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ASSESSING THE CONTRIBUTION OF FOOD ASSISTANCE FOR ASSETS ON FOOD AVAILABILITY IN CHIPINGE, ZIMBABWE

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ABSTRACT: *This paper assessed the effects of Food for Assets (FFA) in improving food availability in Chipinge District of Zimbabwe. Results show that FFA significantly contributes to meeting immediate food needs for participating households, especially households with low numbers. However, being a short-term intervention and targeting few households within communities, the FFA programme's overall effectiveness at the community level is minimal. As a coping strategy, households resorted to food rationing to ensure that the food lasted the whole season. Also, households that participated both as workers and had established plots in FFA irrigation schemes had a better opportunity to cope since they also resorted to their own food production. Such households were found to have increased food availability compared to non-beneficiaries. Short working hours that guide FFA activities have also allowed community members to engage in other productive activities to improve food security. We recommend that future FFA should be implemented over an extended period for a more sustainable benefit on food availability and livelihoods. Participation in the FFA programme should be transitory to enable progression from emergency response to more developmental initiatives that will result in long term food availability and sustainable livelihoods.*

KEYWORDS: Food availability, Food for Assets (FFA), rural communities, climate change and climate variability.

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INTRODUCTION

According to Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2012), approximately 80 percent of poor people in Sub Saharan Africa (SSA) continue to depend on the agricultural sector for their livelihoods despite low production levels. Such low production levels are due to poor access to services, agro-ecological features, lack of inputs and knowledge, and low levels of investment in agricultural infrastructure and irrigation (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill 2012). In addition, high population growth rates coupled with climate change and variability have further intensified pressure on agricultural production and natural resources, further complicating the challenge of reducing food insecurity and poverty (IFPRI, 2009; IPCC, 2007).

Given the forgone, smallholder farmers in particular, who are the hardest hit, need to find ways of increasing resilience to such shocks (Malo *et al.*, 2012; Hassan and Nhemachena, 2008). The IPCC (2007) remarks that even though smallholder farmers across the globe have developed several adaptation strategies to cope with contemporary climate variability, these strategies are not adequate for current and future climate changes.

Following the food price crisis of 2008, debates about global food security are increasing (Wiggins, 2008). Little (2015) highlighted that the impact of the food crisis on the prospects for achieving Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) Number 1 to end poverty in all its forms everywhere was also high. Increasing food prices primarily affects the poor, whose ability to buy food is undermined. These impacts are higher on governments of low-income countries that face higher import bills, costs for safety net programs and political instabilities. As most communities depend on food aid, aid agencies battle with increased demands for food, cash, and technical assistance (Wiggins, 2008).

For more than six decades, food aid has been a central approach for ending world hunger within humanitarian circles (ECDPM, 2008). Modern food aid, which began with the passage of the United States Public Law 480 (PL 480) in 1954, is normally classified into three broad categories: program, project, and emergency or humanitarian food aid (Elden and Chisholm, 1993). In the 1940s and 60s, developed countries gave grant money towards assisting victims of World War I, where packages that included food commodities were distributed. However, this trend spread to all parts of the world, Africa included. Projects were launched but were disconnected from local goals. It was observed that technical assistance and cooperation efforts were donor-driven, and as a result, food aid frequently got caught up in debates about aid mechanisms. According to Diriye *et al.* (2014), food aid seeks to improve food access for the most vulnerable households who face food deficits, invest in enhancing livelihood sources, and support safety nets that target the prevention of loss of livelihoods**.**

Mousseau (2008) summarises three types of food aid: program food aid, relief food aid, and project food aid. Program food aid is where food is grown in the benefactor country to be sold/ distributed abroad. This is not free food because this is a government-government transfer. The beneficiary countries pay for the food. Emergency or relief food aid is usually distributed during emergencies such as natural disasters and wars. Lastly, project food aid is delivered as part of a specific project that promotes agricultural or economic development, nutrition and food security, such as Food for Assets and school feeding programs.

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The advent of food aid in the early 1990s in Zimbabwe was to address immediate food needs caused by droughts. According to the OEDC (2006), billions of dollars have been spent yearly on food aid, albeit being one of the least responsive of all donor assistance. The 2005 Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness identified capacity constraints as one of the central factors impeding progress in achieving the Millennium Development Goals (Global Monitoring Report (2004). OECD (2006) views food aid as a responsibility of partner countries, and donors play a support role. From 2005, when the Millennium Project Report was released, and several dialogues on aid effectiveness ensued, a more rigorous view of food aid emerged. The achievement of the Millennium Development Goals and other international and national development targets hinged on individuals, organisations, and societies' capacities to reach their development objectives (Wignaraja, 2008).

Madziakapita (2008) postulates that increased food aid could benefit African agriculture. This argument stresses the role of food aid in increasing access to food in the face of climatic shocks, thereby improving human nutritional status, health, labour productivity and income-earning capacity relative to what would transpire in the absence of food aid. Whether food aid positively or negatively affects local agricultural development and poverty reduction turns largely on the effects of food aid on recipient country food production and downstream processing and marketing patterns. These, in turn, depend largely on how well donors and operational agencies manage food aid in terms of targeting, timing, functional modalities, and whether the domestic political and institutional environment in recipient countries is conducive to effective and efficient food aid delivery.

In Zimbabwe, food aid comes mainly in two forms: free distribution and food for assets (FFA). Free distribution programs distribute food commodities directly to households. In contrast, participants in FFA programs typically work in community development programs, such as constructing toilets, dams and road rehabilitation. In all contexts, food aid is an intentional process of influencing changes in the food security situation at the individual, household, or community level. A growing interest in food aid evaluation stems from the perceived failure of technically focused aid strategies.

