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Conference Paper The role of food from natural resources in reducing vulnerability to poverty: a case study from Zimbabwe

Proceedings of the German Development Economics Conference, Berlin 2006, No. 28

Provided in Cooperation with: Research Committee on Development Economics (AEL), German Economic Association

Suggested Citation: Akinnifesi, Festus; Waibel, Hermann; Mithöfer, Dagmar (2006) : The role of food from natural resources in reducing vulnerability to poverty: a case study from Zimbabwe, Proceedings of the German Development Economics Conference, Berlin 2006, No. 28, Verein für Socialpolitik, Ausschuss für Entwicklungsländer, Hannover

This Version is available at: https://hdl.handle.net/10419/19853

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The role of food from natural resources in reducing vulnerability to poverty: a case study from Zimbabwe

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7 Abstract

8 Vulnerability to poverty is a major problem in the rural areas of Sub Saharan Africa. 9 Rural Households are confronted with various covariate and idiosyncratic shocks and are 10 often severely constrained in coping with such events. They frequently resort to food from 11 natural resources such as indigenous fruits during times of crisis. The availability of such food 12 sources is increasingly at risk due to deforestation and biodiversity loss.

The objective of this paper is to quantify the contribution of indigenous fruit trees 13 towards reducing vulnerability to food insecurity and poverty. The methodology used is a 14 15 multi-period stochastic household income model. The data were collected in a case study in 16 Zimbabwe using detailed monthly income and expenditure records of a sample of 39 rural households in two areas. The two regions differ in their agricultural system. In one area 17 horticulture, off-farm activities and exotic fruits are a major source of income while in the 18 19 other area indigenous fruits are a more important source of income. This paper concentrates on the latter area. 20

Model calculations show that rural households in Zimbabwe are highly vulnerable to seasonal fluctuations in income and therefore a critical period where households run high risk of being food insecure can be identified. While indigenous fruits, as a low cost natural resource, can facilitate income smoothing, the role of other sources of income must not be neglected. The paper concludes that diversified season-specific income generating portfolios must be designed of which indigenous fruit trees have a role to play.

27

Keywords: Vulnerability, poverty, food security, seasonal fluctuations, wild food
 resources, Zimbabwe

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32 **1. Introduction**

Poverty is the major problem in rural areas of Sub Saharan Africa. In Zimbabwe in 33 34 1995, 48% of the rural population lived below the poverty threshold (Alwang et al., 2002). Many of those, however, are at risk to fall deeper into poverty as a consequence of various 35 micro and macro shocks such as family tragedies, complete harvest failures, energy crisis and 36 37 political upheavals. Likewise, people whose income is above the poverty line may fall back into poverty. Hence, any analysis of poverty reduction measures must treat poverty in a 38 39 dynamic context and identify risk-reducing strategies that lower the probability of people 40 falling back or falling deeper into poverty. Generally, risk-management strategies such as diversification and income skewing aim at income smoothing from an ex-ante perspective. 41 42 Risk-coping strategies include self-insurance like precautionary savings, i.e. building up of 43 assets, and group-based risk sharing. They deal with risk from an ex-post perspective and aim at consumption smoothing (Dercon, 2000). The collection of wild foods is a commonly used 44 45 risk-coping strategy by rural dwellers in developing countries. Wild foods, e.g. fruits, bushmeat, honey, mushrooms, etc., are food from natural resources, which are collected in 46 47 communal areas and along roads. They are an especially important income source for poor people since entry barriers for collection and use are low (Dewees, 1994). A variety of edible 48 49 wild fruits are a popular natural resource in Southern Africa (Maghembe et al., 1998, Cavendish, 2000). They are extensively used by the local population and, apart from own 50 51 consumption; they are increasingly being sold in markets (Maghembe et al., 1998; Ramadhani 52 and Schmidt, 2002). Indigenous fruits (IF) are available during times of drought and famine, thereby contributing to food security (Rukuni et al., 1998; Mithöfer and Waibel, 2003). In the 53

past, the fruits were a public good, but growing competition over the fruits due to an 54 55 increasing population led to increased rivalry and has changed the status of the resource to an open access good (Ramadhani, 2002). Despite their role in sustaining food security, research 56 57 and development has only recently recognized their importance. Wild harvesting of forest products, especially fruits, is considered as a first major step in their domestication and 58 59 commoditization (Simons and Leakey, 2004). Therefore, research in the last decade has 60 focussed on efforts to domesticate indigenous fruit trees in addition to conservation strategies (Akinnifesi et al., 2004). 61

62 This paper analyses the role indigenous fruit tree products as currently available in63 Zimbabwe play in reducing vulnerability to poverty.

