

FOOD AID TARGETING, PREPAREDNESS & RESPONSE PLANNING

Implications of food economy baseline findings in the Limpopo River Basin Complex

In November 2000 FEWS NET, through its implementing partner, the Food Economy Group (F.E.G.), and with close collaboration from the Ministry of Agriculture, the Ministry of Health, and the World Food Programme, conducted a food economy baseline study in the flood-affected area of Gaza Province, Mozambique. The purpose of this baseline study was to investigate how people in this flood prone area normally live - in other words, how they obtain access to food and cash income and how they spend their money in most years.

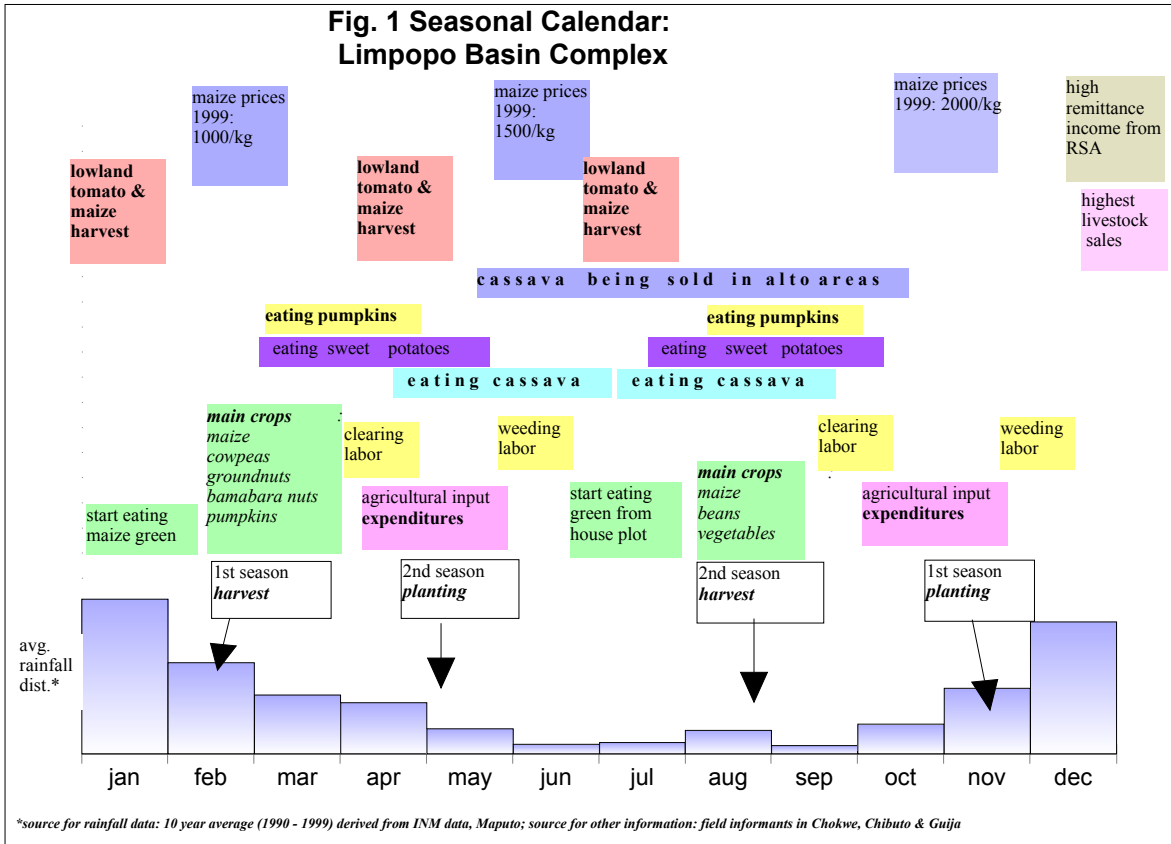
This understanding is intended to provide a richer context against which to judge the effects of any number of potential 'shocks', including additional flooding, drought, price fluctuations or loss of access to specific markets. In light of the potential value of this information for a wide scope of different users, a number of short targeted pieces were written for specific audiences to help highlight the implications of the baseline work for different decision maker groups in Mozambique. Specific audiences for these briefings included food aid decision makers, development planners, private traders, and food security monitors. The following points are directed to the food aid community in hopes that contextual information about livelihoods in the Limpopo Basin will help in the collective effort geared towards continuing to make appropriate decisions.