Development agencies like World Vision have operated in the Chipinge District of Zimbabwe since early 2000. They have embarked on agriculture and economic empowerment projects, food security, nutrition, and infrastructure development. While the initial thrust was curative to redress malnutrition and its effects, the projects have become a permanent component of the drought relief efforts. According to the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) (2013), the ENSURE Food Security Program was a five-year intervention intended to impact 215,000 susceptible and food-insecure Zimbabweans intensely and sustainably in Masvingo and Manicaland Provinces. ENSURE focused chiefly on empowering rural households to become more food secure and build the capacity of marginalised people in the community. The food aid interventions mainly targeted wards with a high prevalence of chronic food insecurity. Furthermore, the implementors targeted areas where there were opportunities to leverage previous development activities, the partners' institutional strengths working in the selected project areas and the opportunities for partnerships with the Government of Zimbabwe (GoZ) and other development partners. However, some reports have accused Non-Governmental Organisations' (NGO) development and humanitarian projects of leading to increased dependence rather than sustained growth and development (Kruse, 2014).

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To generate practical information and offer lessons about improving food security initiatives, evaluations feature prominently in virtually all public programmes' governance and accountability procedures. However, the WFP (2013) noted that although evaluations are routine, they seldom satisfy donors or programme managers. Less is being learned from the evaluations as expected, and the lack of 'hard evidence' on the impact of food aid programmes may jeopardise future funding. Evaluations are needed to test the theories and assumptions on which food aid programs are based, document their results and lessons for improving future programs. From such a background, the study seeks to add to such empirical literature to ensure that future programmes are adjusted to meet the requirements on the ground. Therefore this study assessed the effects of food aid on food security, paying attention to the communities receiving food aid through the Food for Assets intervention. The study thus aims to evaluate the effects of food aid implemented by World Vision under Enhancing Nutrition Stepping up Resilience and Enterprise (ENSURE) Program in Chipinge District and offer recommendations to strengthen food aid efforts in beneficiary communities.

Research Objectives

1. Assess the contribution of Food for Assets intervention (FFA) in addressing food availability in rural communities in Zimbabwe.
2. Evaluate whether the Food for Assets intervention transforms rural communities from a state of vulnerability to a form of sustainable livelihoods.
3. To explore strategies to improve the contribution of FFA to food availability in rural communities.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK FOR FOOD SECURITY

According to the Food and Nutrition Technical Assistance (FANTA) guidance of 1999, food security is defined as a situation where "…all people at all times have both physical and economic access to sufficient food to meet their dietary needs for a productive and healthy life". In addition, Hubbard (1995) includes "…wherever they acquire it and however it is provided" to the definition of food security. The author argued that food availability is more critical than how the food was made available.

The conceptual framework for food security explains the relationship between elements such as availability, access, utilisation, and stability and how they contribute towards food security. Mousseau, (2005) highlights that availability is achieved if adequate food is ready to have at people's disposal whilst access is ensured when households have sufficient resources to obtain appropriate foods. This is either through production, purchasing, or donations. Utilisation is generally viewed from a biological perspective, referring to the ability of the human body to ingest and metabolise food. Stability dimensions of vulnerability and resilience also influence food security status. In line with Sarris and Karfakis (2008), vulnerability is defined as 'the likelihood of experiencing future welfare loss, generally weighted by the magnitude of expected welfare loss'. On the other hand, resilience refers to the ability to recover from such a welfare loss (Sarris and Karfakis, 2008).

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This conceptual framework will assist in addressing whether giving Food for Assets program can contribute towards food availability. Economic and physical access to food and an adequate supply of food at the national or international level does not in itself guarantee household-level food security. The study will focus on household-level security. Therefore, the major focus of the study is on ascertaining whether Food for Assets interventions in Chipinge contribute towards food availability.

The history of Food for Assets

According to Patton (2014), Food for Assets (FFA) is an integrated community development strategy involving the use of food aid, labour-based methods, and participatory decision-making approaches to develop productive assets that are owned, managed and maintained by households or the community. The entry point of the Food for Assets intervention is where food available for consumption is inadequate. The overarching purpose of FFA programming is to:

- Create the productive assets required to save lives and protect livelihoods
- Strengthen traditional and local coping strategies
- Develop human capital through skills training and education; and
- Contribute to the economic empowerment of food insecure communities and households.

Food for Assets has its origins from the experiences, lessons, and best practices of the emergency Food for Work (FFW) activities implemented in Ethiopia during the great famine and in countries in Southern Africa affected by droughts of 1992, 1995/96 and 1998. A transition from FFW to FFA was initiated by the WFP 1998 Food Aid and Development Policy entitled “Enabling Development”. This resulted in a shift from emergency-driven employment creation and income transfer activities to community-managed asset accumulation and human capital development activities.

The FFA intervention emphasises creating assets that are owned, managed, and utilised by the targeted community. The intervention promotes participatory planning approaches in efforts to enhance the decision-making capacity of the targeted community, and particular emphasis is given on activity planning, local resource mobilisation, environmental management and sharing of benefits. As opposed to FFW, the term FFA captures the concept of development.

A well-designed Food for Assets intervention will improve food security for poor, vulnerable households and contribute to protecting or building productive assets for economic recovery and resilience against future shocks. The food for assets programs also supports community food marketing systems without disturbing local markets. They are believed to create employment without displacing labour from other employment schemes and stimulate participation in skills development training without creating dependency on food aid.

