



Facing drought, can Zimbabwe improve on history of food shortage, poor management?

Afrobarometer Dispatch No. 114 | Richman Kokera and Stephen Ndoma

Summary

Zimbabwe and other Southern African countries are facing one of their worst food shortages in decades (Oxfam, 2015; Plan International, 2016). In February 2016, President Robert Mugabe declared a state of disaster in rural parts of the country severely hit by a drought largely blamed on the impact of El Niño (Guardian, 2016; Herald, 2016; Reuters, 2016).

A rapid assessment led by the Zimbabwe Vulnerability Assessment Committee in January 2016 estimated that 2.8 million Zimbabweans are facing food insecurity (Zimbabwe Vulnerability Assessment Committee, 2016), although other estimates have ranged as high as 5 million (see Al Jazeera, 2016).

While weather plays a decisive role in food production, citizens also look to government action to promote food security. Afrobarometer surveys from 2004 to 2014 provide evidence that hunger is not a new phenomenon in Zimbabwe and that the government has generally fallen short of citizens' expectations when it comes to ensuring that people have enough to eat.

Afrobarometer surveys

Afrobarometer is a pan-African, non-partisan research network that conducts public attitude surveys on democracy, governance, economic conditions, and related issues across more than 30 countries in Africa. After five rounds of surveys between 1999 and 2013, results from Round 6 surveys (2014-2015) are currently being published. Afrobarometer conducts face-to-face interviews in the language of the respondent's choice with nationally representative samples that yield country-level results with margins of error of +/-2% (for samples of 2,400) or +/-3% (for samples of 1,200) at a 95% confidence level.

The Afrobarometer team in Zimbabwe, led by Mass Public Opinion Institute, interviewed 2,400 adult Zimbabweans in November 2014. A sample of this size yields results with a margin of error of +/-2% at a 95% confidence level. Previous surveys have been conducted in Zimbabwe in 1999, 2004, 2005, 2009, 2010, and 2012.

Key findings

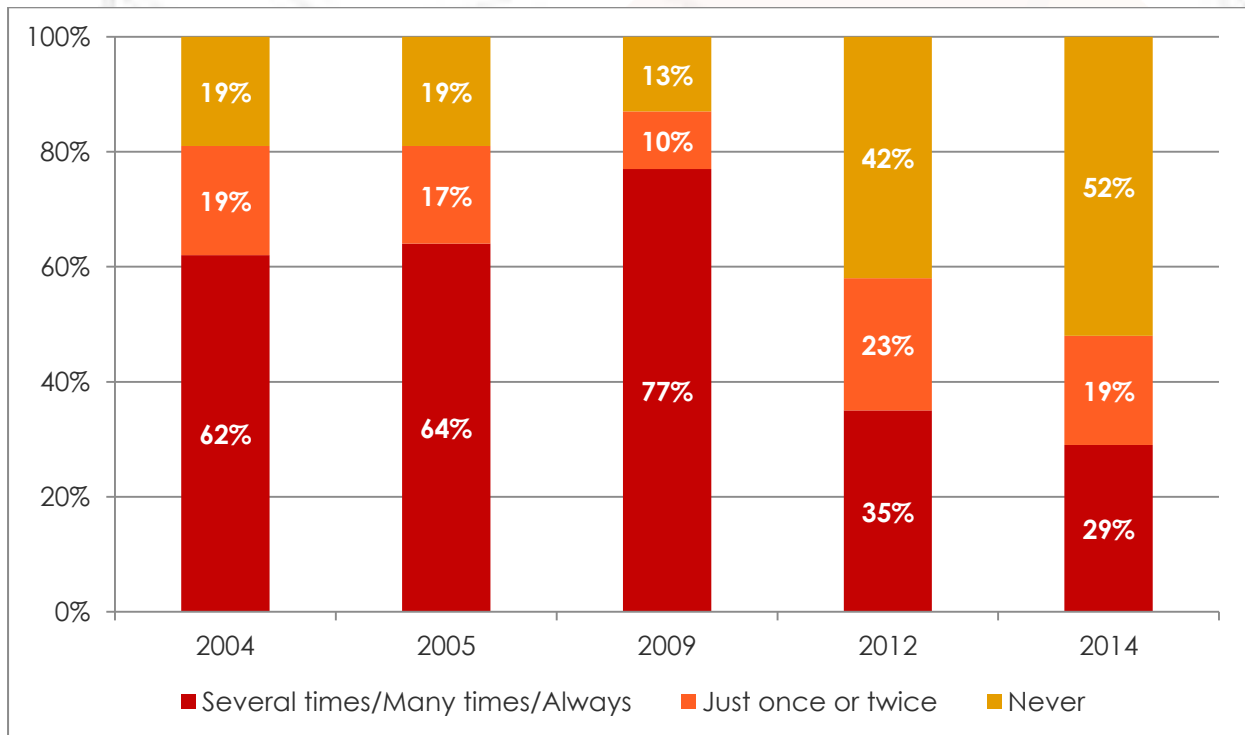
- Almost half (48%) of Zimbabweans say they went without enough food at least once during the preceding year, including 29% who went hungry "several times," "many times," or "always." While this is the lowest level in the past decade, it was recorded in November 2014, before the scope of the current crisis became apparent.
- Experiences of food shortages are most common among rural, older, and less educated citizens.
- More than seven in 10 Zimbabweans (72%) say their government performs "fairly badly" or "very badly" in ensuring that people have enough to eat. Negative