1. NON-EMERGENCY FOOD AID IS NOT LIKELY TO BE AN APPROPRIATE RESOURCE IN THE LIMPOPO RIVER BASIN COMPLEX.

In most years households in this food economy zone are food secure due to a combination of factors. The two most important factors are highlighted below:

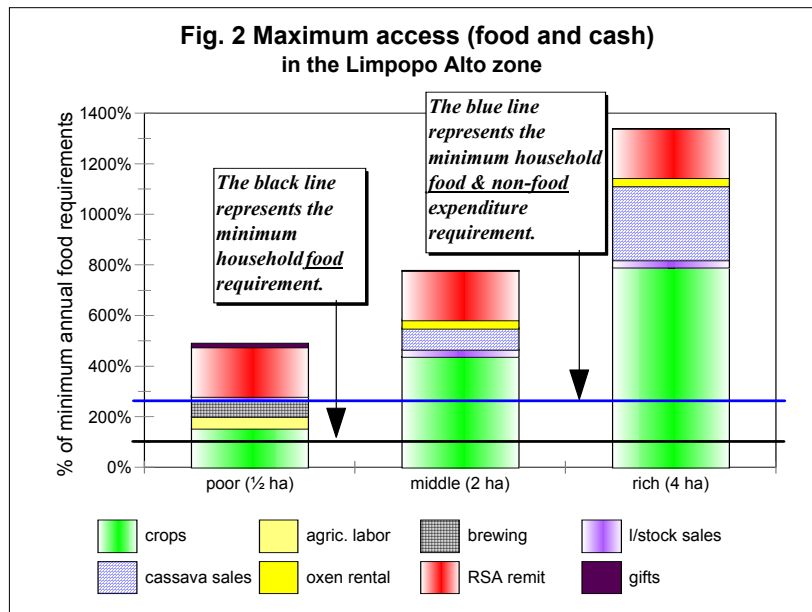
First, risk-minimizing agricultural practices and highly fertile soils along the river basin guarantee that sufficient food from households' own crop production is obtained every year, and in most years, stocks are more than adequate to last throughout the year. (See Seasonal Calendar below)

Households usually plant on at least two plots (including a highland and a lowland plot) and in at least two seasons. If conditions for one plot or one season are not ideal, the other plot or next season usually allows farmers to make up for losses.



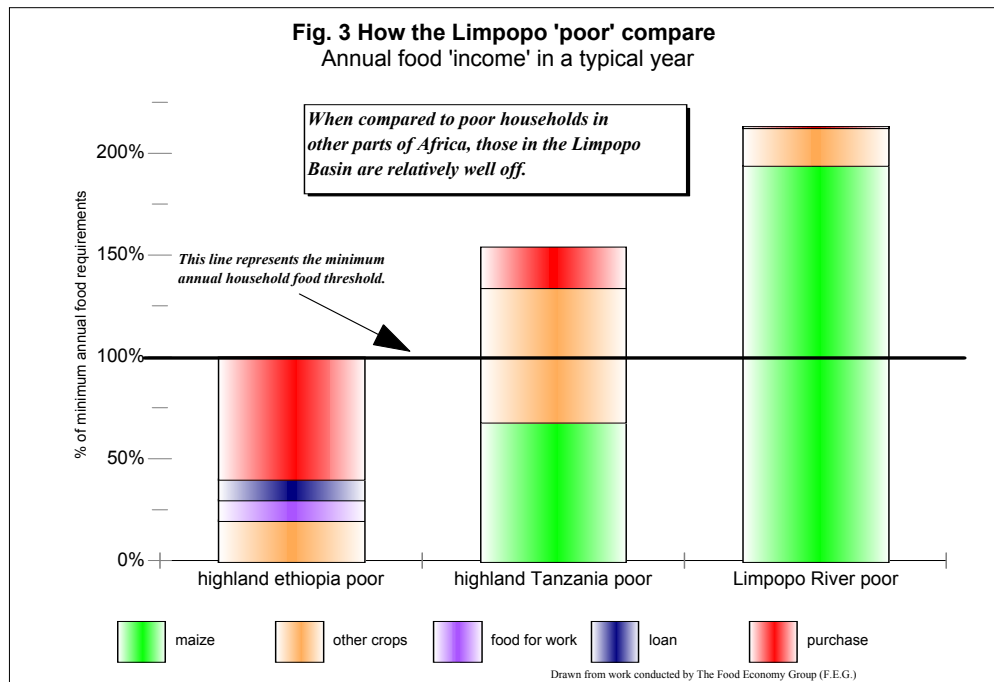
Second, significant involvement in mining employment in South Africa ensures access to cash income even in years when crop production in the Limpopo Basin Zone is not optimal. See Fig. 2. The red bars on the chart represent income from South Africa.