64

65 2. Theoretical background and methodology

66 Common measures of poverty are static. In contrast, vulnerability is a dynamic concept and captures the response to changes over time (Webb and Harinarayan, 1999; World Bank, 67 68 2001). An individual's or household's exposure to risk factors and their ability to cope with 69 them determine the degree of vulnerability. Income risk and the failure to cope with it result in household consumption fluctuations. It affects nutritional, health and educational status as 70 71 well as contributing to inefficient and unequal intra-household allocations (Dercon, 2000). Vulnerability results from poverty, but at the same time can reinforce downward trends of 72 income processes and lead to poverty (Morduch, 1994). Information on factors that determine 73 74 vulnerability can help to design anti-poverty intervention strategies.

Several concepts of vulnerability have been suggested (Hoddinott and Quisumbing (2003) provide a review) including vulnerability as expected poverty (Pritchett at al., 2000), as low expected utility (Ligon and Schechter, 2003) and as uninsured exposure to risk (Glewwe and Hall, 1998). Vulnerability measures based on either assets or income may not reflect households' overall exposure to risk since the total determines the capacity of a household to counteract risk (World Bank, 2001). Moreover, vulnerability is a dynamic
process of cumulative conditions. Significance of causal factors and their combination change
over time and place (Webb and Harinarayan, 1999). Fluctuations in vulnerability not only
result from changes in causal factors, but also from coping mechanisms available (Campbell
et al., 2002).

In this paper, following Pritchett et al. (2000) vulnerability, Vu, is defined as expected poverty and is measured as the probability of falling below the poverty line, PL. The magnitude of vulnerability increases with the time horizon, t. A household, n, experiences a period of vulnerability if the household income, Hi, is below the poverty line¹. Over mperiods, the vulnerability is the probability of observing at least one period of poverty within those m periods, which is one minus the probability of no period of poverty at any of the periods.

92

93
$$Vu(m, PL) = 1 - [(1 - P(Hi_t^n < PL)) * ... * (1 - P(Hi_{t+m}^n < PL))].$$
(1)

94

Poverty is usually measured based on cross section data, whereas measures of vulnerability require panel data including information on household assets, formal and informal safety nets and covariate and idiosyncratic risks that a household or individual is exposed to. Since panel data were not available, this study uses a stochastic household income simulation model, whose database is cross section data from household case studies in Zimbabwe.

101 The household income in period *m* is defined as the sum over gross margins, $\widetilde{G}M$, of 102 all activities, *a*, plus additional cash, $\widetilde{I}C$, e.g. informal loans, and the surplus carried over

¹ Contrary to the definition above, Pritchett et al. (2000) define vulnerability based on expenditure and not on income.

from the previous period, *m*-1. The surplus from the previous period is that period's household income, $\tilde{H}i_{m-1}$, net of household cash expenditure, $\tilde{E}x_{m-1}$, household consumption, Co_{m-1} , and school fees, $\tilde{S}F_{m-1}$, of that period² (equation (2)). Household consumption is based on minimum food requirements (= MFR) estimates from Alwang et al. (2002), which is ZWD 13 per AEQ and day. Income flows and vulnerability to income poverty depend on seasonal fluctuations, which are addressed by defining several periods per year, *m*. ~ denotes the stochastic nature of income and expenditure.

111
$$\widetilde{H}i_{m} = \widetilde{H}i_{m-1} - \widetilde{E}x_{m-1} - Co_{m-1} - \widetilde{S}F_{m-1} + \sum_{a=1}^{A} \widetilde{G}M_{am} + \widetilde{I}C_{m}, \qquad (2)$$

112 with
$$IC = 0$$
, if:

113
$$\widetilde{Hi}_{m} = \widetilde{Hi}_{m-1} - \widetilde{Ex}_{m-1} - Co_{m-1} - \widetilde{SF}_{m-1} + \sum_{a=1}^{A} \widetilde{GM}_{am} \ge Co_{m} + \widetilde{Ex}_{m} + \widetilde{SF}_{m},$$

114 and
$$\widetilde{I}C = Co_m + \widetilde{E}x_m + \widetilde{S}F_m - \left(\widetilde{H}i_{m-1} - \widetilde{E}x_{m-1} - Co_{m-1} - \widetilde{S}F_{m-1} + \sum_{a=1}^{A}\widetilde{G}M_{am}\right)$$
, if:

115
$$\widetilde{Hi}_m = \widetilde{Hi}_{m-1} - \widetilde{Ex}_{m-1} - Co_{m-1} - \widetilde{SF}_{m-1} + \sum_{a=1}^A \widetilde{GM}_{am} < Co_m + \widetilde{Ex}_m + \widetilde{SF}_m.$$

116

The assets carried over from the previous year and surplus available in t_0 is assumed to be equal to the surplus that households had accumulated by the end of the monitoring season in 2000. The model incorporates two specific risk-coping strategies: (1) households can access additional sources of cash, and (2) households can increase indigenous fruit collection. All households have access to additional sources of cash, e.g. from a savings account, with either own accumulated savings or remittances and transfers from other family members,

² Note that, due to using gross margins for household income calculations, the variable cost of production activities have already been accounted for.

savings clubs and informal loans. These informal loans do not require collateral or charge
interest, similar to observations of other rural household surveys as also shown by Fafchamps
and Lund (2002).

Indigenous fruits are available during the critical period, i.e. from August to January. In the model, whenever the household income falls below minimum food requirements plus cash requirements for production and household expenditure during this period, the model household increases fruit collection from the Communal Areas. However, the extent to which the household increases fruit collection is limited to a contribution of 42% to the natural food basket, which is the average across other studies (i.e. Campbell et al., 1997; Shackleton and Shackleton, 2000; Shackleton et al., 2002; Shackleton and Shackleton, 2003).

Receipt of remittances and the share of off-farm activities reflect further riskmanagement and -coping strategies and are employed in the model up to the level found among the survey households. Cattle and poultry are most widely owned and are the main assets sold (Kinsey et al., 1998)³. From a risk-management perspective, the model captures the degree of income diversification in the research location since it uses income data from observed activities. By using gross margins, one indicator captures climatic, i.e. yield fluctuations, as well as market risk, i.e. price variability.

In order to pool the cross-section sample for identifying the distributions of each income and expenditure category, adult equivalent units are used as common denominator. The distributions were fitted to the seasonal cross section data of each enterprise by using BestFit (Palisade, 2004) and the distribution with the best-fit statistic ranked by Chi-square test was employed. The model results for the seasonal household income obtained from the simulations can be interpreted as the income of an average household of the research site.

³ This risk-coping strategy is not accounted for by using gross margins, since the sale of livestock is counterbalanced by the reduction in stock. However, if this risk-coping strategy is to function in the long run, the sale of livestock has to occur at a lower rate than reproduction.

Since all households of the research location use indigenous fruits, no comparison between indigenous fruit users and non-users can be drawn. The latter implies that no 'without IF' scenario can be defined. Thus, the contribution of IF towards remaining above the poverty line is assessed by subtracting the IF income from the household income while holding all other factors constant. The poverty model assesses three different scenarios depending on the degree to which indigenous fruits are used to substitute MFR.

152 The model excludes dependency between the periods, e.g. inputs into agricultural and horticultural production from August to January as expressed by negative gross margins, 153 which could be expected to result in higher gross margins during harvesting time from March 154 155 through to June. Neglect of these dependencies can be interpreted as the risk of crop failure, e.g. due to averse climatic conditions in the latter half of the cropping period. If a farmer 156 157 plants her crops in the beginning of the wet season and uses rather high quantities of inputs, 158 she still faces the risk of a short rainy season. If this happens, and rains fail to continue until February, the crop dries up and the inputs used are sunk. 159

160

161 **3. Description of study area and data**

Income, expenditure and labour data were collected periodically from 19 farm households of Ward 16 in Murehwa District and 20 households of Takawira Resettlement Area in Zimbabwe covering the period from August 1999 to August 2000. Data on the most preferred indigenous fruit tree species by rural communities in the region, namely <u>Uapaca</u> <u>kirkiana, Strychnos cocculoides</u> and <u>Parinari curatellifolia</u> (Kadzere et al., 1998) are used as an indicator of the role of natural food resources in reducing vulnerability.