government performance ratings have been the norm except for 2009, when euphoria over the new Government of National Unity may have helped produce a 55% positive rating.

Zimbabweans' experiences with food shortages

To assess "lived poverty" in a given country, Afrobarometer asks survey respondents how often during the preceding year they or their family members have gone without certain basic necessities of life, including enough food to eat. In Zimbabwe, a majority of citizens reported going without enough food at least once in surveys conducted in 2004 (82%), 2005 (82%), 2009 (87%), and 2012 (58%). This proportion declined to 48% in 2014, including 29% who went without enough food "several times," "many times," or "always" (Figure 1). While a significant improvement from previous years, this still indicates food insecurity for nearly half the population – before the current crisis.

Figure 1: Went without enough food | Zimbabwe | 2004-2014

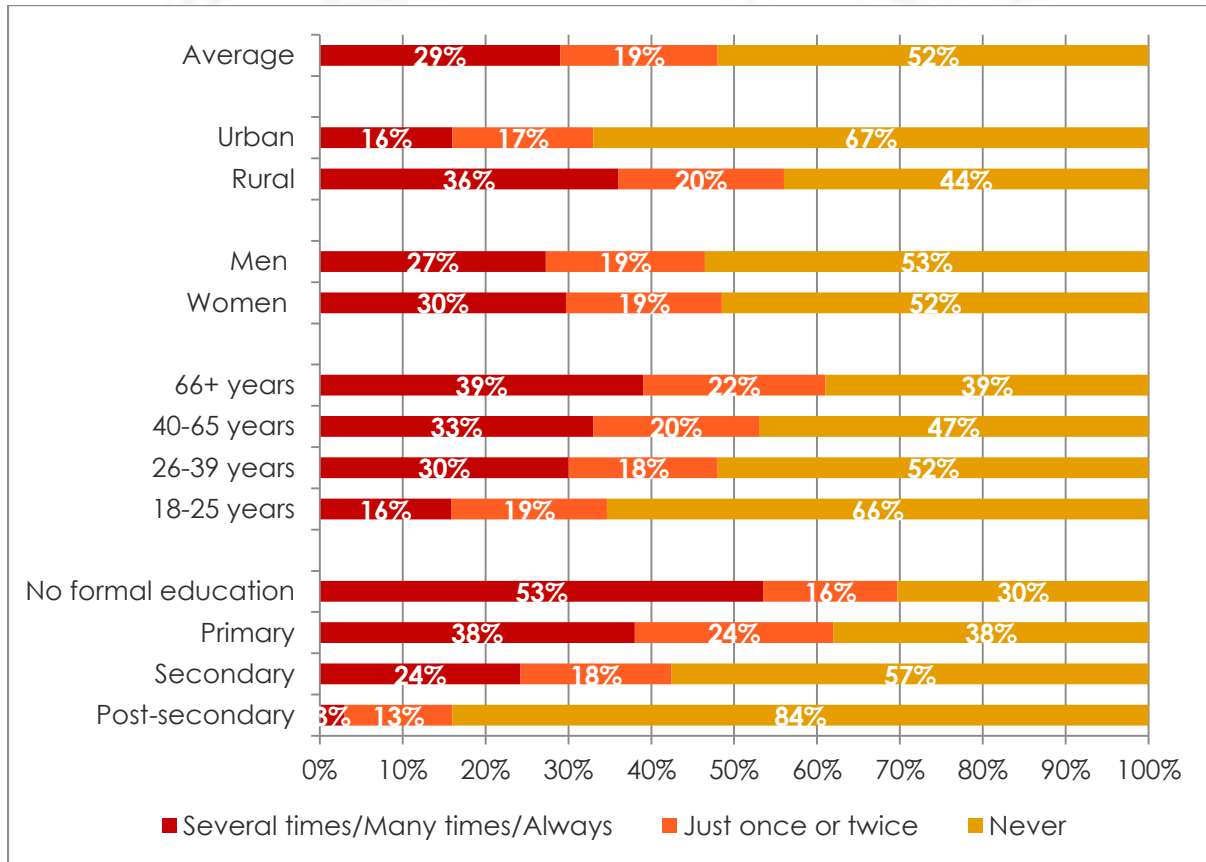


