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FISP in Zambia, as a Solution to Hunger and Poverty

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Hunger and Malnutrition in Zambia

According to the acute food insecurity analysis in Zambia, it is estimated that around 1.42 million people (22% of the analysed population) were facing high levels of acute food insecurity (IPC Phase 3 or above) between July and September 2020, despite increased crop production in most areas. (*Republic of Zambia: IPC Acute Food Insecurity Analysis July 2020 – March 2021, Issued in December 2020)*

Zambia achieved lower middle-income status **in 2011** after years of impressive economic performance. Yet **more than half** of its population still lives below the poverty line. A now deteriorating economy risks puts undermining government's efforts at risk to deliver social services, alleviate poverty, reduce malnutrition and achieve zero hunger. This is especially true in rural areas, where most people of them rely on subsistence agriculture and are exposed to the effects of climate change. (https://www.wfp.org/countries/zambia)
Zambia's malnutrition rates remain among the highest in the world. World Food Programme found that the country ranked 146 of 189 in the 2019 Human Development Index, with 48 percent of the population unable to meet their minimum calories requirements, more than one-third of children under five years stunted and more than half suffering from iron deficiency[1].

Population of Zambia 17.4 Million Number of People who are unable to meet their Daily Minimum Calories 48% 35% Children are stunted Zambia | World Food Programme (wfp.org)

False Solutions

Since 2002, the Government of the Republic of Zambia has been implementing support to farmers through the Fertilizer Support Programme (FSP), which was later renamed to the Farmers Input Support Programme (FISP). FISP aims to ensure sustained food security at both household and national level. The programme that supports small-scale farmers with subsidized seed and fertilizer is implemented by Ministry of Agriculture.

Under the FISP, the government distributes subsidized agricultural **inputs** (Maize seed, beans seed, soybeans seed, groundnuts seed and fertilizers) to small-scale farmers/producers. It also provides a guaranteed minimum price at which the Food Reserve Agency (FRA) buys maize and other crops from **farmers**.

Why is FISP a False Solution?

[1] World Food Programme. (2021) Zambia Country Brief. Available at: https://www.wfp.org/countries/zambia

I. Despite the introduction of FISP, levels of malnutrition in the form of stunting, underweight and wasting have barely changed in the population. According to a study conducted by Hivos and IIED in 2017, most government agricultural funding is still spent on promoting maize production despite repeated findings that this does not reduce food insecurity in the most vulnerable farming households[2]. **Maize makes up the major part of the national diet, while nutrient-rich foods such as legumes, animal-source foods, fruit and vegetables are consumed in small quantities, particularly amongst the poorest families. Therefore, Many Zambians live with food insecurity and malnutrition as a result of poor diets.**

II. FISP has massively promoted selected hybrid seed varieties of only a few crops hence encouraging mono cropping. This contributing to loss of biodiversity, soil fertility and crop yields. In the case study of Chiawa in Kafue district[3], FISP may have contributed to in terms of tonnes of maize produced, however, FISP has not resulted into household food security among FISP beneficiaries as they still lack basic nutritional requirements.

III. The synthetic fertilizers accessed through FISP dependency on fertilisers, decline in soil quality, specifically decline in the diversity of microbes present in the soil which increase the supply of minerals to plants such as copper, iron, nitrogen, phosphorus, Zinc and many more[4]. This entails that nutritious foods are not guaranteed in conventional farming systems as compared to agroecological practices (manure, compost, intercropping) which aim at growing healthy and nutritious crops while improving soil and environmental conditions.

IV. Fertilisers and need are creating a dependency by farmers. The high prices of seed and fertilisers are discouraging farmers from cultivating land beyond what is supported under FISP that is one hector. For example, in the 2020/21 farming season, a 50 Kilogram bag of fertilizer was trading at an estimation of over K600.00 on the Zambian market. The increase in prices of the certified seed and chemicals has also led to the increase in prices of food.

