the invitation of the Government. The mission's objective was to assess all aspects of the right to food in Zimbabwe.

The Special Rapporteur found that despite the constitutional protection of the right to food and a sophisticated set of human rights-based national laws and policies, man-made starvation is slowly making its way in the country, with more than 60 per cent of the population now considered to be food-insecure owing to extreme poverty, high inflation and poor agricultural productivity, among other causes.

The Special Rapporteur called upon the Government to live up to its zero-hunger commitment without any discrimination. She also urged the Government, all political parties and the international community to come together to put an end to this spiralling crisis, by taking steps at the national level to respect the Government's human rights obligations, and internationally, by putting an end to all economic sanctions.

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\* The summary of the report is being circulated in all official languages. The report itself, which is annexed to the summary, is being circulated in English only.

\*\* The present report was submitted after the deadline in order to reflect recent developments.



**Annex****Report of the Special Rapporteur on the right to food on her visit to Zimbabwe****Contents**

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## I. Introduction

1. The Special Rapporteur on the right to food, Hilal Elver, conducted a visit to Zimbabwe at the invitation of the Government from 18 to 28 November 2019, to assess the situation, challenges and good practices concerning all aspects of the right to food.

2. The Special Rapporteur expresses her sincere appreciation to the Government of Zimbabwe for extending an invitation to visit the country. This invitation is itself an expression of the Government's willingness to open its doors to international human rights mechanisms and, with it, to improve its own human rights record. The Special Rapporteur wishes to thank the representatives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Trade and the Ministry of Justice, Legal and Parliamentary Affairs for facilitating and organizing the official meetings. Throughout her 10-day visit, the Special Rapporteur met with the Minister of Local Governance and Public Works; the Minister of Health; the Minister of Finance and Economic Development; the Minister of Public Service, Labour and Social Welfare; and the Director of the Food and Nutrition Council. The Special Rapporteur very much regrets that her repeated requests to meet with the Ministry most relevant to her mandate – that is, the Ministry of Lands, Agriculture, Water and Rural Resettlement – was not honoured.

3. The Special Rapporteur also met with the Zimbabwe Human Rights Commission as well as with farmers' unions and farm workers. She had extensive and fruitful meetings with devoted individuals, peasants, farmers, lawyers, doctors, dieticians, members of non-governmental organizations and activists.

4. The Special Rapporteur would also like to thank the United Nations Resident Coordinator, the United Nations country team and the United Nations Development Programme in Zimbabwe for effectively supporting her team before and throughout the visit. She benefited greatly from the opportunity to exchange views with the diplomatic community and with United Nations agencies in Harare.

5. Throughout her visit, the Special Rapporteur had the opportunity to undertake several field trips. In Harare, she visited Parirenyatwa Hospital and Hupenya Hutsva Children's Home; in Epworth, she visited Makomo Primary School. She also had the opportunity to visit Mwenezi in the province of Masvingo, where she met with the provincial authorities and farmers' communities. In Masvingo, she also visited Shashe Farm and the Agroecology School, an impressive model of ecological farming. In Mwenezi, one of the areas most affected by the food emergency crisis, she met with the beneficiaries of the food distribution efforts of the World Food Programme.

6. The Special Rapporteur wishes to warmly thank the many Zimbabweans who shared their personal stories of hardship, loss and coping mechanisms. From the poorest suburbs of Harare to the drought-affected lands of Masvingo and Mwenezi, their devastating accounts lead to one undeniable conclusion: human rights must be anchored at the very core of the policy agenda of Zimbabwe if the country is to win its fight against hunger and malnutrition.

## II. General overview

7. The Special Rapporteur found that the economic crisis and the widespread drought in the region, further compounded by Cyclone Idai, had led to an escalating food crisis that was affecting a majority of Zimbabweans. According to the International Monetary Fund, the inflation rate reached 300 per cent in August 2019 in a year-on-year comparison, which was the highest in the world. As a result, approximately 2.5 million people have already reached acute food insecurity classification phase 3 ("crisis") and 1.1 million phase 4 ("emergency") on the scale of the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification.<sup>1</sup> According to the classification, some regions of the country are now one step away from famine. Furthermore, the Government estimated that about 2.2 million people in urban areas and 2.3 million people in rural Zimbabwe were in crisis emergency mode and needed food aid.

<sup>1</sup> [reliefweb.int/report/zimbabwe/zimbabwe-food-insecurity-information-bulletin](https://reliefweb.int/report/zimbabwe/zimbabwe-food-insecurity-information-bulletin).

8. A spiralling rate of inflation led to the most basic commodities moving out of reach of vulnerable communities. The cost of food had increased 20-fold over the six months up to August 2019, making the rate of inflation for food products higher than the overall inflation rate. During the same period, the price of maize nearly tripled. The World Food Programme stated that the maize harvest in 2019 was only 50 per cent of that seen in 2018 because the rainy season had been late and inadequate. Because of poor economic and weather conditions, it is likely that the 2020 harvest will also be insufficient. Except for a small number of privileged individuals, the vast majority of Zimbabweans eat insufficient or inadequate food, skip meals, take children out of school, sell their livestock or fall into a vicious cycle of debt.

9. Considering that approximately 60 per cent of the population is already suffering from food insecurity, the World Food Programme has scaled up its food aid programme to try to meet people's needs, prioritizing the areas most severely hit. The Programme needs additional funding to deliver food aid throughout the upcoming lean season in the region. The current crisis will have immense ripple effects across the Zimbabwean population for years to come if measures are not immediately taken by relevant stakeholders. It is essential that the international community commit to supporting organizations, including the World Food Programme, in order to support Zimbabweans and to ensure that the food shortage crisis does not escalate further.

## **A. Historical and political context**

10. In the 1880s, Zimbabwe became a British colony, called Southern Rhodesia. In 1961, a constitution was formulated that favoured whites in power. In 1965, the Government unilaterally declared its independence, but the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland did not recognize the act and demanded more complete voting rights for the black African majority in the country. Sanctions from the United Nations and a guerrilla uprising finally led to free elections in 1979 and independence, as Zimbabwe, in April 1980. Robert Mugabe became Prime Minister, then President in 1987, and remained the sole ruler of the country until the 2017 military coup and his subsequent resignation in November 2017.

11. From its independence until 2009, Zimbabwe was dominated by the Zimbabwe African National Union-Patriotic Front. A strong showing by the opposition group Movement for Democratic Change in the 2008 general election led to the country's first-ever coalition Government in 2009. That Government subsequently fell with the controversial 2013 elections, which were decided in favour of the Zimbabwe African National Union-Patriotic Front, still the ruling party to this day.

12. In 2017, the post-President Mugabe transition sparked celebrations in the streets and gave rise to hopes of recovery for an economy that was crippled during the Mugabe period. In 2018, the electoral commission of Zimbabwe declared that Emmerson Mnangagwa had been elected President with 50.8 per cent of the vote.

