

**USER-PRODUCER WORKSHOP ON FOOD SECURITY
DATABASE**

PAPER: FOOD SECURITY DATABASE USED BY PRIVATE TRADERS.

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When I was asked to present a paper on the use of Food Security Data by private Traders I questioned myself that data is readily available, and if so to what extent the users have access to that data. And again before I got the answer to this question another one came, do we all have the same interpretation to the **Term Food Security**? Thus I thought it is better that we agree on the second question before going any further.

DEFINITION

The term **FOOD SECURITY** had undergone many formulations during the past two decades. Committee on world Food Security defined it as physical and economic access for all people at all times to the basic foodstuffs they need. This is in 1983. A decade later World Food Summit gave a more elaborate definition to it and I quote “ Access of all people at all times to the food they need for an active and healthy life with Dignity”.

However, the committee on world Food Security (again in 1983), also noted that Food Security has its essential component which are availability, stability and accessibility. Yet in 1992 two other concepts were added to quality and safety. Therefore it will be safe to adopt one definition for the purpose of this paper.

“Free Accessibility and availability of a minimum requirement of food with adequate nutrition for all people at all times”.

Having accepted the definition then we can now safely start our dialogue.

SADC DATABASE

Theorists have it that information can be available but accessibility to that information by users is more questionable. We can go further to say that is the information given at any time relevant and effective enough to the users? Thus any information that the SADC database might have accumulated must direct itself to satisfy the need of the users and at the same time be effective enough to the users. Short of this is tantamount to deny the user the accessibility of the required data. Therefore the SADC data base must direct itself to provide correct, adequate and timely information required to enable the private trader to make use of the same when and as required whether national or regional levels.

EVALUATION OF DATABASE

In the collection of Food Security Data separation has to be made to provide identities such as food crop production market information and nutritional standard.

- a) Agricultural production monitoring system is mostly carried out by field surveyors at both provincial and district levels. These are published annually in statistical reports. Air Transport bodies usually undertakes the gathering of rainfall and weather data. These forecasts enable the field surveyors to produce crop forecasts during growing seasons and at time of harvest.

b) Marketing information System (MIS)

MIS undertake the task of gathering, processing and disseminating data on commodity trading. In doing so they monitor prices and qualities available on the market, stocks and merchandise transport facilities for both local produces imports and exports. MIS has a vital role in the dissemination of the information to all sectors whether private or public Traders. Its importance more often than necessary overlaps itself only to give market prices rather than caring for qualities traded. Thus surrendering to the power and demands of the traders and neglecting to the harder task which is the base of trade. Various countries have different organizations or Institutions undertaking the work of MIS and at times the task of one organization is over lapped by the other and resulting in either duplication or contradictions.

c) **FOOD NUTRITION**

Another important factor for Food Security data is the Food Nutrition. This collection is being undertaken by both statutory and non statutory organs. A good example in Tanzania is the Tanzania Food Control Commission which undertakes the monitoring of food Imports and to some extent exports. However Ministry of Agriculture through Early warning and crop monitoring in Food Security Department mostly carries out the local produce. However these two organization do not collaborate and the later has to rely on individual importers to furnish them with the data rather than getting it first hand from the former who issue permits and examine imports as they arrive. Therefore at times the data issued by one institution can contradict the other. There are other organizations that collect the Food nutrition data such as various NGOs, public health staff, and at times even schoolteachers are involved in the line.

Having said these we now have to look in to the availability, accessibility and use of the information data within SADC both at regional and national levels.

Any Food Security Data must have a capacity to give Forecasts in three spheres:

- a) Availability
- b) Stability
- c) Accessibility

a) **AVAILABILITY**

The private Trader would require food security data to enable him make decision of whether to go to the market for sale or purchase of any commodity. This data must be informative to such an extent that would make him take the risk decision and must be available when required.

b) STABILITY

The information – Data, must also be stable and with a long range to allow enough time to give decision-makers to organize reactions to warnings. Yes these data can sometimes be faulty but at most times they must be reliable and stable to avoid false warning. In other words they must be to a greater degree authentic and not shaky.

b) ACCESSIBILITY

Having the correct data stored or kept in a centrally storage point but where it cannot be accessible is to say the least use less. This data is of no use and its validity is zero. Thus any data whether it talks of the number of bags of maize that might be available at X village at Y period or whether it talks of probable bumper harvest, accessibility to it is of a prime importance. This is because it enables to given forecast of the three spheres of Food Security that generally assist the private Trader to make proper use of the data.

Data therefore is a basic component for any decision maker or planner because the main uses of it is that of providing planners of all levels with inter sectoral historic summary analysis of food security its limitations and strong points.

