An Analysis of the Production of Cassava as a Food Security Option for Zimbabwe

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J. Mathende

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ABSTRACT

AN ANALYSIS OF THE PRODUCTION OF CASSAVA AS A FOOD SECURITY OPTION IN ZIMBABWE

by

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Access to food is a basic human right and therefore the insurance of food security to its people is a fundamental objective of every Government. However, as we approach the next millennium the food security situation of most developing countries is projected to decline. This is mainly attributed to civil strife, disasters and a rapidly increasing population.

Over the past three seasons the production of the main staple, maize, in Zimbabwe has consistently been below normal. Zimbabwe which was once dubbed the "Bread Basket of SADC" is now struggling to produce adequate food for national consumption. Secondly, the price of maize (Zimbabwe’s staple) has risen significantly over this period making it beyond the rich of most households. This has jeopardised food security. A concerted effort is required at the national level in order to avert the disastrous consequences associated with food insecurity which may arise from the recent
Several mitigation measures which include food aid, regional food security and national food security programmes have been put in place. In this vein and within the SADC Region, Zimbabwe has been tasked to spearhead the development of the agricultural and natural resources sector. In Zimbabwe, food security is such a serious issue that a Strategic Grain Reserve has been put in place specifically to address this problem. Furthermore the policy of agricultural diversification has been adopted, inter alia, as a food security strategy and in response to the trends of the past three seasons.

Zimbabwe is an agro-based economy with over 70 per cent of her population residing in rural areas and thriving on agriculture. In this context and within the purview of the diversification process, the production of cassava is viewed as a strategic option for achieving food security in terms of direct human consumption and as a cheap stockfeed. The production of cassava for these purposes is not new and peculiar to Zimbabwe. Cassava is widely produced worldwide for human and animal consumption.

This study attempts to analyse the feasibility of producing cassava in Zimbabwe for food security purposes. A two pronged approach is employed in pursuing this goal. The primary thrust is to produce cassava for human consumption. The secondary thrust involves the production of cassava for use in stockfeeds. This assumes that this will result in the provision of cheaper stockfeeds hence cheaper meat. The project will initially be confined to Mashonaland Central and West Provinces. It is planned along the logical framework approach. The purpose of this project is to increase cassava
production in Zimbabwe so as to meet the overall goal of food security. The total cost of the project is US$499 200 (Z$19,24 million).

The feasibility analysis of the project looks at issues such as social aspects, technical aspects, economic and financial aspects. The cost-benefit analysis was used to assess economic and financial viability. The project passed all these tests and in addition has a host of other social and economic benefits to justify its implementation.

The main conclusions arising from this study are that it is feasible to produce cassava in Zimbabwe. Secondly, owing to its multiplicity of uses cassava offers great potential as a food and industrial crop. However, cassava should produced as a side crop in order to be fully compatible with the current socio-economic aspects related to smallholder farming in Zimbabwe.