The components of household income and expenditure of households living in Takawira Resettlement Area (valued at 1999 prices) are provided in Figure 1. Income of farm household enterprises fluctuates in the course of the year and includes cash income as well as the value of own consumption. Income of households in Murehwa is higher than of those in

Takawira. Murehwa is closer to capital city, Harare, than the resettlement area; also, Murehwa 172 173 has a better-developed market since many buses going to Mozambique and Malawi stop here. Remittances and off-farm activities generate a higher income in the period August to January 174 175 and remain relatively stable thereafter on a lower level. Horticultural income increases from June onwards and then also reaches a peak in the period August to December in Takawira, 176 whereas in Murehwa it is relatively stable from May to February. Indigenous fruit income 177 starts rising in August and then decreases from January onwards. All these enterprises move 178 179 anti-cyclically to agricultural activities that require expenditures for inputs in the period August to November and then generate income from February through April. 180

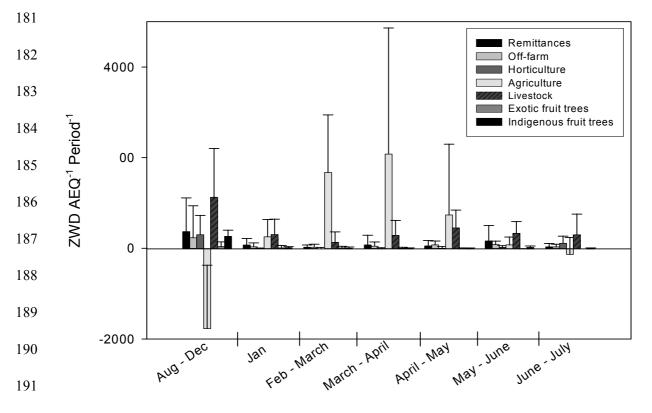


Fig. 1. Gross margins and standard deviation by household enterprise and season, TakawiraResettlement Area*.

194 * 1999 prices (in December 1999, 38 Zimbabwe Dollar (ZWD) = 1 US Dollar); AEQ = adult equivalent
195 (household members above 65 years = 0.75 AEQ; 18–65 years = 1.0 AEQ; 14–18 years = 0.75 AEQ; 7–14
196 years = 0.5 AEQ, below 7 years = 0.25 AEQ).

197 Source: Household Survey.

Analysis of the contribution of indigenous fruits towards reduction of vulnerability focuses on Takawira Resettlement area since the households living here depend more heavily on indigenous fruit during times of crisis (Mithöfer and Waibel, 2003).

201

202 4. Results and discussion

The poverty line extrapolated from Alwang et al. (2002) is at 4600 ZWD per adult 203 equivalent and year⁴. The average household income in Takawira is above the poverty line. 204 However, 25% of the households of Takawira were below the poverty line during the research 205 period. The estimate of the poverty headcount based on consumption data is at 48% for the 206 rural areas and nationally at 35% for 1995 (Alwang et al., 2002). In Takawira, the households 207 below the poverty threshold derived an average annual income of 2700 ZWD per adult 208 equivalent. In comparison, Campbell et al. (2002) estimate that 71% of their households were 209 210 below the "food poverty line" (28000 ZWD per household), which covers basic nutritional needs, and 90% were below the "consumption poverty line" (45000 ZWD per household)⁵, 211 212 the latter also covering some allowances for housing, clothing, education, health and 213 transport.

Seasonality of income generating activities implies that poverty as well as vulnerability to poverty fluctuates in the course of the year. Vulnerability is high during the period from August to January, when agricultural production requires the most inputs and does not yet provide sufficient income. Depending on the harvest of the staple crop (maize) the critical period when households are most vulnerable starts in September if the maize harvest was low

⁴ 24000 ZWD per average household size of Takawira. Alwang et al. (2002) estimate a national minimum food needs poverty line for 1990 based on data of the Central Bureau of Statistics. This threshold was extrapolated to 1999 using the average annual growth rate of the food price index.

⁵ In 1999 Zimbabwean dollars (Campbell et al., 2002). Both measures of poverty were defined specifically for their survey.

whereas in years with normal maize crop, the grain lasts up to the next harvest. During the critical period 80% of interviewed households of Takawira derived an income below minimum food needs.

Figure 2 shows that availability of indigenous fruits reduces the probability of falling below the poverty line. As expected, the higher the share of indigenous fruits towards minimum food requirements, the lower vulnerability to income poverty is.