Widespread access to cash income from an independent source unrelated to events in the Limpopo area greatly decreases Limpopo Basin



households' vulnerability to local shocks (such as floods, droughts, or even price changes).

The combined effects of the two factors mentioned above (outside income and significant crop production potential) mean that in typical years, most households carry over food stocks from one year to the next, and in general, poor households neither have to sell their crops nor purchase food.

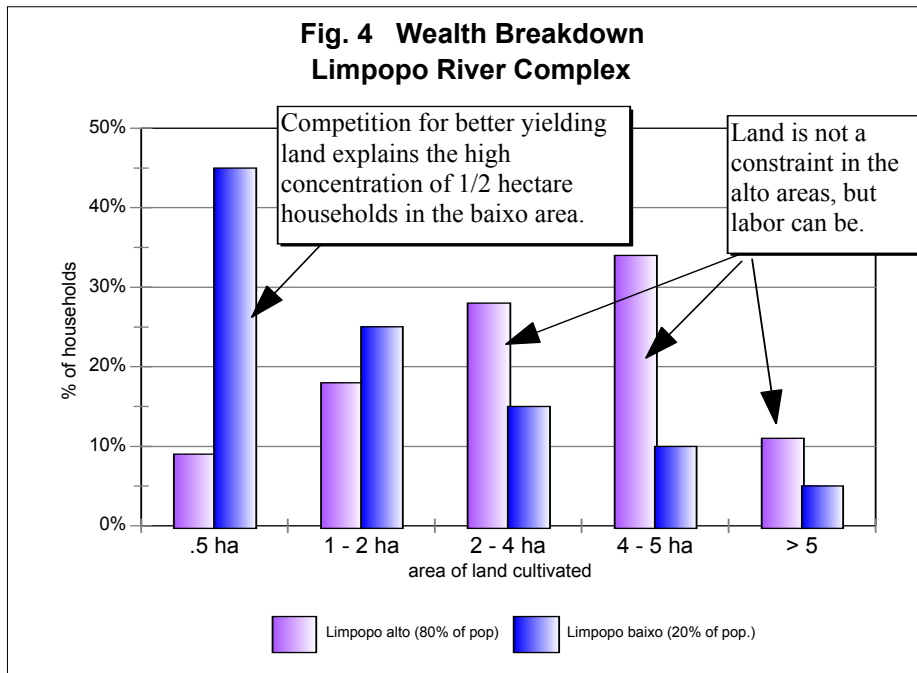


Poor households typically derive more than sufficient cash income from remittances to cover non-food essential expenditures such as school, health, and household goods (salt, soap, etc.). As a result, they can avoid the debt trap that many other poor households in rural Africa fall into, selling crops after harvest at low prices to pay back debts and obtain much-needed cash. These sales typically create a gap in the annual food stocks that has to be made up by purchasing food just before the next harvest – almost always at the year's highest prices.

The fact that poor households do not buy food in most years in the Limpopo Basin Complex is both an underlying reason for, and a significant indicator of, a high level of rural food security.