Respondents were asked: Over the past year, how often, if ever, have you or anyone in your family: Gone without enough food to eat?

According to the 2014 findings, the citizens who are most vulnerable to food shortages are rural residents, older citizens, and the less educated (Figure 2). Rural residents are more than twice as likely as urbanites to go hungry at least "several times" (36% vs. 16%). Similarly, the elderly (39%) are more than twice as likely as youth (16%) to experience repeated food shortages. Education level shows a particularly strong correlation with hunger: Among those with no formal education, only 30% "never" went without enough food, compared to 84% of post-secondary graduates.

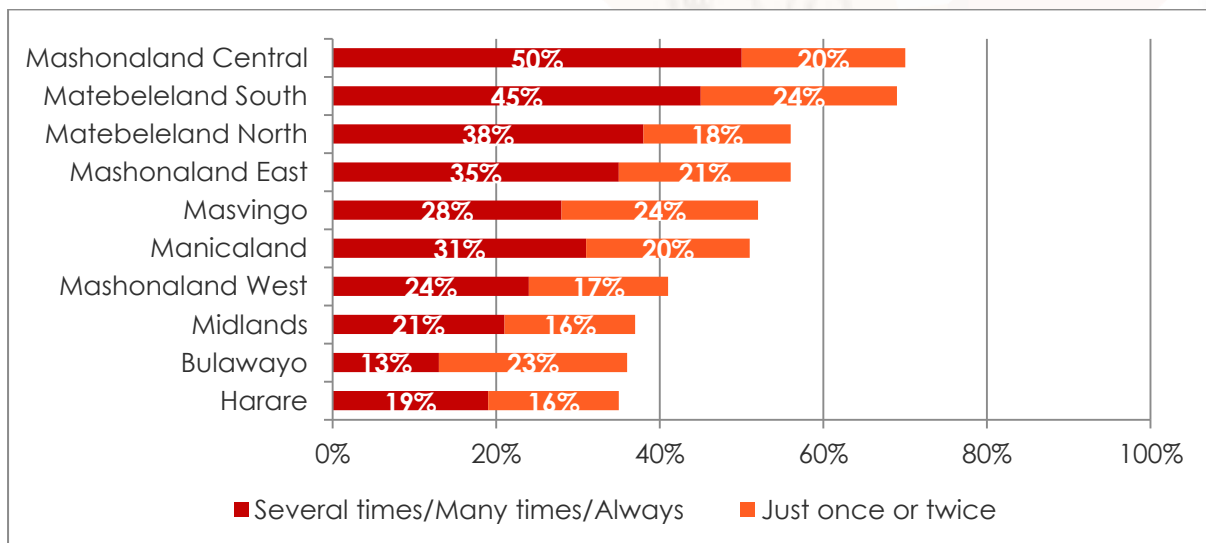
Experiences of food shortages also vary across provinces; Mashonaland Central and Matabeleland South are the most severely affected, while Harare, Bulawayo, and Midlands are the least affected provinces (Figure 3).