## **B. Economic and financial situation**

13. From 2000 to 2008 Zimbabwe experienced severe macroeconomic instability characterized by high inflation. Real gross domestic product (GDP) declined by more than 40 per cent and agricultural output shrank.<sup>2</sup> This resulted in a severe economic and social crisis, which led to food insecurity, with the country becoming a net food importer and a large proportion of the population relying on food aid.

14. The period 2009 to 2012 was marked by an economic rebound, with growth rates averaging 10 per cent per annum. However, after relative stabilization, economic growth

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<sup>2</sup> See Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, International Fund for Agricultural Development, United Nations Children's Fund, World Food Programme and World Health Organization. *The State of Food and Nutrition in the World: Safeguarding against Economic Slowdowns And Downturns* (Rome, Food and Agricultural Organization, 2019).

again declined sharply, from 10.6 per cent in 2012 to 3.8 per cent in 2014, owing to deteriorating trade, a severe drought in 2012–2013 and continued political uncertainty. Zimbabwe was placed 150 out of 189 countries on the United Nations Development Programme’s inequality-adjusted human development index.<sup>3</sup> Revenues from diamonds, platinum and gold-mining – the country’s most productive sector – rarely reach the national treasury. As a result, an insolvent Government was unable to pay civil servants and pensioners on time, instead giving priority to the armed forces and war veterans.

15. Since then, Zimbabwe has been facing challenges relating to fiscal consolidation and financial stabilization. Until 2019, the Reserve Bank of Zimbabwe printed money to fund the budget deficit, but this caused high inflation. Therefore, a multi-currency basket was adopted, allowing various currencies, including the United States dollar, to be used locally in order to reduce inflation. Meanwhile, international financial institutions require Zimbabwe to implement significant fiscal and structural reforms before granting new loans. Fiscal imbalances remain at the core of the country’s financial crisis. External debts prevented Zimbabwe from gaining access to international capital markets.

16. The country also faces challenges due to the continued imposition of economic sanctions, which has hampered the realization of human rights, especially socioeconomic rights, and impacted the livelihoods of ordinary people. In addition, despite adherence to the minimum standards, Zimbabwe still faces hurdles in selling its diamonds on the international markets. This has resulted in depressed revenue inflows into Government coffers, thus making it difficult for the Government to allocate adequate resources towards social spending.

17. The country’s economic crisis led to drastically reduced household incomes. The main challenges faced by households were reported to be high inflation and its correlated price increases for basic needs; low salaries; many forced layoffs due to economic contraction; lack of livelihood options; and high exchange rates. The food poverty line for an average household of five persons was 639 United States dollars as of July 2019. At least 38 per cent of urban households are considered to be poor and 10 per cent extremely poor. The inflation rate was informally recorded at 481 per cent and 521 per cent in November and December 2019, respectively, while the Government suspended the calculation and publication of annual inflation rates until February 2020.

18. The poor performance of the economy negatively affected the livelihoods of rural and urban households, with up to 81.5 per cent of households suffering from cash shortages. Prices of cereal increased by up to 78.8 per cent, while salaries remained low.<sup>4</sup> The proportion of household expenditure on food rose to 68 per cent, compared with 55 per cent in 2018. This proportion keeps on increasing owing to high inflation.

### **III. Legal and policy framework on the right to food**

#### **A. International and regional levels**

19. Despite facing a series of economic and political crises, Zimbabwe is one of the few countries where the right to food is explicitly recognized in the Constitution.

20. As a State party to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, Zimbabwe has a duty to respect, protect and fulfil the right to an adequate standard of living and, specifically, the right to adequate food (art. 11, para. 1) and the right to be free from hunger (art. 11, para. 2). Zimbabwe has committed to take the appropriate steps, to the maximum of its available resources, to ensure the realization of this right. However, the Government has not ratified the Optional Protocol to the Covenant.

21. The right to food is an inclusive right and should be understood holistically to encompass other related rights, including the rights to health, housing, social security, water

<sup>3</sup> [hdr.undp.org/en/countries/profiles/ZWE](http://hdr.undp.org/en/countries/profiles/ZWE).

<sup>4</sup> Southern African Development Community, “Synthesis report on the state of food and nutrition security and vulnerability in Southern Africa” (Gaborone, SADC Secretariat, 2019), p. 21.

and sanitation, a healthy environment, access to decent work and land, as well as to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly, all of which are based on the principle of non-discrimination.

22. The right to food requires unrestricted access and opportunities to produce food for one's own consumption, or to have a job that generates sufficient income for the purchasing of food. This right extends to everyone, including agricultural workers engaged in food production, as well as consumers (A/73/164). The right incurs an obligation for States to implement programmes aimed at ensuring freedom from hunger and malnutrition, including through the development or reform of agrarian systems.

23. In its general comment No. 12 (1999) on the right to adequate food, the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights highlights the interrelatedness of the right to food with other social and economic dimensions and other human rights. The Committee affirms that the right to adequate food is indivisibly linked to the inherent dignity of the human person and is indispensable for the fulfilment of other human rights enshrined in the International Bill of Human Rights. It is also inseparable from social justice, requiring the adoption of appropriate economic, environmental and social policies, at both the national and international levels, oriented to the eradication of poverty and the fulfilment of all human rights for all.<sup>5</sup>

24. In its general comment, the Committee details the normative contents of the right to food, including availability, accessibility, adequacy and sustainability, and elaborates on access to remedies in cases of violations.<sup>6</sup> It also states that the right to adequate food is realized when every man, woman and child, alone or in community with others, has physical and economic access at all times to adequate food or means for its procurement.<sup>7</sup>

25. Zimbabwe is party to other core international human rights treaties relevant to the right to food including the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

26. Zimbabwe also ratified a number of regional treaties, all relevant to the right to food and to be free from hunger, including the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights, the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, the Treaty Establishing the African Economic Community, the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights, the Protocol on the Rights of Women in Africa and the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Establishment of an African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights.

## **B. National level**

27. Zimbabwe must be commended for its constitutional protection of the right to food and a sophisticated set of human rights-based national laws and policies on food and nutrition.

### **1. Legal framework**

28. In 2013, Zimbabwe adopted a new Constitution, which guarantees civil and political, economic, social and cultural rights and confirms the State's responsibility to protect, promote and realize human rights.

29. The right to adequate food is explicitly enshrined in article 77 (b) of the 2013 Constitution of Zimbabwe, which stipulates that every person has the right to sufficient food and that the State must take reasonable legislative and other measures, within the limits of

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<sup>5</sup> Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights general comment No. 12 (1999) on the right to adequate food, para. 4.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., para. 32.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., para. 6.

the resources available to it, to achieve the progressive realization of that right. Articles 11, 15, 19 (2), 21 (2), and 81 (1) also provide for the right to food in special circumstances.

30. The Constitution also brought about the establishment of the Constitutional Court and requires the Government to ensure that all international conventions, treaties and agreements to which Zimbabwe is a party are incorporated into domestic law. In that regard, a domestication strategy was adopted to accelerate the ratification of international instruments and incorporate them into domestic law.