2. FOOD FOR WORK MAY NOT BE AN APPROPRIATE MECHANISM FOR DISTRIBUTING FOOD AID IN THIS AREA FOR AT LEAST ONE IMPORTANT REASON:

Land is not the critical constraint to increased productivity in the Limpopo River Basin Complex, **labor** is. It is true that competition for prime land in the lowland areas near to the river is tight. But the population in these areas accounts for only about 20% of the zone. In the other 80%, the majority of households cultivate at least 2 hectares, more land than most households can manage without hiring outside labor for critical periods such as land preparation and weeding.



With at least one man or older son working in South Africa, labor for many households is already in short supply. Poor households in the lowland areas (those cultivating around 0.5 ha) might provide some of the labor required to cover needs in the higher areas, but clearly, given a population weighted towards upland areas, local supply will have trouble meeting the area's overall demand. This crunch is particularly pertinent given the doubling cropping cycle and the occurrence of agricultural activities throughout the year.

Food for work could add to the already high labor demand, potentially undermining efforts of local farmers to mobilize sufficient force in times of peak agricultural activity.

3. FOOD AID AFTER A FLOOD IN THE LIMPOPO BASIN COMPLEX SHOULD BE CAREFULLY TARGETED. IT IS LIKELY TO BE NECESSARY ONLY FOR A SMALL NUMBER OF HOUSEHOLDS AND FOR A SHORT PERIOD OF TIME.

While the recent baseline work was not intended to be an assessment of flood damage, or a survey of crop production since the floods, there are important clues for contingency and response planning to be derived from understanding how households normally live in the Limpopo River Basin Complex.

With specific reference to floods, food should be targeted to the 20% of households living along the river basin itself (the *baixo* areas). In last year's flood, the biggest flood on record, 80% of the zone's households, those living on sandier soils in higher up areas (*alto* areas) had plots that were reportedly not directly affected by floods¹ and therefore it is unlikely that the *alto* households would require support in the form of food aid.

In the *baixo* areas, food aid is likely to be necessary, but only as a short-term measure, providing households with immediate access to food while markets are being restored.² As soon as food is once again available in markets, households should be able to purchase food with remittance money from South Africa.³

In addition, as soon as flood waters recede, *baixo* households will re-plant, Three months after this recession, therefore, market purchases are likely to be replaced with households' own crop production. It is reasonable to project, therefore, that food aid would be needed for no more than a three-month period after flood waters recede. Even if second harvest crops in the lowlands are not wholly successful, a combination of harvests obtained from higher up plots, and cash income from South Africa should lead to the quick recovery of most households in this zone.

¹These 'alto' households may have plots in the low lying areas, but they usually have more significant production from alto plots, and can switch their dependence from maize to cassava if necessary.

² On the basis of the findings of the recent field work, it is possible to establish an initial total food aid estimate for planning purposes of **3,300 MT**. This estimate is predicated on census population figures for the relevant parts of the districts included in the Limpopo River Complex [Chokwe, part of Guija and part of Chibuto – total included population is 345,154], and based on the assumption that 20% of this population, or 69,030 people would be directly affected (i.e. the population living in the *baixo* areas) and need 100% of food needs for three months. This figure is meant to provide a maximum outer range with the assumption that refinements would take place to reduce the ration as appropriate.

³It is probable that men working in South Africa would purchase household goods and food there to bring or send back to family members within a month or so, circumventing the local markets until they functioned again. Reports of this type of 'coping' are common.

In addition it is worth keeping in mind that *alto* household harvests in the last flood were only partially affected. This local supply may have played a role in alleviating some of the immediate availability problems in the lowland areas. Analysts should investigate this possibility in the immediate aftermath of another similar event so that the duration and magnitude of food aid can be appropriately established.

The current state of affairs in the Limpopo River Basin Complex is a testament to this capacity for quick recovery. Less than a year after the worst floods of the century, households in the *baixo* areas are eating sweet potatoes, pumpkins and maize from their own fields, new houses have been constructed with income from South Africa, and cash crops from both *alto* and *baixo* areas are being readily sold along the zone's main roads. Life has quickly returned to a relatively prosperous normality.