V. **Loss of Food Sovereignty;** FISP gives farmers access to only new seed varieties including hybrid seed which cannot be recycled for the next farming season due to patents and loss of vigour. Farmers therefore purely depend on seed companies to grow their food most farmers who cannot afford expensive inputs thus remain poorer and cannot provide food for home consumption and for sell.

VI. **Erosion of Indigenous see varieties;** the promotion of new seed including hybrid seed varieties under FISP has also led to erosion of indigenous seed. Under FISP local

[2] Mwanamwenge, M. & Harris, J. (2017) Agriculture, Food Systems, Diets and Nutrition in Zambia, Discussion Paper, IIED/Hivos.

[3] Allan Magasu. (2016) The Effectiveness of Farmer Input Support Programme in Promoting Household Food Security: The Case of Chiawa, Kafue District, The university of Zambia.

[4] Audain K. (2020). Poor Soil Quality Reduces the Nutrient Content of Many Crops. Here's Why. Provelopment. Available at https://provelopment.wordpress.com/2020/03/01/soil-quality-affects-the-nutrient-content-of-the-foods-we-eat/

seed varieties are not included in the programme, and the Food Reserve Agency (FRA) does not purchase any crops grown from indigenous seeds. Some of the indigenous seeds include Munali, Buusumili, Gaangata, Kapya bwangu and Kafwamba. These seed are known to be very nutritious, taste better, adaptable to local climates, not vulnerable to pests, perform very well with organic manure, can be recycled yet give tremendous yields and are treasured cultural heritage[5].

The Capture of Seed by business

The seed industry is now a business mainly distributed by large corporations and multinationals, who are concerned about profit. These corporations are pushing forward their agenda of maximizing profits by developing varieties of hybrid seed, agro-chemicals and fertilizers that work hand in hand with their engineered varieties.

Even when such occurrences are notable, Government under FISP has failed to act against these interests, at is simply implementing the agenda of these perceived powerful corporations by promoting and marketing their inputs like seed, fertilizers and other agricultural chemical.

Seed systems must be textured to sustain human life, ecology and climate and further preserve farmers' rights to save, exchange, sell seed as outlined in the International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture (ITPGRFA)[6], .

Pandemics: experiences from COVID-19

Restoring food sovereignty especially in light of pandemics such as COVID-19 are important. The experiences of COVID-19 has shown how vulnerable Zambia's food system is to external shocks. The unprecedented rise in food prices, limited access to seed and fertilizers by farmers, income erosion and lack of indigenous seed as an alternative.

It is therefore important that people reclaim their food sovereignty by rebuilding relationships between them and their land that has been both directly and indirectly victimized by the constant use of chemicals.

[5] Baidu-Forson, J.J., Phir, N., Ngúni, D., Mulele, S., Simainga, S., Situmo, J., Ndiyoi, M., Wahl, C., Gambone, F., Mulanda, A., Syatwinda, G. (2014). Assessment of agrobiodiversity resources in the Borotse flood plain, Zambia. https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/33719339.pdf

[6] ITPGRFA Secretariat (2011). Introduction to the International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture: Module 1. IT PGRFA Secretariat, FAO, Rome, Italy.

Recommendations

i. Food Reserve Agency (FRA) should transform and start purchasing crops grown from Indigenous seed varieties
ii. FISP should undergo a transformation to promote both food security and sovereignty and include indigenous seed varieties in the farmers package
iii. Farmers Rights should be upheld as a basis for human beings to feed themselves and choose their way of production
iv. Zambia's agricultural system should incorporate agro ecology that promotes the production of a diverse and healthy food basket.
v. Establishment of indigenous (local) seed banks at community level for purposes of multiplication, saving, use, exchange and sell with fellow farmers.
vi. Human beings should be at the center of the food system; government must not allow the interest of business to take over the food system
vii. Discourage mono-cropping and encourage biodiversity
viii. Government should fully implement Article 19.1 of the UNDROP