225

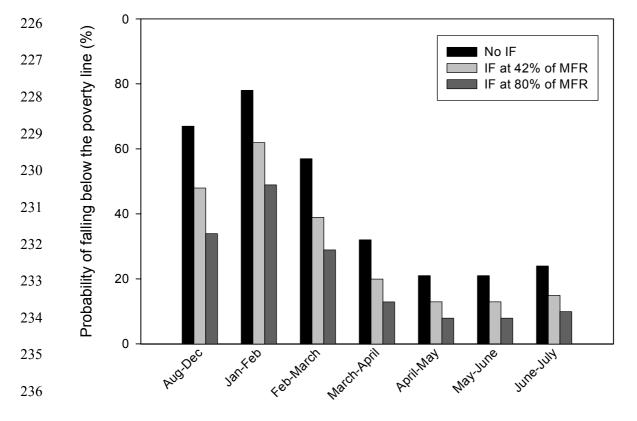


Fig. 2. Probability of falling below the poverty line, Takawira Resettlement Area (%)*.

* MFR = minimum food requirements, IF = indigenous fruits.

239 Source: Simulation results based on household survey data.

240

Overall, vulnerability to poverty is high in the resettlement area and also fluctuates strongly during the year. The impact of IF with respect to reducing the probability to fall below the poverty line is considerable. Depending on their availability, they can reduce vulnerability to poverty by up to 33% during the critical period of the year.

The overall likelihood that a household will fall below the poverty line at least during 245 246 one period of the year is high. With no surplus from the previous cropping season, the likelihood to experience at least one period of poverty is higher. It ranges from 99% to 85% in 247 Takawira; the more IF can contribute to MFR, the lower it is. Rather than stating the number 248 of vulnerable households, which would include an arbitrarily set threshold under which 249 households are considered vulnerable, these figures describe the risk of becoming poor. 250 Campbell et al. (2002) show for the south of Zimbabwe that wealthy households receive more 251 remittances than poor households and that poor households depend to a larger extent on 252 woodland products. The link between wealth and indigenous fruit use is captured in the model 253 254 indirectly, namely by the resource stock the year of analysis starts with, the amount of remittances and other income received by the household, which all influence the extent of IF 255 256 collection.

257 Since the household income in one season is derived from various sources, the sensitivity of the household income towards each of its components is assessed for the critical 258 259 period, August to December. The sensitivity analysis is carried out for scenarios with indigenous fruit tree use. For this purpose, simulation data are further analysed by linear 260 regression for the critical period. The functional form underlying the regression is given by 261 equation 2^6 . The sensitivity analysis uses the standardised beta coefficients as a measure of 262 the impact of a standard deviation change in each income component on the household 263 income. 264

265

266

As expected, the regression model results in a R-square of 1.

266 Table 1

	Standardised Beta Coefficient
Remittances	0.450
Off-farm activities	0.127
Horticulture	0.183
Agriculture	0.698
Livestock	0.554
Exotic fruit trees	0.044
Indigenous fruit trees	0.188
Loan	0.169
HH consumption & expenditure (incl. school fees)	0.000

267 Sensitivity of household income to changes of income by source

268

Income from agriculture, livestock and remittances ranks highest in influence on household income. In comparison, the impact of IF availability is smaller. Harvesting of nontimber forest products is a subsistence strategy of households; it provides additional income to households earning the bulk of their income from agriculture or off-farm sources as findings of Ruiz-Perez et al. (2004) show for lightly managed forests.

274

275 **5. Conclusions**

Vulnerability to food poverty in Zimbabwe is high and fluctuates strongly during the year. Portfolios of income generating activities in Zimbabwe consist of a variety of different activities and vary amongst farmers and areas. These activities follow seasonal patterns and their extent in terms of demand for input varies in the course of the year. By combining activities farmers smoothen income fluctuations.

Wild foods like indigenous fruits reduce vulnerability. In the research area, the 281 282 probability of falling below the poverty threshold is at 70% during the critical food insecure season when agricultural crops are planted if no indigenous fruits are available and about 30% 283 284 during maize harvesting time. If indigenous fruit area available, they reduce vulnerability by about one third during the critical period. However, vulnerability to poverty cannot be 285 eliminated by indigenous fruit use due to their limited availability. However, the trees 286 287 contribute one risk-coping strategy, which can be further complemented by other strategies, during the agricultural off season and thus provide a cushioning effect to annually occurring 288 poverty and hunger in August to December. 289

Since IF use is a low entry barrier activity during the time of need, measures should be taken to assure availability of indigenous fruit trees, e.g. through on-farm conservation. Adding value to the fruits may be another area to enhance rural incomes at the times of need.

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