31. The Special Rapporteur also welcomes the institutionalization of the promotion of human rights through the establishment of the Zimbabwe Human Rights Commission by the Government, and wishes to emphasize the need to ensure that the Commission is adequately funded so as to ensure that it is able to discharge its constitutional obligations without any hindrance.

## **2. Institutional framework**

### **(a) Policies**

32. Zimbabwe has adopted a number of excellent human rights-based policies to implement the right to food, with effective benchmarks and implementation plans that give due consideration to gender issues and to the most vulnerable segments of society, including smallholder farmers. Among these policies are the National Nutrition Strategy, the Zimbabwe Agenda for Sustainable Socio-Economic Transformation (Zim Asset), the Zimbabwe Agriculture Investment Plan, the Comprehensive Agricultural Policy Framework, the National Policy on Drought Management and the Food Deficit Mitigation Programme.

33. All of these policies establish authorities and agencies responsible for implementation and provide for proper supervision and accountability mechanisms to promote the full and active participation of all interested parties, including those most vulnerable.

34. The Special Rapporteur wishes to particularly praise the work undertaken by the Food and Nutrition Council to anchor the country's food and nutrition policies in human rights standards and urges the Government of Zimbabwe to provide the Food and Nutrition Council with sufficient funding to carry out its crucial mandate.

### **(b) Programmes supporting the agriculture sector**

35. Agricultural support has greatly expanded in recent years to an estimated direct fiscal cost of 4.2 per cent of GDP in 2018, up from less than 1 per cent in 2013.<sup>8</sup>

36. In recent years, the production of maize was subjected to subsidies to maintain food security. According to the International Monetary Fund, a grain subsidization programme for the purchase and sale of maize was a fundamental driver of the 2018 fiscal deficit, costing nearly RTGS\$1.1 billion.<sup>9</sup> The losses on operations stemmed from the difference between the guaranteed purchase price for maize, versus a prevailing regional market price, and the subsidized selling price. While maize represents the bulk of the agricultural price subsidy costs, similar price guarantee schemes have been put in place for other crops, including wheat, with similar loss-making price differentials.

37. Several input subsidy schemes have been implemented to assist farmers by providing them with free or heavily subsidized inputs (mainly seeds and fertilizers). The Presidential Agricultural Input Support Scheme and the Command Agriculture programme are the central programmes of the Government's agricultural input system.

#### *Presidential Agricultural Input Support Scheme*

38. In 2011, the Presidential Agricultural Input Support Scheme was introduced to guarantee household food security, providing maize seed and fertilizer and targeting

<sup>8</sup> International Monetary Fund, "Zimbabwe: staff-monitored program—press release and staff report", IMF Country Report No. 19/144 (Washington, D.C., International Monetary Fund, 2019), p. 13.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

smallholder farmers irrespective of agroecological region. The Scheme was launched for the 2013–2014 farming season, targeting 1.6 million households at a total cost of 161 million United States dollars.<sup>10</sup> The input packages were mainly distributed through the Grain Marketing Board depots throughout the country. However, this became a major challenge for the Scheme, as the depots of the Board are not available to all farming communities, and very often the Board failed to deliver inputs on time for the planting season, as a result of logistical hurdles.

39. Recently, free direct-input distributions have been minimized in favour of the use of subsidized vouchers and contract-farming arrangements. The use of electronic vouchers has also been tested by the Ministry of Agriculture, Mechanization and Irrigation Development. The e-vouchers system gives farmers the choice of the inputs they need, but they are also required to contribute to the voucher's cost. E-vouchers might exclude smallholder farmers who face difficulty in using or accessing technology. The system is struggling to deliver the packages to farmers in a timely fashion because of financial problems. Considering that this programme targets smallholder farmers, it is vitally important to keep it alive.

#### *Targeted Command Agriculture programme*

40. In August 2016, the Government introduced the Targeted Command Agriculture programme, aimed at ensuring food self-sufficiency and promoting commercial farming. The Command Agriculture programme is the main vehicle for the authorities to spur agricultural production, mostly by focusing on the provision of loan guarantees to farmers for the purchase of inputs. The programme targets farmers residing near water bodies who could manage a minimum of 200 hectares of production per individual. Each participating farmer was required to commit to 5 tons of harvested crops per hectare towards repayment of advanced loans in the form of irrigation equipment, inputs and chemicals, mechanized equipment, electricity and water charges. Farmers were allowed to retain a surplus product produced in excess.

41. The default rate on these loans has been very high (above 35 per cent), with strategic default and off-selling playing an important role.<sup>11</sup> Despite these drawbacks, and the large fiscal costs, the Ministry of Lands, Agriculture and Rural Resettlement remains committed to the possibility of further expanding it into other agricultural commodities. The Command Agriculture programme has been criticized, however, for its high financial cost, heavy burden on the budget and low returns.

42. The Special Rapporteur considers that overall, Government inputs should be improved to support the agricultural sector while rationalizing expenditures, and should carefully target the beneficiaries and give priorities to subsistence and smallholder farmers. The Special Rapporteur also takes note of the 2019 budget, which envisages a gradual phasing out of these subsidies, allowing the private sector to take the lead in driving sustainable growth in the agricultural sector. This could indeed generate significant productivity improvements, which is low by regional standards, but requires a reorientation of support to improving infrastructure, extension services, human capital and access to finance.

## **IV. Normative content of the right to food**

### **A. Availability**

43. The availability of food is predicated on the existence of sufficient food produced from natural resources or for sale in the market to satisfy the needs of the population, whether by cultivating land or by engaging in animal husbandry, fishing, hunting or any other ways

<sup>10</sup> Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, "Country fact sheet on food and agriculture policy trends: socio-economic context and role of agriculture" (August 2016). Available at [www.fao.org/3/a-i6022e.pdf](http://www.fao.org/3/a-i6022e.pdf).

<sup>11</sup> International Monetary Fund, "Zimbabwe: Staff-monitored program—press release and staff report", IMF Country Report No. 19/144 (Washington, D.C., International Monetary Fund, 2019), p. 13.

of obtaining food (A/HRC/34/48/Add.1, para. 24). The Government is constitutionally responsible for ensuring the availability of food and for the development of local food production.

44. Currently, 60 per cent of the country's population of more than 14 million is considered food-insecure, living in a household that is unable to obtain enough food to meet basic needs.<sup>12</sup> In 2020, the food security situation is expected to worsen with an estimated 8 million people needing urgent action to save livelihoods.

45. Widespread poverty, limited employment opportunities, liquidity challenges, a pervasive climate of corruption, economic instability, the mismanagement of funds, natural disasters, recurrent droughts, and economic sanctions and conditionalities, all contribute to the country's current crisis.

46. According to recent data released by the Zimbabwe Vulnerability Assessment Committee (ZimVAC), a staggering 5.5 million people (38 per cent of the population) are currently facing food insecurity. Adverse weather conditions halved the 2019 cereal harvest in Zimbabwe. The number of food-insecure people is expected to almost double in early 2020 compared with the same period in the prior year. The peasant community, which produces 70 per cent of staple foods (maize, millet and groundnuts), is particularly vulnerable. It has access to less than 5 per cent of the irrigation facilities and is struggling to access productive resources owing to cash shortages.

