

# Food Security Research In Southern Africa: Policy Implications



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17. **Six Years of Food Security Research in Southern Africa: Is The Job Completed?**  
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The Food Security Research in Southern Africa Project was initiated in 1985 with a tripartite agreement among the University of Zimbabwe, Michigan State University and USAID in response to a 1980 pledge by the United States to assist SADCC in carrying out its regional food security program. The project objectives were to 1) develop a conceptual framework for analysis of food security issues in Southern Africa, 2) conduct applied research emphasizing food security policy and collection of primary data, 3) train local research professionals, and 4) promote a food security communication network among Southern Africa Universities. One only had to attend one of the seven Food Security Research in Southern Africa Conferences and/or peruse the published conference proceedings to observe that all of these objectives have been competently achieved.

An additional accomplishment of the Project has been the integration of government policy makers from throughout SADCC, as well as the international donor community, into the Conference discussions. This has guaranteed that the food security research conducted throughout the region has not been merely an academic exercise but that the results have helped inform policy decisions. Agriculture, food and nutrition policy conferences, supported by the Project, have been held in Malawi, Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe to assist these governments develop policies that are effective in improving national and household food security. Active food security research projects are currently underway in Malawi, Mozambique, Swaziland, Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe to support such efforts.

However, "all good things must come to an end" and this Project is no exception. The USAID SADCC regional funding, which has made all of this possible, will no longer be available after 31 March 1992. However, there is some indication that an attempt may be made by USAID/Harare to continue the annual conference, thus the networking that has been developed over the life of the Food Security Research in Southern Africa Project. A major concern is where the support for continuing food security research in the individual SADCC countries is to originate.

The Seventh Annual Conference, reported herein, examined the implications of the food security research within the region on related policy. The opening session featured Professor Chetsanga, Pro Vice-Chancellor, University of Zimbabwe, examining the role of the University in contributing to the success of Economic Structural Adjustment Programmes in the region. Dr. Ndimande, Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Lands, Agriculture and Rural Resettlement, Zimbabwe, followed with a discussion of the policy environment for food and agriculture under the market liberalisation occurring in many countries of the region. These discussions set the scene for the technical papers that followed.

Session II, 'Impact of changing grain and inputs market policies on private and public sector participation--implications for household food security and economic development', analysed the impacts of grain market reforms in Tanzania, Malawi, Zambia, Mozambique and Zimbabwe. The shift from government dominated grain marketing to systems permitting the participation of private sector entities is emerging throughout the region. Differential impacts on pricing, movement, storage and market access have been observed within the region.

Session III, 'Governments' role in price determination, stock management and import-export of grains and farm inputs--implications for food security', delved deeper into some of the specific issues identified in the previous session. Session IV, 'Food entitlement--policy alternatives to improve households' access to adequate food and income growth', examined this very important topic in light of experience in Malawi and Zimbabwe. It was a general consensus that many of the findings reported can be extrapolated to other countries within SADCC.

Session V, 'Policy issues related to crop mix, technology and food security', brought some new data from Swaziland into the regional mix relative to the impact of cash cropping on household food security. A discussion of the role of livestock, as insurance or as a source of income to provide for household food security, brought another added dimension into consideration. The session did not overlook the all important impact of crop mix, technology transfer and related policies as they affect household food security.

A look at both the past and the future of Food Security Research in Southern Africa wrapped up the discussions of the Seventh Food Security Research in Southern Africa Conference. Many of the contributions of the UZ/MSU Project to the information base, capacity building and policy networking within SADCC were highlighted together with the need to continue research to further the analytical base for policy making. It was concluded that the UZ/MSU Food Security Research in Southern Africa Project has provided a solid empirical base for policy makers within SADCC. The responsibility for advancing this knowledge base now rests with the regional cadre of professionals and policy makers within SADCC.