FFA and Climate Change and Climate Variability Adaptation

Smallholder farmers who rely heavily on climate-sensitive livelihoods are the most vulnerable to the impacts of climate change. Climate change leads to a decrease in crop yields, thereby aggravating the food security issues in developing countries. Although farmers have experience dealing with climate variability, long-term climate change effects go beyond their traditional

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coping strategies (Pettengell, 2010). Therefore, approaches that strengthen economic development efforts and enhance the adaptive capacity of farmers, their households and their communities are imperative.

According to FAO (2010), agriculture in developing countries must be 'climate-smart' to prevent food insecurity amongst the rural poor. To adapt to climate change, farmers need new and improved technologies, skills, and knowledge, or in many cases, linked to existing technologies that are currently inaccessible. These may include enhanced water management techniques, soil conservation and erosion control and greater use of renewable energy. Given the uncertainty surrounding climate change impacts, choosing the most appropriate tools needs a careful approach to avoid locking poor communities into unsuitable technologies (Practical Action, 2009). Therefore, enabling producers to adopt or develop sustainable agricultural techniques is essential for improving resilience.

Food for Assets and building resilience.

Resilience building is long term in the context of recurrent shocks. Food aid can meet emergency needs and safeguard the gains made by development. This is where development and emergency responses correspond and reinforce actions. According to ENSURE (2016), World Vision through Food for Assets supports resilience-building efforts when it tackles one or more of the underlying causes of vulnerability. This is done to **s**trengthen communities and households' capacity and food security to deal with risks, forge complementary partnerships, invest in livelihood assets, and improve nutrition while enhancing human and social capital.

The poorest and most food-insecure populations live in highly degraded and shock-prone environments. According to Belachew (2009), climatic risks compound these already fragile settings in which food-insecure people, women, and children, in particular, are disproportionally affected. These households and communities urgently need their assets base to be restored and increased to improve their access to food and strengthen their ability to withstand and quickly recover from shocks.

Food for Assets (FFA) interventions can result in immediate gains in food security and simultaneously reduce risks from natural and man-made hazards such as droughts and floods; at the same time, FFA contributes to long term environmental and livelihood benefits that increase resilience. WFP (2010) reports that FFA is becoming increasingly central to the resilience agenda in its continued efforts in strengthening the quality of the design and delivery of asset creation programmes to the most food-insecure people. Stevenson (2008) suggests that appropriate technologies and research to improve farm productivity by boosting land and labour returns are essential in building resilience to climatic changes.

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MATERIALS AND METHODS

Study area

This study was carried out in Chipinge, a district located in the Manicaland Province of Zimbabwe. The district has 298 841 people who stay in 30 wards (ZimStats, 2012). The map below shows the location of Chipinge district in the Manicaland Province of Zimbabwe.

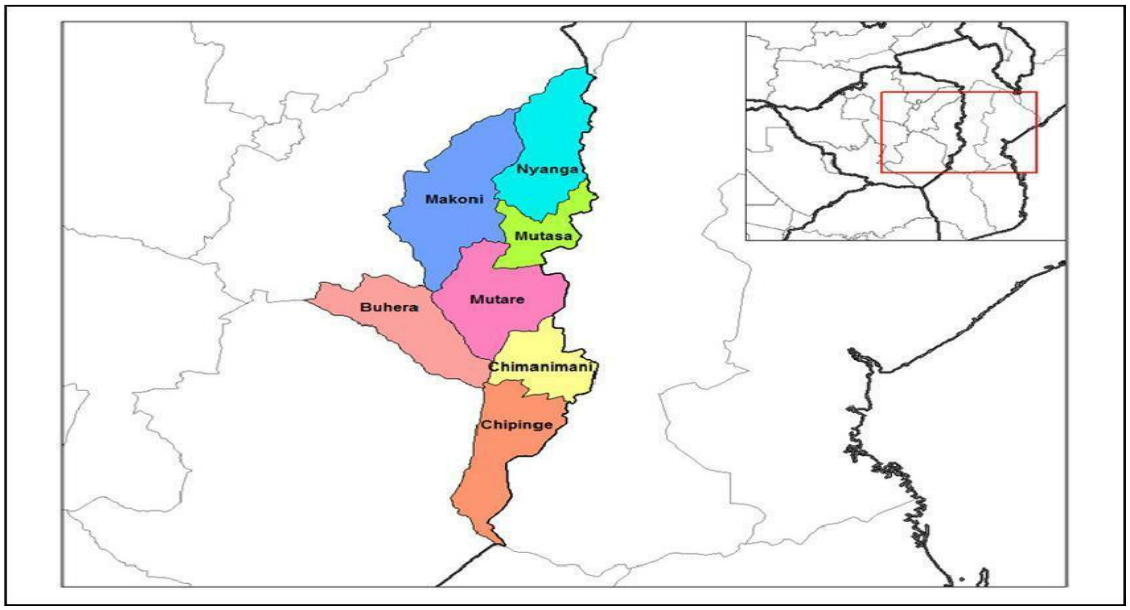

Figure 1: Map showing Chipinge District's location in Manicaland Province, Zimbabwe

Source: *Guveya (2014)*

In terms of agro-ecological zoning, Chipinge district is divided into two distinct zones. The first zone in the district's eastern parts experiences a cool to warm climate with an annual rainfall of 1500 – 2500mm. This area is suitable for the cultivation of plantation crops like tea, bananas, and macadamia nuts. The second zone located in the southern parts of the district experiences very high temperatures and at the same time receives very low and erratic rainfall (Moyo *et al.* 1993). As such, food insecurity issues are predominant in this part of the district. Major livelihood activities are petty trade and market gardening, where dams have been constructed. For the purposes of this study, Ward 1 was purposively selected of the 18 beneficiary wards of Chipinge district.

