



W/O 3/93
CAMPAIGNERS FOR HUMAN RIGHTS
1992 - 2022

Celebrating
30 YEARS OF
GRASSROOTS ORGANISING

Analysis on the impact and implications of the partisan distribution of food aid on the enjoyment of other human rights in Zimbabwe.

23 February 2024

Introduction

The distribution of food aid in Zimbabwe involves a network of state and non-state actors, spanning from village to national levels. These actors are legally obligated to provide equitable and accessible food assistance to those facing food insecurity. However, reports of selective distribution based on political affiliation have sparked criticism. Such practices not only contravene the Zimbabwean Constitution but also international norms.

Background

Zimbabwe is currently facing a drought in various parts of the country, intensified by climate change, leading to extended dry periods that undermine agricultural productivity and food availability. The El Niño weather pattern has reduced rainfall, exacerbating the situation. According to ZimFact (Factsheet on Climate Change- Drought EL Nino and impact on Zimbabwe agriculture), the El Niño posed a threat to the agricultural livelihoods of millions of people globally. In Southern Africa and Zimbabwe in particular, the impacts of El Niño have been felt across all sectors affecting the most vulnerable communities.

According to the 2022 Population and Housing Census Preliminary Report, over 60% of Zimbabwe's population resides in rural areas, with a heavy reliance on small-scale agriculture. At present, nearly half of the population is food insecure, struggling due to poor harvests and economic turmoil. The Zimbabwe Vulnerability Assessment Committee (ZimVac) reports that 29% of the rural populace lacks sufficient food. The UN World Food Programme (WFP) and other agencies are aiding over 5 million people, a figure projected to increase.

Partisan Distribution and Human Rights

The politicization of food aid distribution has raised alarms among rights and relief organizations. There are allegations of favoritism towards the ruling party's supporters, with traditional leaders implicated in these biased practices. The USAID's Famine Early Warning Systems Network forecasts that 20 million individuals in southern Africa will require food assistance due to El Niño's impact, with many in Zimbabwe facing hardships into early 2025.

Such partisan distribution infringes upon the fundamental human right to food, as enshrined in Section 77 of the Zimbabwean Constitution. This right is intrinsically linked to other rights, including health, water, education, and social security. Moreover, the manipulation of food aid jeopardizes the right to political participation and freedom of expression. By using food as a tool for patronage and coercion, the ruling party undermines the electoral process's integrity and instills fear among opposition supporters.

Additionally, withholding or threatening to withhold food aid from opposition supporters, activists, and critics contravenes the right to freedom of expression—the liberty of every person to seek, receive, and convey information and ideas across all frontiers as stated in the Constitution of Zimbabwe section 61. By conditioning access to food aid on political allegiance, the ruling party and its cohorts foster an atmosphere of fear and suppression that quashes dissent and critique.

Lastly, the discriminatory and arbitrary allocation of food aid also breaches the right to freedom from discrimination—the entitlement of every individual to

access all human rights without any discrimination based on race, color, sex, language, religion, political stance, national or social origin, property, birth, or other status as stated on section 56 of the Constitution of Zimbabwe. By preferentially treating or disadvantaging groups or individuals due to their political ties, the ruling party and its allies contravene the principles of equality and non-discrimination, which are foundational to the constitution and international human rights legislation.

Recommendations:

To overcome the barriers and challenges to equitable food aid distribution in Zimbabwe, the following recommendations are proposed for the government, civil society, and development partners:

Government: *Uphold the right to food for all citizens, acting without discrimination and in line with constitutional and international obligations.*

Integrate the right to food into national policies, laws, and programs.

Promote democratic governance, accountability, and the rule of law.

Cease the politicization and manipulation of food aid.

Foster dialogue and cooperation with opposition parties, civil society, and international stakeholders to address these challenges.

Civil Society: *Monitor, advocate, and campaign for the right to food.*

Hold the government and other stakeholders accountable for their actions or lack thereof.

Raise public awareness about the right to food.

Empower and mobilize citizens to claim and exercise their right to food and equitable food aid distribution.

Development Partners: *Support the government and civil society in realizing the right to food.*

Provide assistance that aligns with human rights principles and standards.

Respect Zimbabwe's sovereignty and avoid imposing conditions that could infringe upon the right to food.

Conclusion: The partisan distribution of food aid in Zimbabwe constitutes a widespread violation of the right to food as enshrined in Section 77 of the Zimbabwean Constitution. This practice disproportionately affects opposition party members and civil society groups. Although structures are in place to ensure fair access to food assistance, political biases in food aid distribution threaten democratic values and the realization of the right to food. The lack of specific laws to counteract partisan practices exacerbates the issue, undermining fundamental human rights.