47. According to the 2019 Integrated Food Security Phase Classification analysis,<sup>13</sup> a total of 25 per cent of the rural population are estimated to be at Classification phase 3 ("Crisis") or phase 4 ("Emergency") levels of food insecurity and face moderate to large food consumption gaps. Moreover, agricultural labour opportunities have been limited owing to poor productivity, hence affecting the most vulnerable segments of the country's population.

48. Throughout the last few years the weather conditions in Southern Africa had a detrimental impact on the agriculture. El Niño affected the first half of the agricultural season, from October to December 2018, which resulted in a delayed start of the season. The second half was characterized by prolonged dry spells. In 2019, the eastern and southern parts of Zimbabwe were affected by Cyclone Idai. These climate shocks – droughts and floods – exacerbated by the effects of the fall army worm (a pest of the *Lepidopteran* order) resulted in a significantly reduced crop harvest.

49. The Special Rapporteur witnessed the consequences of this emergency food crisis in the province of Masvingo and the district of Mwenzezi where the drought hit hard. The women and men she spoke to told her that they ate only one portion of sadza (maize porridge) a day.

50. Additionally, households have been affected by animal diseases, which contributed to two thirds of cattle deaths, induced by water shortages and other scarcities. Livestock being the most important asset of rural communities in periods of food crises, the income for these households has fallen sharply.

51. Although the immediate obligation to provide food aid is the duty of a country's government, in times of emergency the international community has the responsibility to help countries in dire situations. In Zimbabwe, the international humanitarian response system has been essential in reducing the negative effects of Cyclone Idai and the repeated droughts on food security, although it was not enough to compensate for the damage.

52. The Special Rapporteur notes that the imposition of economic sanctions, conditionalities and past fiscal deficiencies all contributed to a negative image of the country, thereby adversely impacting the level of international aid to Zimbabwe, in comparison to neighbouring countries that suffered similar adverse effects from Cyclone Idai.

<sup>12</sup> See Zimbabwe Vulnerability Assessment Committee, "Food and nutrition security update report: February 2020". Available at [fnc.org.zw/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/ZimVAC-2020-Food-and-Nutrition-Security-Update-Report.pdf](https://fnc.org.zw/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/ZimVAC-2020-Food-and-Nutrition-Security-Update-Report.pdf).

<sup>13</sup> [ipcinfo.org/fileadmin/user\\_upload/ipcinfo/docs/IPC\\_Zimbabwe\\_Acute%20Food%20Insecurity\\_2019June2019Dec.pdf](https://ipcinfo.org/fileadmin/user_upload/ipcinfo/docs/IPC_Zimbabwe_Acute%20Food%20Insecurity_2019June2019Dec.pdf).

53. Many humanitarian agencies complained to the Special Rapporteur about the difficulties they faced in getting clear figures on the Government's stock levels of maize and wheat staples and expressed serious worries that the current stock may be too low to cover the urgent needs of the most-affected communities beyond January 2020. However, Government representatives also ensured the Special Rapporteur that the shortage of maize importation would be liberalized to overcome food insecurity for the most vulnerable sections of the society.

54. The Special Rapporteur is worried that without access to adequate food and a diversified diet, Zimbabweans, particularly younger children living in rural areas and among the low-income suburban population, will barely survive, and if they do, will have to face a variety of health and developmental challenges. Even short periods of hunger and malnutrition have long-lasting impacts on children under 2 years of age. The situation is very severe, and urgent action is needed to protect future generations.

55. The Special Rapporteur urgently calls upon the Government, humanitarian agencies and the donor community to see this crisis as an opportunity to lend primary support not only in the form of urgent food aid, but also through long-term development and production-oriented support to smallholder farmers, especially women. This would help shift the current food and agriculture systems towards more diversified, sustainable food production and consumption systems.

## **B. Accessibility**

56. The current economic and financial crisis, a heavy tax system due to the imposition of austerity measures, unpredictable inflation rates, high levels of unemployment and low wages all contribute to the food insecurity crisis affecting a total of approximately 8 million persons in urban households and rural communities. About 76.8 per cent of the urban households are below the food poverty line. While they are able to meet their cereal requirements, they are unable to meet their other basic needs. Although there are differences among the regions, approximately 93 per cent of households are below the total consumption poverty line.<sup>14</sup>

57. The energy crisis also negatively affected food security. The proportion of urban households using electricity for cooking decreased from 60 per cent in 2018 to 36.9 per cent in 2019. The proportion of households using wood for cooking increased from 26 per cent in 2018 to 52.7 per cent in 2019, which led to further deforestation.

58. The Special Rapporteur witnessed the consequences of the disastrous economic crisis on the streets of Harare, with people spending long hours queuing for fuel, as well as in front of banks to get cash, and in shops to obtain cooking oil, gas or water. The Special Rapporteur visited local supermarkets in Harare where she observed that while an ample amount of diversified food was available on the market, high inflation rates and food prices prevented a majority of Zimbabweans from purchasing it. The Zimbabweans in Harare and its suburbs explained that the erosion of their incomes combined with an inflation skyrocketing to more than 490 per cent, made food inaccessible to them. Affordable basic commodities should be available on the market for households with reasonable to low incomes, in order to reduce the burden on social welfare.

59. As a consequence of the drought and food insecurity crisis hitting the rural parts of Zimbabwe, waves of people have escaped to cities in search of job opportunities to improve their access to food and other public services. Most of them have ended up living in the informal settlements that are multiplying in the suburbs of Harare. Among other risks, contagious diseases, including an outbreak of cholera, might be expanding quickly in Harare and other urban settings throughout the country. These outbreaks are likely to increase owing to the use of unsafe water and open sewage.

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<sup>14</sup> Zimbabwe Vulnerability Assessment Committee, "2019 Urban Livelihood Assessment Report", Powerpoint presentation, 2019, p. 107. Available at [fnc.org.zw/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/ZimVAC-2019-Urban-Livelihoods-Assessment-Report.pdf](https://fnc.org.zw/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/ZimVAC-2019-Urban-Livelihoods-Assessment-Report.pdf).

60. The Special Rapporteur visited one of the settlements located in Chiko, in the south of Harare. Approximately 5,000 people were living in inhumane conditions without any infrastructure, jobs, hope or help. One resident told her: “I do not think the Government even knows we exist.” All reported that they were not able to afford more than one meal a day, mostly consisting of sadza.

61. The Special Rapporteur also received disturbing information that public hospitals had been reaching out to humanitarian organizations after their own food stocks were exhausted and medical equipment no longer operational. She observed the failure of the health system when she visited Parirenyatwa Hospital, which was nearly empty, because of a doctors’ strike against their low wages and lack of resources.

62. The most vulnerable segments of society, including the elderly, children and women, are forced to rely upon coping mechanisms such as school dropout, early marriage and the sex trade to obtain food, behavioural patterns that are often accompanied by domestic violence. This kind of struggle for subsistence affects their physical well-being and creates behaviour and conditions that violate their most fundamental human rights.