Research Design

The study adopted a descriptive and interpretive case study design. Four data collection methods were employed in the study: a household survey questionnaire, Focus Group Discussions (FGDs), Key Informant Interviews (KIIs), and secondary data collection. Relying on ward registers from the programme beneficiaries that we obtained from World Vision offices, we used online sample determination software at a confidence interval of 95% to

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calculate the sample size of 40 households. To select the 40 participants, a random sampling approach was employed.

We conducted three Focus Group Discussions (FGDs. Two groups of project beneficiaries were identified to provide insights on the FFA intervention. The third group comprised of non-beneficiaries who held in the same ward as the FFA beneficiaries. We saw it relevant to interview non-beneficiaries as they had an open view and insight into the FFA program. They also have an insight into the food security situation in their area. Thematic codes were used to analyse data collected from the focus group discussions. Key informants for the study were purposively selected. We interviewed a total of 10 key informants: the Ward Councillor, an Agritex officer, 3 FFA committee members, two village heads, and 3 World Vision employees who were actively involved in the programme's implementation.

Lastly, the study also relied on secondary data to help answer the study questions. Documents reviewed included reports by World Vision on the FFA programme. This was done to get an insight into the project intentions and events that had taken place before this research. The documents reviewed are project proposals, WVI newsletters, success stories, annual reports and end of project evaluation reports for food for assets projects that have since ended.

RESULTS

Demographic Data

The household questionnaire response rate was 97.5 %. Respondents' gender analysis shows more females (56.4%) than males (43.6%) responded to the questionnaire. These results are shown in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Summary statistics

Variable	Frequency	Percent (%)
Gender of respondents		
Male	17	43.6
Female	22	56.4
Age range of respondents (Years)		
18-25	6	15.4
26-35	8	20.5
36-45	12	30.8
46-55	7	19.9
56+	6	15.4
Marital status		
Single	3	7.7
Married	27	69.2
Divorced/Separated	4	10.3
Widowed	5	12.8
Household Size		
1-5 people	15	38.5
6-10 people	20	51.3
10 +	4	10.3

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Level of Education		
Never attended school	11	28.2
Primary School	17	43.6
Secondary School	8	20.5
Tertiary	3	7.7

Table 1 above also shows that most respondents fall within the prime productive age range of 36 to 45 years, constituting about 30.8% of the selected respondents. This is expected as the Food for Assets intervention mainly targets households with labour capacity to participate in productive activities. The respondents' age ranges show that the majority are old enough to contribute meaningfully to the research. Additionally, table 1 shows that the average household size in the interviewed households' range was 5.9 people. Most households fall within the 6 to 10 members per household. This is on the high side, and in cases of food insecurity, these households face more difficulties in coping. Food aid programs typically work with a capped household size of 5, and FFA is no exception. The ration size for FFA is pegged using an average household size of 5. This results in ration dilution, impacting the household food security status every month.

Normally, one's educational attainment influences their ability to learn, adapt, and apply new concepts in life. Households with illiterate heads are generally vulnerable as they rely primarily on casual labour to earn a living. Study results presented in Table 1 above shows that more than half of the respondents barely reached secondary education, as 43.6% attained primary education, and 28.2 % never went to school. This signals a vulnerable society that is not likely to effectively support itself when disaster strikes as they tend to have limited non-farm livelihood options.

Effects of Food for Assets (FFA) interventions on food availability

Study results show that the distribution of food items was conducted monthly, and beneficiaries were given 50kgs of sorghum after working for 20 days. Unlike transfers made under the free food distribution, the size of the food package was not linked to household size. At an output level, the FFA intervention aimed to increase food availability, and in times of food insecurity and scarcity, commodities distributed contributed somewhat to food availability.

When asked about their main source of food, the interviewed household indicated that they relied mainly on the Food for Assets programme (38.5% of the respondents). Furthermore, they stated that they got their other food supplies from other sources, which included their own production in their plots (23.1%), remittances (2.6%), traded goods (12.8%). Other insignificant sources of income including casual labour, donations from Social Welfare, churches and relatives combined contributed about 23.1% of their income.