Figure 2: Went without enough food to eat | by location, sex, age, and education level | Zimbabwe | 2014



Respondents were asked: Over the past year, how often, if ever, have you or anyone in your family: Gone without enough food to eat?

Figure 3: Went without enough food to eat | by province | Zimbabwe | 2014



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Government performance on food security

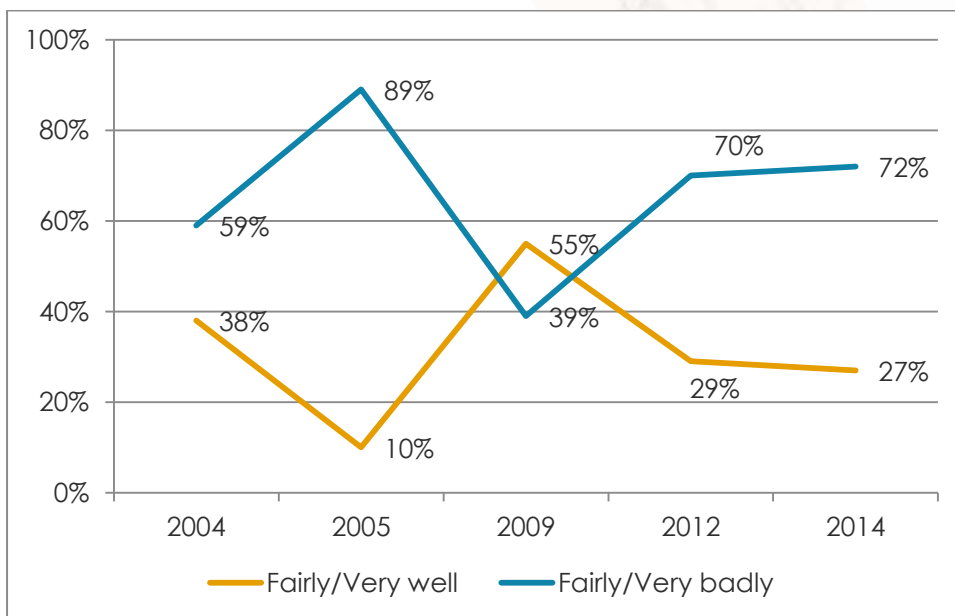
If millions of Zimbabweans are projected to go hungry (Zimbabwe Vulnerability Assessment Committee, 2016; UNICEF, 2016), citizens will look to the government to help ensure access to food for those who need it most. But the government's performance in this regard has not been perceived as impressive over the past decade. The only Afrobarometer survey in which the government received a majority favourable rating for its efforts to ensure that people have enough to eat was in 2009, when 55% of respondents said the Government of National Unity (GNU), established three months before the survey was conducted, was performing "fairly well" or "very well." This positive evaluation was recorded despite the fact that 2009 also saw the largest proportion (87%) of people going without enough food at least once, and may reflect the public's general optimism about the GNU.

In surveys before and after that time, large majorities – up to 89% in 2005 – said the government was performing "fairly badly" or "very badly" on ensuring adequate food supplies (Figure 4).

