



Zimbabwe Catholic Bishops' Conference

A call for practical action to
protect the **ENVIRONMENT** and
promote
FOOD SECURITY



*A Pastoral Letter of the Zimbabwe Catholic Bishops' Conference
On the Current Food Security Crisis in Our Country:
15 November 2015.*

1. Introduction

We, your Shepherds, have reflected on Zimbabwe's 2015/2016 food security crisis caused by many factors including climate change, our disregard for the environment and policy deficiency. In the light of the Word of God and Christian Social Teaching, we provide some guidance, light and hope in these difficult times.

2. Poverty, hunger and food insecurity

2.1. Approximately 1.5 million Zimbabweans (16% of rural households) may not be able to meet their food needs during the 2015/2016 hunger season.

2.2. Most of the rural households are finding it difficult to purchase food at the market, even if available.

2.3. The orphaned, elderly, unemployed, HIV infected and affected, female and child headed households and other vulnerable groups are getting poorer due to food scarcity.

3. Climate Change a reality

3.1. In June 2015, Pope Francis issued an Encyclical Letter entitled LAUDATO SI': Praise Be to You, indicating that climate change is now a reality on which all need to act from our various levels — whether individual, communal, national, regional or global. Among some of the most important points highlighted in the Encyclical are that: Climate change is real and is getting worse; Human beings are a major contributor to climate change; Climate change disproportionately affects the poor; We can and must make things better; and Individuals can help, but politicians must take the lead.

3.2. Pope Francis writes that the environment, “our common home”, is in an ecological crisis because of “the harm we have inflicted on her by our irresponsible use and abuse of the goods with which God has endowed her” (Laudato Si no. 2). The earth is burdened and laid waste, groans in travail with sickness as evidenced in the soil, in the water, in the air and in all forms of life. As Zimbabweans we should acknowledge our contribution to the

degradation of our environment mainly through wanton cutting down of trees, veld fires, pollution, siltation of rivers and disregard for wetlands. New and old mines continue to pollute our air, water and soil as they fail to fulfill legislation on the disposal of residues, fumes, chemicals, etc., posing a health hazard for many. We are literally turning our beautiful country into a desert. Contrary to our ancient traditions of maintaining a healthy ecological balance, we have come to see ourselves as the lords and masters of the earth, entitled to plunder her at will (Laudato Si no. 2). We inherited a wholesome country from our forefathers, we have a similar obligation to future generations.

3.3. Climate change has led to multidimensional problems with serious social and economic implications. Zimbabwe for instance, has experienced climate change through extreme weather conditions events such as frequent droughts, erratic and too much rainfall. This has affected agriculture production where more than half of the country's population derive their livelihoods. Many fail to till their land, secure inputs and plant on time. Persistent poverty, hunger and food insecurity have therefore become common. We all need to make an effort to take care of nature and climate by avoiding veld fires, cutting down of trees, water and air pollution. "Human beings, while capable of the worst, are also capable of rising above themselves, choosing again what is good, and making a new start" (Laudato Si no. 205).

4. Well Written Policies

4.1. Zimbabwe has some of the best agriculture, and even economic policies on the continent that seek to address poverty, hunger and climate change.

4.2. The Zimbabwe Agenda for Sustainable Socio-Economic Transformation (ZimASSET) provides that Food Security and Nutrition revolve around the country's food producing and processing capabilities. It is the ultimate goal of the ZimASSET in this regard to restore Zimbabwe's bread basket status producing food enough to sustain not only the country but the whole region of Southern Africa. The ZimASSET anticipated some of the goals of the newly adopted global Sustainable Development Goals.

4.3. The Zero Hunger Challenge Strategy brings together different

stakeholders at the country level to contribute to eliminating food nutrition insecurity. It is anchored on 5 pillars which are:- Zero stunted children less than two years, 100% access to adequate food all year round, all food systems are sustainable, 100% increase in smallholder productivity and incomes and Zero loss or waste of food

4.4. The Zimbabwe Agriculture Investment Plan (ZAIP) is premised on the principles of the Comprehensive Africa Agricultural Development Programme (CAADP) that are meant to enhance the agriculture sector through the facilitation of sustainable increase in production, productivity and competitiveness. It promises that if Government allocates at least 10% of its national budget to the Agricultural sector, this will contribute to sustainable annual agriculture growth rate of more than 6% per annum.

4.5. Climate Change Response Strategy is underpinned on six sub-sectors that cover water resources, agriculture, gender, youth and vulnerable groups, education and awareness, human settlement and governance. It aims to produce concrete mitigation and adaptation, actions integrated into long-term economic planning processes to support a low carbon, climate resilient development pathway. The strategy will ultimately feed into the national climate policy which aims to promote the main-streaming of climate and climate change issues into national development plans.