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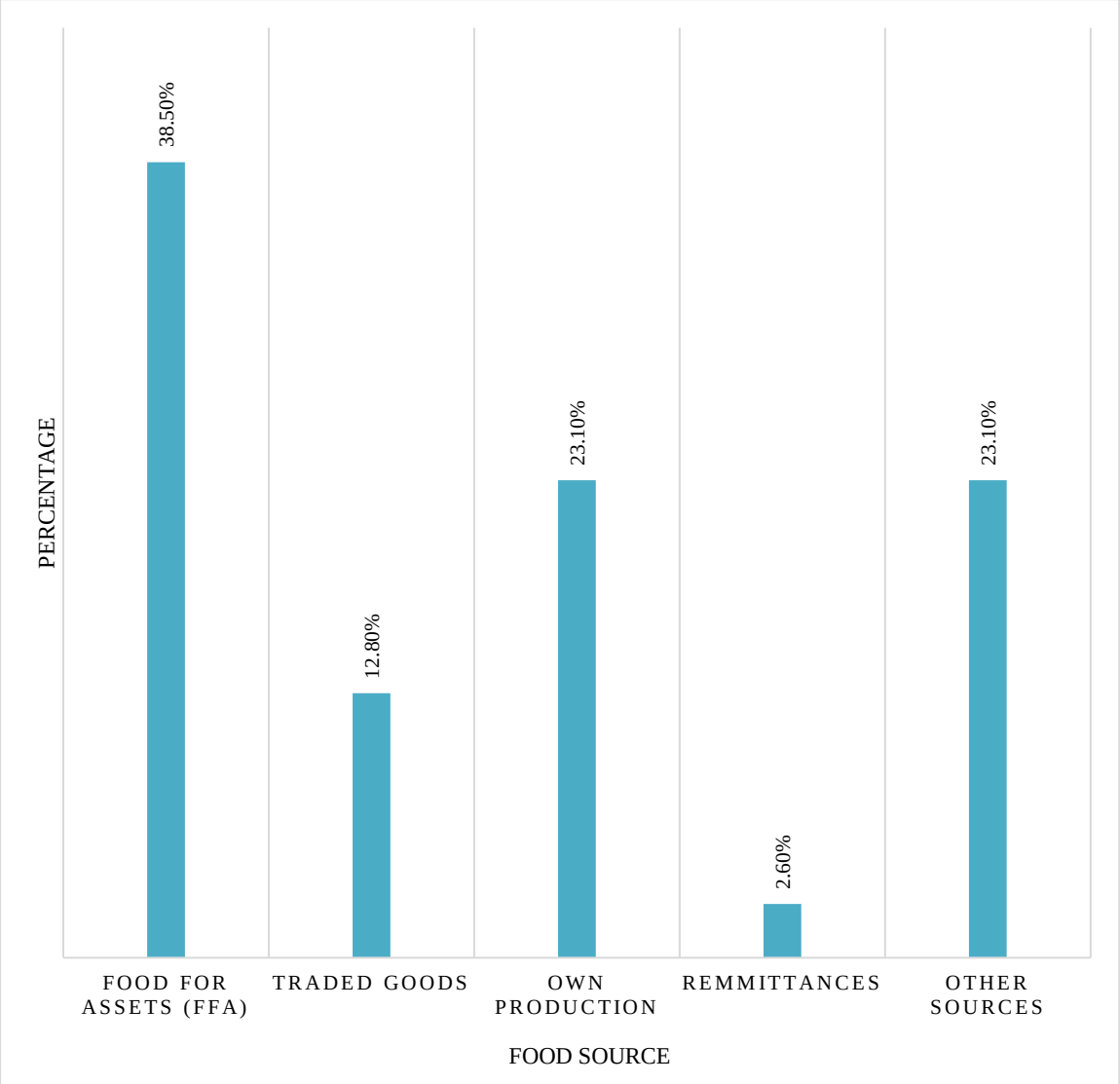

Figure 2: Main food sources

Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) revealed that quantities received failed to last the whole month, with sorghum lasting an average of 17 days. This could be because the ration sizes were set using an average household size of 5, yet the average household size for the sampled households was 5.9, and more than half (51.35) of households had 6-10 people.

Additionally, the study observes that the FFA programme targeted just a proportion of the community, and due to high levels of food insecurity, people tended to share commodities received. As shown in Table 2 below, portion sizes decreased for 54.27% of the households mainly because of their household sizes. Household sizes above six either reported a decrease or that the portion sizes remained the same. Therefore, FFA played a limited role in ensuring continuous food availability within the month.

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Table 2: FFA effects on meal portion sizes consumed by Household Size

HH Size	*Same*	*Decreased*	*Increased*	*Total*
1-5	**4**	**4**	**6**	**14**
6-10	**3**	**14**	**2**	**19**
10+	**1**	**1**	**0**	**2**
Grand Total	**8**	**19**	**8**	**35**

The number of meals eaten did not differ significantly before FFA and after FFA as households coped by reducing the portion sizes. Table 3 shows interviews' findings on the number of meals eaten before and after FFA. Households who had one meal per day decreased after FFA from 20.0% to 11.4%, whilst those eating two meals increased from 62.9% to 77.2%. On a negative note, however, households eating three meals before FFA reduced from 17.1% to 11.4%. Focus group discussions indicated that women formed most workers. This could have contributed to time poverty, resulting in reduced meals cooked per day since they must work for 4 hours a day for five days a week. Again, this could be related to the inadequacy of rations in times of high food insecurity.

Table 3: Number of meals before and after FFA

Number of meals	**Before FFA**		**After FFA**	
One	7	20.0%	4	11.4%
Two	22	62.9%	27	77.2%
Three	6	17.1%	4	11.4%

Key informants displayed knowledge of what was comprised in the ENSURE FFA food basket - sorghum at 50kg per worker per month. Key informants' responses corroborated findings from focus group discussions concerning the food's inadequacy. In addition, they showed concern about kilograms that were inevitably lost during processing. 50kgs would suffice if it were maize but not sorghum. FGDs with beneficiaries confirmed the latter, where discussions showed that they preferred maize over sorghum. If it had to be sorghum, they requested increased quantities to at least 70kgs or additional cash to assist in the grinding mill costs.

Key informants and participants of focus groups shared different sentiments regarding the quality of the sorghum received from FFA. The respondents further indicated that the sorghum type was different from their own in terms of taste. They generally preferred the type provided by World Vision to the one they produce locally. However, others felt that the taste was not that good; the physical condition of the grain was not good and had an unpleasant odour. Furthermore, some respondents stated that they had difficulties processing, and they also raised palatability issues due to preferences for maize. The FFA intervention has age restrictions and requires households with labour capacity to participate.

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Due to varying reasons, food availability decreased for approximately 39% of households participating in FFA whilst it increased food availability for 33%, as shown in Figure 3 below. Households with more than six members and participated as workers only mainly faced a decrease in food availability. This was due to the high reliance on food aid through FFA. This confirms the assertion by Malthusians, who believed that food insecurity was due to the presence of too many people compared to the amount of food produced.