Dissatisfaction with the government's performance is more prevalent among men (74%) than women (70%) and among urbanites (77%) than rural residents (69%). Disapproval is the majority view in all 10 provinces, although proportions offering negative appraisals range from just half (51%) of citizens in Mashonaland West to more than three-fourths in Harare (82%), Masvingo (81%), Manicaland (78%), and Matabeleland South (78%), suggesting the possibility of uneven access to food provision by the government (Figure 5).

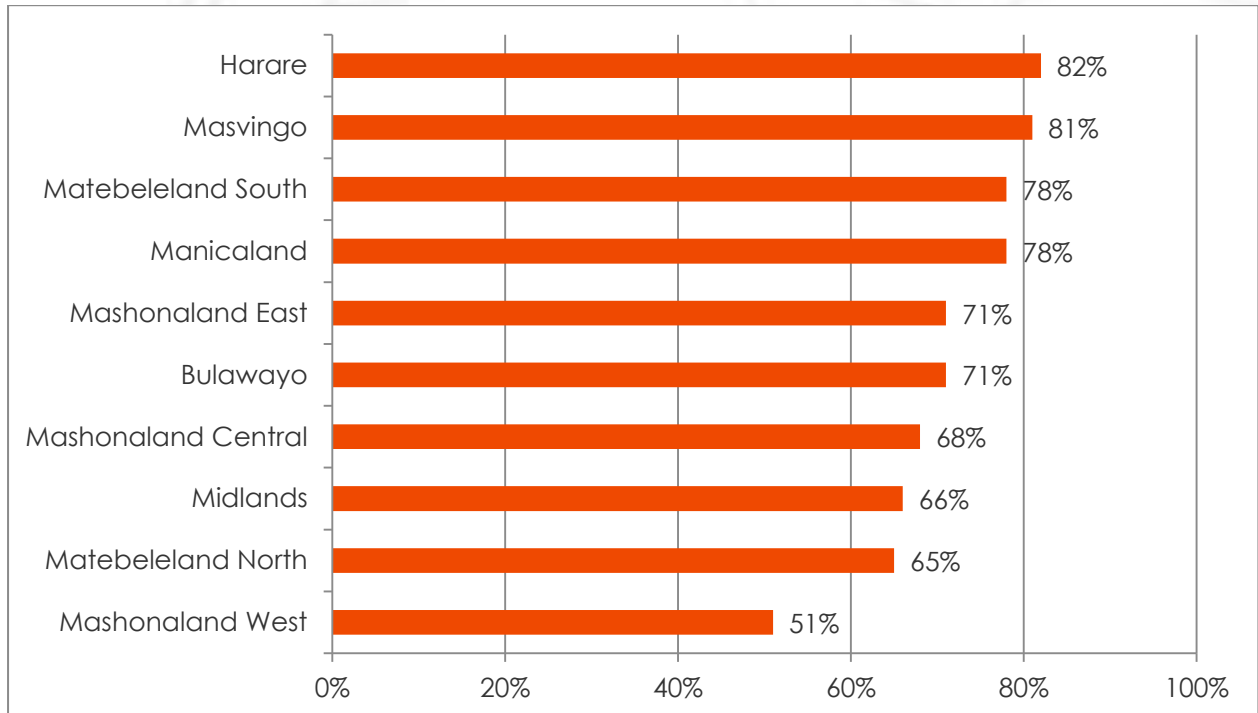
Political party affiliation is also correlated with public perceptions of the government's performance in ensuring that everyone has enough to eat. Negative assessments are far more common among MDC-T supporters (89%) than among ZANU-PF adherents (58%) (Figure 6). Still, even among the ruling party's supporters, a majority rates the government negatively on this issue.