### C. Adequacy: acute malnutrition

63. The country’s food production dramatically decreased with consequences on the nutrition and diet of Zimbabweans, which severely lacks diversity and remains largely dependent on maize. Despite the Government’s intentions to diversify agricultural production and encourage the culture of traditional seeds, including millet, groundnuts or round nuts, the Special Rapporteur observed that the vast majority of public expenditure on seeds in 2018 and 2019 had been channelled towards the production and import of maize. Subsidies were also used to encourage the maize sector, instead of traditional food production. Considering the importance of a diversified and nutritious diet to build Zimbabweans’ resilience to the current economic and climate change-related shocks, the Special Rapporteur strongly supports the Government in its strategy to intensify efforts to diversify the agricultural production and to support alternatives to maize.

64. In times of emergency, there is a tendency to think about food quantity, instead of its quality. However, even a short-term poor diet creates severe malnutrition that has a long-term adverse impact on children under 2 years of age. Indeed, the first 1,000 days of life determine a person’s physical and intellectual development (A/71/282).<sup>15</sup> It is estimated that children who receive appropriate nutrition during this period are 10 times more likely to survive potentially fatal childhood diseases. Similarly, well-nourished mothers are more likely to have infants with healthy birth weights, and such children are less likely to ever suffer from malnutrition.

65. Chronic malnutrition and stunting is endemic throughout the country, where an alarming 90 per cent of children aged 6 to 24 months do not consume the minimal diet to survive. The vast majority of children the Special Rapporteur met in the rural parts of Masvingo and in Mwenezi, as well as in informal settings in the suburbs of Harare, appeared severely stunted and underweight owing to reduced food availability. Nevertheless, Zimbabweans are more resilient against malnutrition compared with other countries, thanks to the available natural resources, which provide a diverse diet, especially in rural areas.

66. The situation is more serious in urban settings. The dieticians and paediatricians the Special Rapporteur met in Parirenyatwa Hospital in Harare explained that the death of children from malnutrition had been on the rise in the last few months. The Special Rapporteur herself witnessed the ravaging effects of malnutrition on infants deprived of breast milk and micronutrient supplementation because of their own mothers’ lack of access to adequate food. Children are often fed only with sadza, which is not sufficiently nutritious. At times, they eat some vegetables, mostly cabbage.

<sup>15</sup> Sarah Cusick, PhD and Michael K. Georgieff, MD, “The first 1,000 days of life: the brain’s window of opportunity”, United Nations Children’s Fund. Accessed on 23 March 2020.

67. Child-feeding practices remained suboptimal across all urban areas where there was an urgent need for a multisectoral approach to food and nutrition. These approaches should focus on improving child-feeding practices, promoting the consumption of diversified diets and the safe storage and preparation of food.

68. As a direct consequence of the economic and food crisis in the country, most of the public schools in Harare are no longer able to continue their school feeding programmes. At best, some schools are able to offer one meal a week per classroom. School feeding programmes are vital to prevent school dropouts. During the Special Rapporteur's visit, a significant proportion of children were out of school owing to financial constraints. The Government should invest more resources to assist vulnerable children and regularly regulate the prices of school fees and levies. It is commendable that the education and health sectors received the highest allocations of 10.7 billion and 6.5 billion Zimbabwe dollars, respectively.<sup>16</sup>

69. The Special Rapporteur calls upon the Government to fulfil the obligation of the right to food by providing food assistance throughout this period of food insecurity emergency and ensure that social safety nets are established for the most-deprived segments of its population, without any form of discrimination and with respect to the principles of transparency and accountability.

70. However, food assistance does not mean that the human right to food is respected. The right to food is only fulfilled if people are able to access productive resources, or have employment opportunities that enable them to buy available food. Food assistance is only necessary in times of emergency, which is currently the situation in Zimbabwe.

#### **D. Sustainability**

71. Although cyclical drought episodes have marked the history of Southern African countries, they are further compounded by the natural disasters that are related to the current climate emergency and that are occurring more often, with stronger and long-lasting consequences and damages. In addition to the periodic drought that affected the 2018–2019 agricultural season, in March 2019, Zimbabwe was struck by Cyclone Idai, which caused a flood-induced disaster and left a trail of devastation in the greater part of the eastern highlands and some areas in the southern part of the country, destroying most of the expected harvest.

72. The Government of Zimbabwe should prepare for future droughts and floods carefully and make sure that all mitigation and adaptation measures are developed and implemented with the full and effective participation of those concerned. Disaster risk management, early warning systems, and climate- and ecosystem-friendly production methods are widely available, and could ease the pain when droughts and floods hit the country.

73. Agroecological practices have proved to be successful in many parts of the world, not only in the production of impressive yields but also the promotion of environmentally friendly practices providing livelihoods to local communities and reducing rural poverty.

74. During her visit, the Special Rapporteur had the opportunity to visit the Agroecology School in the village of Shashe, in the province of Masvingo, which offers great inspiration for emancipatory rural initiatives. Hundreds of peasant families share the farming and grazing plots in Shashe, producing a variety of food crops, medicinal plants and roots, and herding livestock. A significant number of those families save, reproduce and reuse their own seeds. Farming is still the most important source of income and livelihood, despite the dryness of the soil, and continuous drought. Shashe peasant families have even been able to sell some of the surplus production, to Masvingo City markets.

75. The Shashe Agroecology School also promotes farmer-to-farmer training programmes that are based on traditional knowledge systems and that work to incorporate the principles of agroecology and food sovereignty. While visiting the school, the Special Rapporteur met with a group of women small-scale farmers who travelled from the province of Mashonaland Central to share their experiences as contract farmers in tobacco plantations

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<sup>16</sup> Zimbabwe Peace Project, "Monthly monitoring report" (November 2019), p. 2.

and to learn new practices to improve their production and working conditions. Such training programmes should be supported by the Government and disseminated throughout the country.

76. Among the most important features guiding the school is the implementation of sustainable ways of living and reproduction. No chemicals are ever used, the production of healthy food being the school's main philosophy. The school's strategies constantly adapt to the versatility of weather patterns, thus demonstrating that a sustainable production of food items is possible in the long term, despite the effects of climate change. More importantly, the diversification of food production will undoubtedly help address the malnutrition problem, and release the country from its dependency on maize.

77. The Government's climate-change and disaster-response policies should fully integrate the protection of peoples' access to food in times of emergency. These efforts should pay special attention to those who are especially vulnerable, including farmers, fisherfolk and rural populations, and take into account a gender perspective.

78. In this context, the Special Rapporteur refers to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, to which the Government has committed itself, and in particular Sustainable Development Goal 2, on ending hunger, achieving food security and improved nutrition, and promoting sustainable agriculture. The governmental policy should carefully pick the production methods that fit the geography and climate conditions of the particular region and implement appropriate agroecological practices rather than industrial monoculture systems that will have significant detrimental effects on the climate.