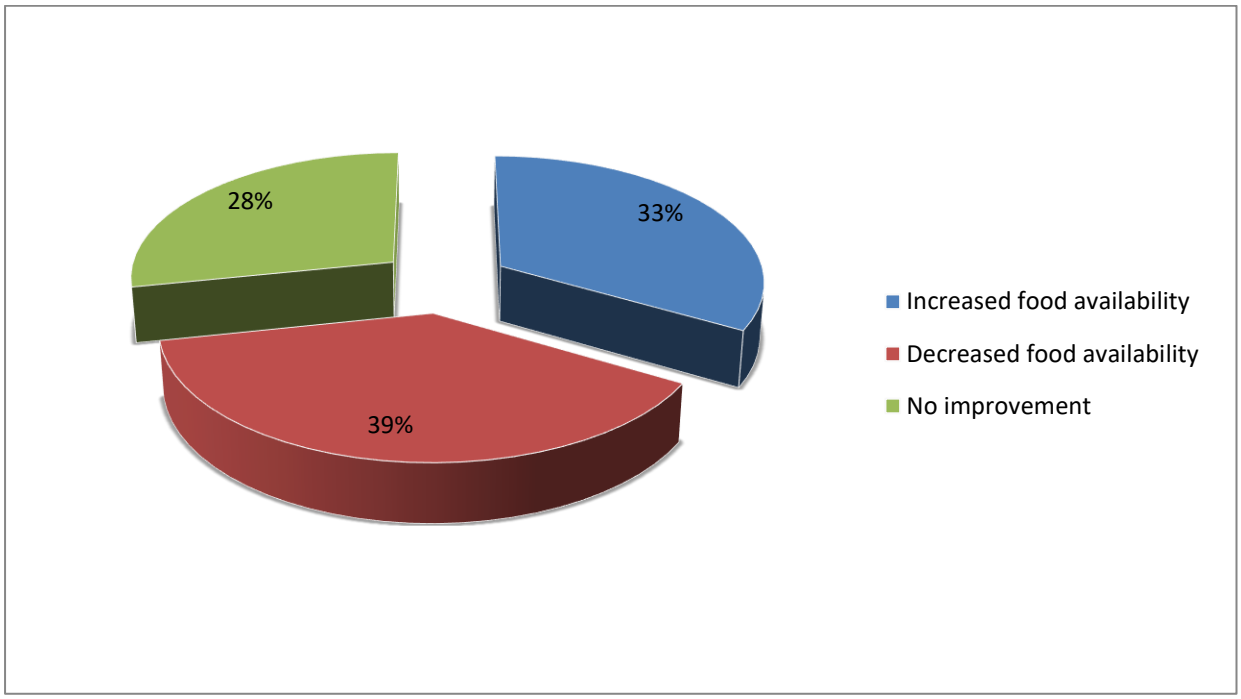

Figure 3: FFA contribution to food availability

To obtain more information on how FFA contributed to food availability, participants of focus group discussions and key informants were asked to provide more details on how FFA influenced food availability. It was noted that FFA addresses immediate food needs, especially when food is not readily available on the market. FFA rations provided relief, giving households a springboard to use other means to complement the rations received. Interestingly, non-beneficiaries felt their households would be better off if they had been allowed to be part of FFA. Non-beneficiaries and beneficiaries agreed that engaging in severe coping strategies was lower for participating households and such households used acceptable coping strategies such as reducing meal portions or meal frequency to cope when their rations were exhausted. This is different from non-participating households who engaged in sending children to eat elsewhere, collected large volumes of indigenous wild fruits like *nyii*, amarula, and exotic ones like avocados and guavas and sent household members to beg for food.

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Assessing the effectiveness of Food for Assets intervention in transforming rural communities from a state of vulnerability to a state of sustainable livelihoods.

Many FGD and KII participants indicated that it was more beneficial to participate as a worker and in agricultural production assets created under the FFA component. That way one would have multiple benefits. Of the respondents interviewed, 54% participated as workers only and 36% as workers and plot holders in the irrigation scheme, as shown in Figure 10.