Figure 4: Government performance in ensuring that everyone has enough to eat
 | Zimbabwe | 2004-2014



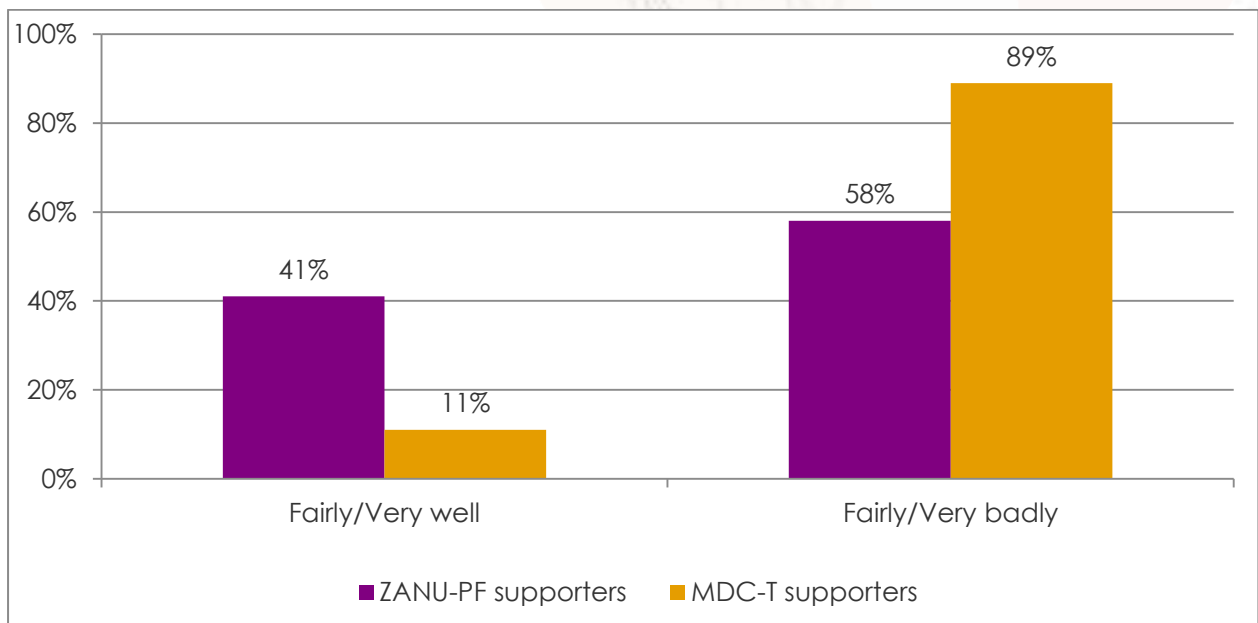
Respondents were asked: How well or badly would you say the current government is handling the following matters, or haven't you heard enough to say: Ensuring everyone has enough to eat?

Figure 5: Government performing badly in ensuring everyone has enough to eat | by province | Zimbabwe | 2014



Respondents were asked: How well or badly would you say the current government is handling the following matters, or haven't you heard enough to say: Ensuring everyone has enough to eat? (% who say "fairly badly" or "very badly")

Figure 6: Government performance in ensuring everyone has enough to eat | by political party affiliation | Zimbabwe | 2014



Respondents were asked: How well or badly would you say the current government is handling the following matters, or haven't you heard enough to say: Ensuring everyone has enough to eat?

Conclusion

Even before the current drought and food crisis, significant proportions of Zimbabwe's population experienced shortages of food, especially among rural, older, and less educated citizens. Zimbabweans continue to rate their government's performance in ensuring adequate food supplies as poor, although variations in the extent of negative appraisals across provinces and political party affiliations may point to unequal access to government food support among the population. With the 2016 El Niño-induced drought threatening millions of citizens, the government and interested stakeholders should put measures in place to ensure adequate food for all citizens.

To further explore this data, please visit
Afrobarometer's free online data analysis facility at
www.afrobarometer.org/online-data-analysis.

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Afrobarometer is produced collaboratively by social scientists from more than 30 African countries. Coordination is provided by the Center for Democratic Development (CDD) in Ghana, the Institute for Justice and Reconciliation (IJR) in South Africa, the Institute for Development Studies (IDS) at the University of Nairobi in Kenya, and the Institute for Empirical Research in Political Economy (IREEP) in Benin. Michigan State University (MSU) and the University of Cape Town (UCT) provide technical support to the network.

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