## **V. Structural obstacles to the realization of the right to food**

79. Beyond the current food crisis, the Special Rapporteur observed structural and systemic obstacles to the realization of the right to food in Zimbabwe. In addition to not having secure land tenure, major constraints affecting the agricultural sector include limited access to market information, unreliable supply of affordable inputs, lack of agricultural financing, high transportation costs due to inadequate road infrastructure, inadequate irrigation systems and vulnerability to weather-related shocks. Since 2000, the country has experienced a negative trend in the production and productivity of its main staple cereals, maize and wheat, which has compromised national and household food and nutrition security.

### **A. Agriculture and land system**

80. As Zimbabweans remain largely a rural people who derive their livelihood from agriculture and other related rural economic activities, agriculture is the backbone of the country's economy, contributing 15 to 20 per cent of the GDP and providing livelihoods for about 70 per cent of the population. As the main source of livelihood for the majority of the population, the performance of agriculture is a key determinant of rural resilience, poverty eradication, and social and political cohesion.

81. Zimbabwe has a number of distinct farming systems, which reflect historical land allocation and tenures as well as natural resources and available technologies. Upon achieving independence in 1980, after close to 100 years of British rule, Zimbabwe inherited a dual agricultural system: large-scale commercial farms and small-scale communal land, with the former mainly held in freehold and the latter de jure owned by the President, but de facto communally owned. Communal ownership confers individual rights to plots for houses, gardens and fields with shared and unlimited access to grazing land.

82. The foundations for this division of land were laid in the earlier part of the century. The means for doing so were expropriation, the legal segregation of the market in land – through the Land Apportionment Act of 1930 – and the gradual and often forced removal of so-called “black squatters” from the “white” areas. The position of white farmers was further bolstered by price discrimination against black peasants in the produce markets and various interventionist measures by the State. These policies combined to produce and maintain

cheap labour for employment in the mines, manufacturing business, farms and homes owned by whites.<sup>17</sup>

83. Land and access to it are of enormous value to Zimbabweans as the society is emotionally, traditionally and economically connected to the land. The seriousness of the issue of land reform is undeniable in a country where, prior to 1980, a total of 5,700 white farmers owned half the productive area and black peasants were relegated to mostly inferior land in the drier, drought-ridden parts of the country. The Government of Zimbabwe began its land reforms to address the imbalances in land access, ownership and use that had existed in the country before independence. Several reforms were implemented over the years, with corresponding modifications to the law and redistribution targets.

#### *Land redistribution*

84. The major land redistribution campaign began during the Mugabe period in the 1980s and intensified in 2000, causing the expulsion of white farmers and, in some cases, farm workers. According to many interlocutors that the Special Rapporteur met with, the land reform altered the landscape of Zimbabwean agriculture and, over the years, bore serious negative effects on productivity.

85. The Fast Track Land Reform programme, which generated significant attention in Southern Africa and beyond, was introduced in 2001 to speed up the redistribution of land.

86. Officially the land was divided into either smallholder production units or commercial farms, known as A1 and A2 schemes, respectively.

87. However, the reform has not delivered the outcomes the Government intended. Instead, it resulted in a complex system, which structurally weakened the country's agricultural infrastructure and contributed to its deteriorating social and economic conditions, in particular the right to food.

88. The land was redistributed without facilitating and arranging access of the new small-scale farmers to the necessary technical and infrastructural resources. Meanwhile, commercial farms were divided without clear infrastructural, financial, institutional and technical support. Throughout the last two decades, these uncertainties around land tenure have multiplied and continue to contribute to today's food insecurity crisis.

89. Communal lands were generally situated in less fertile, non-arable land and highly populated areas. As a result, the quality of soil and water deteriorated while productivity decreased. In the meantime, commercial farmers were either entirely expropriated or lost significant portions of their lands. Before the land reform, as few as 4,000 commercial farmers owned 7.6 million hectares, or 20 per cent of the total land area in the country. In the aftermath of the land reform, approximately 160,000 families resettled in those areas. Although statistics are contested, it is widely accepted that 90 per cent of the land formerly owned by white farmers were transferred to landless Zimbabweans, with war veterans being treated with special favour.

90. Land allocations are made through "offer letters", which have reportedly been assigned to ministers and other high-level officials, without any formal guidelines for these allocations. The reallocation of land and farms expropriated from commercial farmers was reportedly done on a political basis, without any consideration given to whether or not the new tenants possessed the needed agricultural skills. As a result, many hectares of land were left abandoned and unexploited, or were managed by absent farmers – through so-called "cell phone farmers" – while the existing tools, irrigation facilities and infrastructures slowly deteriorated.

91. Moreover, according to information the Special Rapporteur received, there did not seem to be any security of tenure or respect of property rights: at any given time, lands could be confiscated and reallocated to individuals deemed more loyal to the ruling party. Although such allegations are contested, a climate of uncertainty surrounds the security of land tenure.

<sup>17</sup> Sam Moyo and Tor Skalness, "Land reform and development strategy in Zimbabwe: State autonomy, class and agrarian lobby", *Afrika Focus*, vol. 6, No. 3–4 (1990), pp. 201–242.

This situation discourages long-term investments, since obtaining credit from commercial banks is very difficult.

92. Given the gross historical inequalities around access and ownership of land in Zimbabwe that were an aspect of the colonial legacy, pressure arose to find ways to redress the injustices of the past with respect to land ownership. However, to avoid harming the agricultural system and social fabric of the country, the land reform needed to be carried out in a responsible manner. This meant that property rights were not to be contested and needed to be protected, sustainable food production promoted and food security maintained. On the basis of information received, this had not been done, which explains a large portion of the troubles currently experienced by Zimbabwe.

#### *Poor agricultural productivity*

93. Poor agricultural productivity is one of the root causes of today's severe food insecurity and poverty in Zimbabwe.

94. General challenges facing smallholder farmers (A1 scheme) include low and erratic rainfall, especially since these lands are non-arable and access to water is very problematic; low and declining soil fertility due to intensive agriculture; low investment; shortages of farm labour; lack of support by public institutions in relation to credit, agricultural extension services, and inadequate and late subsidies; difficulty accessing markets; and overall poor physical and institutional infrastructures.

95. Commercial farmers do well in the tobacco, cut-flower and cotton industries, in contrast to maize. These successful spheres of the country's economic activity enjoy access to large foreign markets. Maize, however, is confronted by market uncertainties, and is not resistant to droughts.

## **B. Economic sanctions and conditionalities**

96. The Special Rapporteur is also concerned about the negative impacts of the economic sanctions and conditionalities imposed on the Government of Zimbabwe and the resulting indirect costs on the overall civilian population, particularly on the right to food.

97. Zimbabwe has been under some form of sanctions since 2001. These targeted measures were imposed in reaction to economic mismanagement, human rights abuses and the way in which the land reform programme had been handled. The original rationale advanced for imposing sanctions on Zimbabwe was that such measures would influence a change in the behaviour and policies of the Government and those that presided over the perceived abuses. The stated intention of these sanctions was to impose restrictions on Zimbabwean individuals and entities that have not upheld the rule of law and have participated in human rights abuses. By limiting access to economic resources for individuals and entities, sanctions would also limit their capacity to sustain repression against their own people.