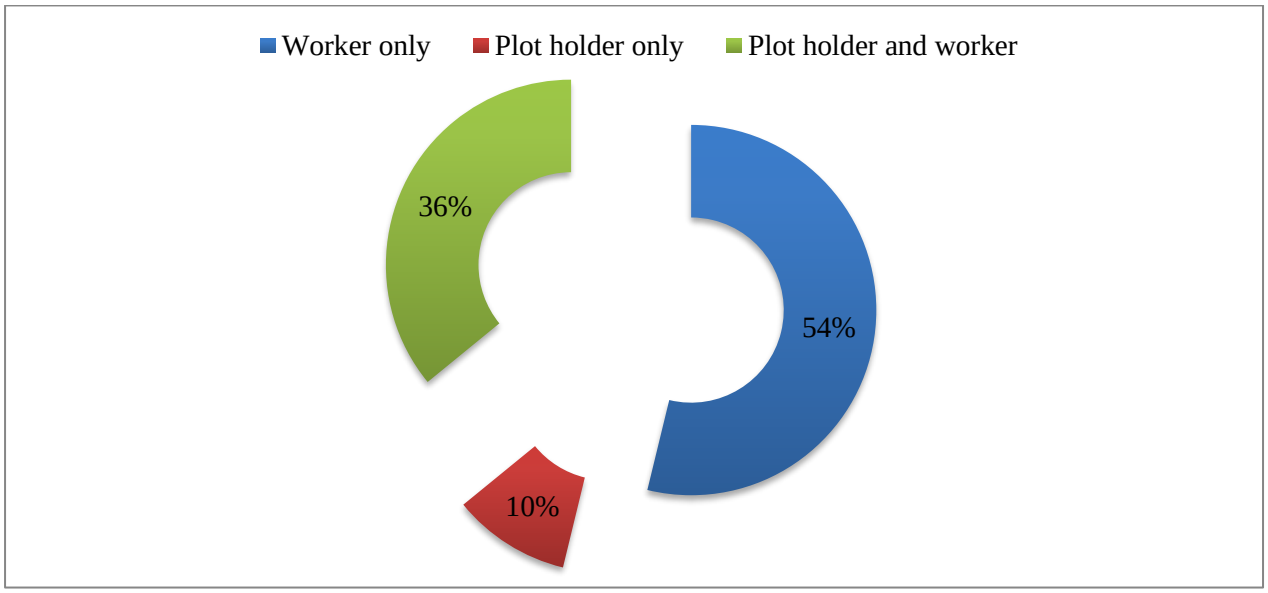

Figure 4: Participation of respondents in FFA

One of the objectives of FFA is to contribute to a sustained decrease in levels of food insecurity in the community and other vulnerable households. This is possible when assets created or rehabilitated contribute to long term food security, for example, dams, gardens, irrigation schemes, dip tanks and livestock sales pens. The FFA interventions are effective in paving the way for sustainable livelihoods. Specifically, FFA beneficiaries in the sample target highlighted that the contribution of the current FFA activities was vital in improving the livelihoods of other vulnerable target people through direct food distribution and creation of assets which have benefited 214 households with approximately 1262 household members in the ward.

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Table 4: Plot sizes for irrigation plot holders

Plot size (acres)	Frequency	Percent (%)
0 - 0.5	6	33.3
0.5 – 1.0	9	50
1.0 – 1.5	3	16.6
Above 1.5	0	0

Table 4 above shows that at least 66.6% of the farmers had plot sizes above 0.5 acres, and from this size, they indicated they could produce food for consumption and sale. Crops grown throughout the year on a rotational basis include cabbages, rape, tomatoes, maize, beans, beetroot, onions, and butternuts. All these contribute to the household food basket, increasing food availability.

Results show that while FFA beneficiaries reported production increases than non-beneficiaries, they also said they are more food secure due to their participation in FFA as they had access to food rations and plots for their own food production. Of the beneficiaries with plots in the irrigation scheme, 94.3 reported an increase in food availability compared to the period before FFA. This shows how significant FFA assets have contributed to increasing food availability at the household level. Table 5 below shows the percentages of households within each range (number of months) before and after production in FFA irrigation schemes. The number of people whose food lasted longer after FFA increased, and the majority (61.1%) were found to have food lasting more than 6 months compared to 16.7% before FFA.

Table 5: Number of months food lasts before and after production through FFA

Number of months	Before FFA		After FFA	
	Frequency	***Percent (%)***	***Frequency***	***Percent (%)***
0 - 3	6	33.3%	1	5.6%
4 - 6	9	50.0%	6	33.3%
7- 9	3	16.7%	7	38.9%
10 - 12	0	0.00%	4	22.2%

By providing a food-based transfer system during the months of a food gap, communities avoided negative coping strategies. Focus Group Discussions revealed that Food for Assets effectively provided food through food rations to people. Medium- and long-term impacts were

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seen in livelihoods albeit mixed results emerging in terms of food security. Women benefited significantly from FFA activities through increased access to resources and increased control of and benefit from the assets created. Scoones (1998) stated that a livelihood must have the ability to cope and recover from shocks and stresses. FFA assets like dams and irrigation schemes have provided such opportunities for community members, enabling them to cope in hard times.

Community leaders observed that regular maintenance would be critical to ensure the future viability of the capital/ asset improvements. Suggested maintenance includes periodic stabilisation of soils within a dam's water catchment area and regular de-silting of sand traps and dams. Additionally, the community will need reserve capital available for the irregular but periodic replacement of parts, including fencing, valves and pipes. Regular maintenance of such assets has been observed as a critical aspect of any infrastructure for the intervention to be sustainable (Chidavaenzi, Mazenda and Ndlovu, 2021).

Upon being asked if they had expectations for food aid in the future, the majority (60%) indicated "Yes", questioning their attitude towards self-sustenance. If people expect continued aid they may relax and not put requisite effort into livelihood activities as they would perceive their future to be secured. FFA thus will play a critical role in graduating people from vulnerability to sustainable livelihoods such that if FFA interventions do come to an end, communities are found in a position where they produce their food. "Own production supported by all-year-round production will surely increase food availability," said the Ward Councillor.

Strategies to improve the contribution of Food for Assets to food availability in rural communities.

FFA is used to create assets that are selected based on the priority of the community informed by community developed disaster risk reduction plans. The projects embarked on vary from road rehabilitation, gully reclamation, dip tanks refurbishment/construction, construction of sanitation facilities, deep wells, dam construction, irrigation, and nutrition gardens. Discussions with key informants and community members showed an inclination towards projects that improved food security in the short and long term, such as dams. These are believed to provide short term relief to food insecurity through the production of crops or vegetables and income obtained through crop or vegetable sales. Workers from the community who offer labour at these sites are given payment in the form of food parcels. The commodities received provide immediate relief, thus increasing food availability in times of scarcity. As shown in Table 6 below, FFA improved household livelihoods in several ways.

Table 6: Effects of FFA on livelihoods

Livelihood improved	Percent (%)
Income through crop sales	49.70%
Increased production in the plots	67.50%
Water for livestock watering and domestic uses	72.30%
Other	17.10%

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Among the tangible benefits of the FFA component, 49.7% of beneficiaries reported that they had realised income from crop sales harvested from created, rehabilitated gardens or irrigation schemes. Due to increased water availability, production in plots also increased for 67.5% of respondents, significantly contributing to food availability. The dams constructed under FFA provided an important water source for livestock and domestic use, as cited by 72.3% of the households.