4.6. Food and Nutrition Security Policy offers a framework for a cohesive multi-sectoral action programme with a shared vision and strategy for improved food and nutrition security in Zimbabwe. Among other commitments made by Government in this document, it devotes to ensuring a national integrated food and nutrition security information system that provides timely, reliable information on the food and nutrition security situation, effectiveness of programmes and informs decision-making.

5. Our Request

5.1. As highlighted by Pope Francis, “It is a scandal that there is still hunger and malnutrition in the world. It is not just a question of responding to immediate emergencies, but of addressing together, in all areas, a problem that challenges our personal and social conscience, to achieve a just and lasting solution”.

Food

5.2. More than 16% of Zimbabweans urgently need food assistance. Jesus said, “Give them something to eat yourselves” (Mt.14:16). And accordingly the early Christians “shared the proceeds among themselves according to what each one needed” (Acts 2:45).

5.3. We appeal to everyone to share what they have charitably and generously. We invite Parishes and Small Christian Communities to make concrete gestures/actions to alleviate the suffering of the hungry. We extend our appeal to our brothers and sisters, and all institutions of goodwill, in and outside Zimbabwe to assist. “Whoever has two tunics is to share with him who has none, and whoever has food is to do likewise.” (Luke 3:10-11). Our faith is tested by how we treat the vulnerable members of our community. This too will be our ultimate test on judgment day: “For I was hungry and you gave me food” (Mt.25:35).

5.4. We would like to assure all those willing to assist through the Church that everything received will be channeled to the needy transparently, prioritizing the most vulnerable people, through our Diocesan, Parish and Caritas offices. We appeal to others involved in food assistance to uphold the principles of honesty and transparency in the sharing of food.

5.5. We are grateful that Government is taking measures to mitigate the adverse effects of hunger and climate change. We request the Government, traditional and political leaders to depoliticize the distribution of food and other humanitarian assistance. Political and structural transformations are needed for lasting change. Every effort to protect and improve our world entails profound changes in lifestyles, models of production and consumption, and the established structures of power which today govern societies. An elected Government becomes a parent for all citizens regardless of their political affiliation. We were all created in the image of God who loved us first and created us in his own image (Genesis 1:27). There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for we are all one in Christ Jesus (Galatians 3:28) everybody deserves life and dignity through access to food.

Timely provision of inputs and fair payment for farmers

5.6. Most rural households rely on agriculture to secure their livelihoods. They spend more than half a year working on the land.

5.7. We appeal to the Government and all those who provide farmers with agricultural inputs to timely distribute them before the rainy season. We are also asking for impartiality in the distribution of the inputs.

5.8. The prices of each farm commodity should be communicated before the farmers make their crop choices for the season. The buying and payment processes should also be communicated in advance to avoid prejudice.

5.9. In situations of contract farming, farmers should be well educated on the contracts they will be signing. This should be supported by Government through a clear regulatory framework that protects smallholder farmers. All clauses of the contracts should be revealed and thoroughly discussed in a language understood by both the contractors and contracted. Hiding some of the contract clauses and revealing them to the farmers during the selling season contradicts what the bible teaches us: Therefore, having put away falsehood, let each one of you speak the truth with his neighbor, for we are members one of another. (Ephesians 4:25)

Sincere and practical implementation of relevant policies

5.10. Policy makers and implementers should move from rhetoric to practical action by financing and implementing existing policies and fulfill ratified regional and international covenants to protect the environment and improve food security. Good policies on paper are not useful if they are not transformed into reality. Policies become a reality through frank and open dialogue, political will, innovation and sufficient financing.

5.11. We urge Government to increase agriculture investment and spending in line with the 2003 CAADP Maputo Declaration, particularly targeting the smallholder farmers.

5.12. Extension Support needs to be enhanced so that the rural poor cope, adapt and manage climate risk in order to prevent hunger and poverty.

5.13. In line with ZIMASSET, we urge Government to invest more in improved

irrigation and water harvesting systems to address the current water poverty. We further request the Government to develop and adopt appropriate and climate smart and ecological agriculture techniques.

6. Final Words

6.1. We must not despair. If we all work for the common good, if we are in solidarity with one another and if everyone does their part to protect the environment and improve food security, there is hope. Let us pray that the Lord may touch our hearts so that we are ready to protect our environment, give and share what we have and implement the good policies we have. May the blessings of God be upon us during these difficult times.

PEACE BE WITH YOU

- +Michael D. Bhasera, Bishop of Masvingo(ZCBC President)
- +Robert C. Ndlovu, Archbishop of Harare(ZCBC Vice President)
- +Alex Thomas, Archbishop of Bulawayo (ZCBC Secretary/Treasurer)
- +Alexio Churu Muchabaiwa, Bishop of Mutare
- +Angel Floro, Bishop of Gokwe
- +Dieter B. Scholz SJ, Bishop of Chinhoyi
- +Albert Serrano, Bishop of Hwange
- +Xavier J. Munyongani, Bishop of Gweru
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