98. Zimbabwe is under three categories of economic sanctions adopted by the United States of America, which are under the Zimbabwe Democracy and Economic Recovery Act, the African Growth and Opportunity Act and the Office of Foreign Asset Control. In 2012, an Economic and Partnership Agreement entered into force between the European Union and Zimbabwe. Under the Agreement, Zimbabwe has privileged tariff- and quota-free access to the European Union market and enjoys a trade surplus with the European Union. In early 2019, the European Union eased its sanction regime against Zimbabwe.

99. Although targeted sanctions for individuals and institutions have been successful in some areas, in many cases, sanctions have had detrimental humanitarian effects. Sanctions against Zimbabwe have worsened the economy and negatively affected livelihoods, particularly the most vulnerable groups, including underprivileged children and mothers.<sup>18</sup> Sanctions contribute to creating a hostile environment for business, international trade and

<sup>18</sup> Carren Pindiri, "Taking stock of the impact of sanctions on livelihood and poverty in Zimbabwe", *Defence and Peace Economics* (4 September 2019).

foreign investment. They also contribute to the overall atmosphere of corruption, uncertainty, food insecurity and unemployment, particularly in times of emergency. Economic sanctions gradually exacerbated existing inequalities and did not have a meaningful impact on their supposed targets.

100. The conditionalities under the Zimbabwe Democracy and Economic Recovery Act, coupled with the failure by the Government to clear its arrears, make it extremely difficult to access credit lines from international financial institutions as well as loan scheduling and debt cancellation.<sup>19</sup> Such conditions clearly diminish the ability of the Government to meet its obligation to adequately feed its people.

101. Given the current economic and food emergencies in the country, the Special Rapporteur urges concerned member States, development partners and international financial institutions, including the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, to ease the conditions imposed on the deployment of funds to the Government for almost two decades. Similarly, the Special Rapporteur urges the termination of all sanctions, which could be used by the Government as an excuse for its poor economic performance. She also urges the Government to initiate the promised legal reforms to fulfil its human rights obligations, notably the rights to freedoms of expression, assembly and association, which are the necessary foundations of a human rights-based approach to food security.

### **C. Partisan distribution of food**

102. The Special Rapporteur received allegations about partisan distribution of food aid, favouring those who support the ruling party, the Zimbabwe African National Union-Patriotic Front. Individuals or communities perceived as belonging to the opposition or deemed insufficiently loyal to the ruling party, are reportedly being deprived of their right to food, including in the regions most affected by the food crisis.

103. The Special Rapporteur took note of the explanation of the Minister of Public Service, Labour and Social Welfare, according to which the Government follows a set of criteria provided by the Food and Nutrition Council to identify the most vulnerable individuals who could benefit from food distribution.

104. In accordance with the Constitution of Zimbabwe, the Government should permit all people to have access to food aid without any reference to their regional origin or residence, or political affiliation. The Government should instruct local authorities in charge of beneficiary and distribution lists to abide by the principle of non-discrimination and to follow the criteria set up by the Food and Nutrition Council. The Government should also monitor the food distribution at the local level to investigate these incidents when they occur. Moreover, efforts should be made to ensure access to highly vulnerable populations first, such as women and children head of households, the elderly, persons with disabilities and those affected by HIV/AIDS.

## **VI. Population groups requiring special attention**

105. Throughout her mission, the Special Rapporteur found that some groups or individuals, including farm workers, women and children, faced severe discrimination and obstacles to their enjoyment of the right to food that required a special focus.

### **A. Farm workers**

106. Agricultural workers play a critical role in achieving food security and fulfilling the universal human right to adequate food. They are, however, among the most food-insecure,

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<sup>19</sup> Zimbabwe became ineligible for multilateral loans in 1999, well before the adoption of the Zimbabwe Democracy and Economic Recovery Act, because it stopped repaying loans owed to the international financial institutions.

facing formidable barriers to the realization of their right to food, often working without labour and employment protections, and under dangerous conditions.

107. In Zimbabwe, farm workers, particularly of foreign origin, are the invisible and unheard victims of the current food crisis. Following the implementation of the Fast Track Land Reform programme and the subsequent expropriation of commercial farms, people working the lands were left without any safety nets, with no social protection or minimum wages. Currently, the second generation of farm workers are the most vulnerable and forgotten part of the society.

108. Many workers are employed in one of two ways: informally (e.g., without a contractual agreement to guarantee, among other things, a fair wage, safe working conditions and available remedies), or, as in the case of family members, without any financial compensation. To date, workers in commercial farms receive monthly wages as low as 300 to 400 Zimbabwe dollars (25 United States dollars), putting them below the World Bank levels of extreme poverty. Many small-scale farmers working in the tobacco, horticulture and cottons sectors are contracted by commercial farming and therefore not in a position to negotiate the prices of their harvest or to pay their own farm workers owing to a combination of extremely low earnings and high inflation.

109. Moreover, in some parts of the country, agricultural workers and smallholder farmers – particularly those working on tobacco and sugar plantations – are exposed to toxic pesticides: from spray, drift or direct contact with treated crops or soil; from accidental spills; or owing to inadequate personal protective equipment. Given that agricultural workers often lack social protections, including health care, compensation, long-term disability insurance and survivor benefits, such accidents may propel agricultural workers and their families into deep poverty and prevent them from realizing their right to food.

110. The Special Rapporteur also received information that children as young as 7 were doing hazardous work for meagre sums on sugar or tobacco plantations, performing tasks that threatened their health and safety or interfered with their education. The Special Rapporteur commends the Government of Zimbabwe for its ratification in May 2019 of the Protocol to the Forced Labour Convention, 1930 (No. 29), of the International Labour Organization, which demonstrates the country's commitment to combating forced labour in all its forms. Governments that have enacted strong laws against child labour, and provided extensive information about hazards and how to provide protection, have witnessed some progress in keeping children out of the fields and protecting other workers. Child labour and other human rights abuses on tobacco farms in Zimbabwe severely tarnish the contributions of the tobacco and sugar industries to the country's economic growth and improved livelihoods.

## **B. Women and children**

111. Women and girls play an essential role in providing food and nutrition security for their families and communities. Zimbabwe is among the countries experiencing a “feminization of agriculture”, as women are increasingly left to carry the full burden of agricultural work in addition to their load of unpaid responsibilities at home (see A/HRC/26/39).

112. Zimbabwean women are responsible for 70 per cent of subsistence farming and food production in the country. Within the agricultural sector, labour is divided as 45.4 per cent men and 54.6 per cent women, with the percentage of females being high because they are mostly unpaid family workers. It is worth mentioning that in Zimbabwe the unpaid contributing family worker rate stands at 39.4 per cent men and 60.6 per cent women. Approximately, 86 per cent of women in Zimbabwe depend on the land for their livelihood and that of their families.