At each site, work norms were established that required each beneficiary to work 4 hours per day for five days a week. This enabled workers to perform household chores and, if necessary, commit to other paid casual labour. Community members also echoed that only one member from the household is engaged as a worker. This is done to enable other household members to engage in other activities that could increase home food availability, such as production in gardens.

Interviews with the World Vision staff disclosed that the work breakdown structure for FFA activities was designed to take at least six months so that food may be made available to cover the lean season where food shortages are at peak. This period covers the months of August to March. However, on a negative note, this also coincides with the agricultural production season. In such cases, FFA is viewed as detrimental as it competes with a medium to long term solution where communities are expected to be producing their own food. In this study, 23.1% of the households indicated that their production is the main source of food. FFA could have severe repercussions in ensuring continuous or long-term food availability.

Thirty-eight (or 17.8%) of the respondents were not satisfied with the way FFA was implemented because they felt the programme left the deserving. The food basket was inadequate and inappropriate to meet needs, and the tasks were too labour intensive. On being asked if the food given was ideal or not, 72.6% said the food basket was ideal, whilst 27.4% felt it was not.

The FFA payment modality used by World Vision for giving food was a preferred means by approximately 80% of the focus group participants (both beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries). Respondents highlighted that there were fewer chances of abuse of food than cash. Again, in circumstances where there were access challenges on the market, cash would not be ideal. In Ward 1 of Chipinge district, it was noted that cereal prices of cereals were high compared to other localities, and money would, therefore, result in reduced quantities that households would eventually receive.

Feedback from beneficiaries and stakeholders revealed that, in their view, FFA activities had minimal geographical coverage and that few assets (an average of two per ward) were established throughout the intervention. Other respondents noted that some workers only benefited from the food rations. This is consistent with findings from household interviews where 53.8% participated in FFA as workers only. These households are said to benefit little as they do not have plots in the irrigation scheme since their homes are too distant from the created assets.

Some beneficiaries dropped out of the FFA works. The figure below shows a 7% dropout rate was noted. Major reasons given for dropping out were that the tasks were labour intensive (23.2%), some said the distance to work was rather too long (8.3%). In contrast, others cited

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that the FFA programme competed with their household tasks (31%) and some stated that benefits obtained from the programme were not commensurate with work done (19.7%).

Finally, despite the contribution of FFA rations toward increased food availability, most beneficiaries confirmed that involvement in FFA projects as workers only had done little to improve their capacity to cope with future food security crises; but rather improved food availability in the short term. FFA, however, does increase food availability in times of food insecurity, albeit for a short time.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusion

The FFA component, which largely focused on the provision of food and rehabilitation of assets, was an appropriate response to food insecurity in Chipinge District. Targeting of households that are food insecure but with labour, capacity was justified due to the labour-intensive nature of the physical works. The mode of payment through food was most favoured as it addressed the immediate food needs of the communities. The study showed that communities do appreciate the effects of the FFA intervention as demand for more projects was echoed in focus group discussions and key informant interviews.

FFA did improve food availability through the ration sizes were noted to be inadequate to last the whole month. Thus, households had to seek alternative complementary sources or introduce food rationing coping strategies in such cases.

The nature of the FFA activities implemented in Chipinge (dams, irrigation schemes, gardens) contributes significantly to communities adapting to climate change and variability. Also, FFA promoted technologies like the drip irrigation system and use of pipes in the infield works are climate-sensitive, reducing water loss due to evaporation. This makes the communities more resilient to climatic shocks. Dams have increased the ability of households to produce vegetable crops and provide water for livestock, both of which support improved food security and income generation.

Therefore, besides the food rations received, the assets created led to own production of food to complement the food rations resulting in continuous food availability and more long-term food security. FFA benefits are multifaceted and beneficiaries who participated as workers eventually got plots. The created assets tended to have sustainable benefits and increased food availability compared to non-beneficiaries and those who participated as workers only.

However, despite these achievements, the researcher identified certain factors that limited the effectiveness of the intervention. FFA activities were implemented over a limited period and had minimal program coverage considering that food insecurity levels are very high in Chipinge District. Participation in the FFA must be transitory to enable progression from emergency response to more developmental initiatives and benefits to communities to result in long term, sustainable livelihoods.

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Lastly, the sustainability of the assets created by the project is crucial for achieving long-term benefits. In contrast, utilisation and maintenance of such assets were issues dependent on benefits accrued to the community.

Recommendations

Based on the findings from this study, the following recommendations are put forward:

FFA activities should be implemented over a longer period for more sustainable effects on food availability and livelihoods. Care must be taken to find strategies that do not disrupt farming activities when FFA is implemented in the agricultural season such as changing working times from 0800 to 1200hrs or 1300 – 1600hrs to allow beneficiaries to attend to their fields as well.

Evaluations should be conducted at various intervals of the response and not just at the end of the project. They will help improve the project design and factor in the concerns of communities and staff.

Technologies used in FFA assets such as dams and irrigation schemes infield works require regular maintenance for communities to realise sustainable livelihoods. This, therefore, means a more robust community-based asset maintenance/management framework must be adopted and operationalised.

FFA is labour intensive and not recommended for people with limited or no labour capacity. However, due to high levels of food insecurity and its impact on poor households with little or labour capacity, work norms could be reviewed to include such households where they are given light duties such as baby minding tasks just to increase food availability in their households.

Participation in the FFA must be transitory to enable progression from emergency response to more developmental initiatives and benefits to communities to result in long term, sustainable livelihoods.

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