DATA USE BY PRIVATE TRADER

Of late the SADC countries have all changed to Free Trade. The Governments have gradually but effectively withdrew from the trade arena and left to Private Sector. Private Sector participation has called for a systematic build up of database for Food Security. Each company or organization has its own database on Food Security and the management in decision making uses it.

SADC has its own database in Harare and each country within SADC has one. In Tanzania the Food Security Department maintains a database. They also run a Bulletin, which gives information on some aspects of the Food Security. However these database have been maintained and built up by Government Institutions which are basically construed to serve Government institutions and departments statistics which are not catagorised to fulfil the different information needs of various user categories. Such is the case the private Trader at times will have to take the trouble of analysing the data before use. The Bulletin is to some extent very informative but as stated does not cater for need of a private Trader unless expertise knowledge to analyse is used.

Here then brings the need for a collection of Food Security related information to care for the across the board requirements of the Free Trade Market. To build up this database there should be a two-way runway.

- The Government Organization and Institutions who cater for Food Security database must also go for Free Trade at least in mind.

- Private Traders like wise should open up from their nutshells of confinements to a more liberal minds of understanding that information systems and data are for their advantages and their participation in both building it up and running the infrastructure is to the advantage of all.

To achieve this the database awareness must be built from grassroots level of village institutions, local Governments to national and regional level. This chain would enhance the sustainability of the data and creates within it stability and accessibility rendering the data an effective component to the private Trader. Encouraged by this a trader would find greater benefit in the Food Security data and be willing to contribute towards and for it.

INFORMATION DISSEMINATION

At this point and time we must also take note that there is a massive spread of information exchange system in the way of Fax, Internet etc. Aided to it is the globalization of the computer use including the availability of less expensive but increasingly powerful simple software. These facilitate the development of more diversified multipurpose information data system. Non the less the cost of data gathering to be used in these net works is still very expensive. Therefore the present database collected by SADC still funds itself more compatible and required by private trader than this more sophisticated expensive way. It is therefore imperative to put more effort in modifying, changing and adapting the data to the needs of the ever-growing private trader who is also very demanding.

TECHNOLOGY AND NEEDS

The private Trader would need Food Security data, even more, in this world of technological development and urbanization. This data would be the basis of link in the information system that would enable the trader answer the question of cost reduction in the gathering of his own information system to this changing world. That is to say it would reduce duplication of data gathering or processing and provide a regular coordination between providers and users. Thus if the result of the data processing becomes rapidly available to as many users as possible in the form, that can be all more readable, in a somewhat summarised form, the private trader will be willing to pay for it to enable him use it.

Finally let me at this juncture try to draw a line between the present available data which is more crop oriented to the requirements of a trader who requires a more detailed information based on:

- Availability of both cash and food crop
- Stocks and accessibility
- Prices

- Places where there is more demand

Yes the present database of SADC is of good use none the less it has to be reprocessed to meet the demands of ever growing global changes and world globalization of Trade.

Thank you.

SUMMARY

WHAT IS FOOD SECURITY?

A short definition derived from a few interpretations from

- a) Committee on World Food Security 1993
- b) World Food Summit

“ Free Accessibility and Availability of minimum Requirement of Food with adequate nutrition for all people at all time”.

DATABASE SADC

- Is it all-available to all people?
- Do they have access to it?
- Does a private trader know about it?
- What does it contain?

MIS – Marketing Information System

The present system its collection analysis and limitations

FOOD NUTRITION

Its collection and availability

A Case of TANZANIA

- TANZANIA FOOD CONTROL COMMISSION
- AND FOOD SECURITY DEPARTMENT
- HOW THEY CO-ORDINATE?

REQUIREMENTS OF ANY FOOD SECURITY DATA

- Availability
- Accessibility
- Stability

DATA USE BY PRIVATE TRADERS

- PRESENTLY EACH PRIVATE TRADER HAS ITS OWN DATA BASE

- FOOD SECURITY DEPT HAS ONE
- CO-ORDINATES TO FORM SADC DATABASE
- PRIVATE TRADER MUST BE CONTED
- A STAKEHOLDER AND TAKEN ABOARD IN COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS
- GOVT MUST CHANGE ALTITUDE
- VILLAGE AND VILLAGE GOVT PARTICIPATION

INFORMATION NETWORK

- Massive spread of information
- Internet a computer access
- SADC DATABASE MUST ADAPT TO THE CHANCING WORLD

TECHNOLOGY AND NEEDS

- CHANGE IN TECHNOLOGY MAKES THE PRIVATE TRADER EVEN MORE DEMANDING TO FOOD SECURITY DATA
- ASSIST HIM IN COST REDUCTION AND ARRIVE AT PARIST DECISION

THE PRESENT AND REQUIRED INFORMATION

- A LINE BE DRAWN BETWEEN INFORMATION
- PRESENT FOOD SECURITY DATA
- THE REQUIRED ONE