113. While women constitute the majority of the food producers in Zimbabwe, they encounter more barriers and challenges to sufficient and sustainable agricultural livelihoods, including limited access to land and productive resources (capital, labour, land, and mechanization and irrigation infrastructure). Poverty levels among female-headed

households are higher than among male-headed households, and adverse health conditions disproportionately affect women. Low-productivity agricultural practices and lack of access to markets also affected rural women whose livelihoods depended on their own production.

114. With most of the men gone to work in neighbouring countries for employment, women bear the primary responsibility of caring for their children, as well as for the sick and elderly. They are only marginally able to meet minimum food needs by depleting essential assets or employing emergency coping strategies. While acknowledging the crucial importance of external assistance, many interlocutors expressed their frustration at being dependent on food assistance and told the Special Rapporteur that they would rather receive the necessary resources and tools to realize their own potential. For instance, in Mwenezi, the Special Rapporteur was impressed to see how, with the assistance of international development aid, the World Food Programme and the local government, a group of women came together to build a small dam, cultivated a vegetable garden for their own consumption and started selling surplus production in the local market.

115. The Special Rapporteur considers that children and women bear the disproportionate burden of the ongoing food crisis. In a desperate effort to find alternative means of livelihood, women and children resort to negative coping strategies that violate their most fundamental rights and freedoms. As a result, domestic violence, school dropouts, early marriage, prostitution and sexual exploitation are on the rise throughout Zimbabwe.

## VII. Conclusions and recommendations

116. **While acknowledging the strong commitment to a zero-hunger policy expressed by all her interlocutors in the Government, the Special Rapporteur is worried that the situation in Zimbabwe is slowly getting to a point of man-made starvation.**

117. **Political polarization, the economic and financial crisis, and erratic climatic conditions all contribute to the storm of food insecurity currently facing the country. Despite being at peace, Zimbabwe is counted among the four highest food-insecure places, alongside conflict-ravaged countries. With its large reserves of gold, platinum, diamonds, and other metals and minerals, as well as fertile agricultural lands, the country still has an enormous economic potential, which could lift the entire region.**

118. **The Government should adopt the necessary measures to reduce the country's dependence on food importation, mostly maize, especially given the volatility of foreign exchange rates. Relying on maize as the main staple food hinders the fight against malnutrition. It is vitally important for the country to create the conditions for the production of its own food and the protection of traditional seeds, in order to ensure the country's self-sufficiency, food sovereignty and preparedness for the climate shocks that already hit the country. The Government should initiate a master plan for a sustainable and nutrition-sensitive food production system that takes into account the country's natural resources and climatic conditions with a view to diversifying the diet of its people.**

119. **Good fiscal and economic governance could change the course of the economic and social conditions of Zimbabweans, particularly their right to food. It is the primary responsibility of the Government of Zimbabwe to ensure that the right to food of its citizens is respected, protected and fulfilled, as provided by its Constitution.**

120. **The Government should fulfil the obligation of the right to food by providing food assistance throughout this emergency period, and ensure that social safety nets are established for the most-deprived segments of its population, without any form of discrimination and with respect to the principles of transparency, accountability and participation in decision-making. The right to food cannot be effectively implemented without a democratic order respecting all sets of rights, including civil and political rights.**

121. **The international community, the Government and opposition parties must urgently scale up their humanitarian assistance and provide for most of the resources needed to eliminate hunger and malnutrition with a view to putting an end to this**

spiralling crisis before it morphs into full-blown social unrest. Early warning mechanisms aimed at monitoring the entire set of economic and social rights should be put in place to prevent more suffering.

122. The Special Rapporteur recommends that the Government of Zimbabwe:

(a) Ratify the Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights;

(b) Ratify all International Labour Organization conventions relevant to workers in the agricultural and food production sectors, including plantation workers, and ensure their effective implementation;

(c) Honour its obligations under the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women by taking immediate action to implement principles that protect the livelihood of rural women and eliminate their vulnerability, and support women farmers with incentives, access to credit and other productive sources;

(d) Implement the various voluntary guidelines of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations to revise the national agricultural and food policies such as the Voluntary Guidelines to Support the Progressive Realization of the Right to Adequate Food in the Context of National Food Security, the Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forests in the Context of National Food Security and the Principles for Responsible Investment in Agriculture and Food Systems;

(e) Establish security of land tenure to prevent forced evictions of farmers;

(f) Create policies that support urban and peri-urban agriculture;

(g) Ensure the proper functioning of the Human Rights Commission in accordance with the principles relating to the status of national institutions for the promotion and protection of human rights (the Paris Principles), and allocate budgetary and human resources for the effective implementation of all human-rights policies, including the right to food;

(h) Enact binding legislation introducing due diligence mechanisms to allow affected individuals and communities to hold accountable the private sector, including all supply chain enterprises that profit from the human rights abuses;

(i) Enact legislation to limit the excessive and dangerous use of toxic agrochemicals, providing for appropriate sanctions for those who break the law and adequate compensation for persons affected, together with implementation monitoring systems;

(j) Improve the human rights protection for informal agricultural workers, especially women and girls, peasants, certain minorities suffering discrimination, those living in remote areas, and migrant workers without citizenship rights;

(k) Support small-scale farmers and producers, particularly women and young people, fisherfolk, indigenous peoples, and pastoralists, by ensuring fair access to land and other productive resources and by continuing the Presidential Agricultural Input Support Scheme;

(l) Revise and restructure the Targeted Command Agriculture programme to include an effective monitoring system to avoid unnecessary burdens on the budget;

(m) Continue targeted food subsidies in times of emergency to lower food prices for vulnerable groups, and subsidize more diverse and nutritious foods, in order to address hunger and malnutrition throughout the country;

(n) Continue to cooperate with international humanitarian agencies and donor countries to provide an equitable and transparent distribution of food and humanitarian assistance;

- (o) **Share information about the current stock levels to swiftly respond to the needs of Zimbabweans in this period of emergency;**
- (p) **Establish an early warning system to avoid the severe consequences of future natural disasters, cooperate with international institutions to receive financial and technical assistance;**
- (q) **Extend the school meals programme to cover all children, giving priority to rural areas, and adopt a system for purchasing agricultural production from family farming and local producers;**
- (r) **Diversify current agricultural targets, which focus predominantly on maize, so as to support the production of more diverse and nutritious foods, including fruits and vegetables, in order to respond to malnutrition and to drought-resistant traditional staple foods;**
- (s) **Develop properly financed comprehensive nutrition policies aimed at dealing with stunting and wasting, and all forms of malnutrition, including obesity and micronutrient deficiency, and provide the necessary support to further empower the Food and Nutrition Council;**
- (t) **Elaborate national agroecology and sustainable agriculture strategies and implement good practices from international organizations, such as the World Food Programme and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, and introduce training programmes on agroecology;**
- (u) **Prioritize access to potable water to residents at all times, as enshrined in section 77 of the Constitution of Zimbabwe;**
- (v) **Urgently address issues of open defecations, particularly in the informal settlements, with a view to adhering to housing and sanitation policies, and to preventing water-borne diseases. The Government and its development partners should promote household-based Water, Sanitation and Hygiene for All interventions to address hygiene at household level.**

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