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## Enhancing Decentralised Governance for Food System Transformation: Insights from Food and Nutrition Security Committees in Zimbabwe

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### Abstract

Decentralised governance has gained currency in the context of transforming food systems in developed and developing countries. Development partners have promoted the governance of food and nutrition security at the local level to end hunger and malnutrition and ultimately achieve related Sustainable Development Goals. However, little research has focused on developing countries and how decentralised governance of food and nutrition security works within a food system framework to achieve a set of policy goals. This paper uses local-level food and nutrition security committees in Zimbabwe to study the factors that enhance decentralised governance for food system transformation. Using key informant interviews and focus group discussions with stakeholders involved in food and nutrition security interventions in Zimbabwe, the study results show that food and nutrition security coordination structures at the local level require effective central government support and a well-capacitated and supportive institutional structure. Technical assistance and

adequate budgetary support are also important in supporting decentralized governance for food systems transformation.

**Keywords:** *Decentralised Governance, Food System Transformation and Food and Nutrition Security Committee, Zimbabwe.*

## 1. Introduction

It is increasingly realized that the food systems of the developing regions will not deliver on the Sustainable Development Goals, particularly achieving “Zero Hunger,” unless they are supported by effective, transformative processes (HLPE, 2017). Notwithstanding the efforts to alleviate hunger and malnutrition, the Government of Zimbabwe is still far from realizing food and nutrition security for all its citizens. In 2022, approximately 4.3 million people and 2.2 million children were anticipated to urgently need humanitarian assistance in Zimbabwe due to numerous hazards, including economic challenges, the COVID-19 pandemic, and weather-related shocks (UNICEF, 2022). Zimbabwe will likely get below-average harvests for the 2021/22 agricultural season following poor and erratic rainfall and the early termination of the rainy season. As a result, hunger and malnutrition are likely to persist, and livelihood strategies will likely persist throughout the year (FEWSNET, 2022). Governance issues in most developing countries usually affect the design and implementation of food and nutrition interventions (FAO, 2015). Inherently, the governance structures and processes determine the nature and speed of achieving food and nutrition security, particularly at the local government levels where implementation occurs (Resnick et al., 2017). The key to attaining food and nutrition security in any country is the establishment of well-capacitated local government structures and institutions to implement programs and policies (Kosec & Resnick, 2019; FAO, 2017). Designing decentralized structures and institutions has been recently recognized as more appropriate for addressing food and nutrition insecurity in local communities (Tinarwo et al., 2018). In addition, improving food and nutrition security at the local government level requires coordinated efforts by all stakeholders through the existing structures and frameworks.

Notwithstanding the importance of decentralized governance structures and institutions in improving food and nutrition security, developing countries suffer from ineffective organizational structures and power imbalances (Babu & Blom, 2017). Consequently, if decentralised

structures are not well coordinated and capacitated, their efforts in addressing hunger and malnutrition may result in pandemonium rather than cohesiveness. Lack of harmonisation among government sectors and other key stakeholders can result in poor accountability mechanisms within a food system (Babu, 2014; Grindle, 2004).

In this paper, the author delineates the role of governance, particularly at the lower levels, in improving food and nutrition security using the case study of Zimbabwe. Improving food and nutrition security at local government levels hinges on having resolute and vibrant governance institutions and structures that enhance the inclusivity and participation of various stakeholders (von Brown, 2018). The paper attempts to shed more light on the role played by decentralized governance and coordination structures, particularly at the provincial and district levels, in enhancing food and nutrition security. The paper attempts to address the following research and evidence gaps.

1. Inadequate attention to the efficacy and of decentralized governance in food system transformation
2. Insufficient body of knowledge across food systems,
3. Lack of integration of decentralized governance food systems policy

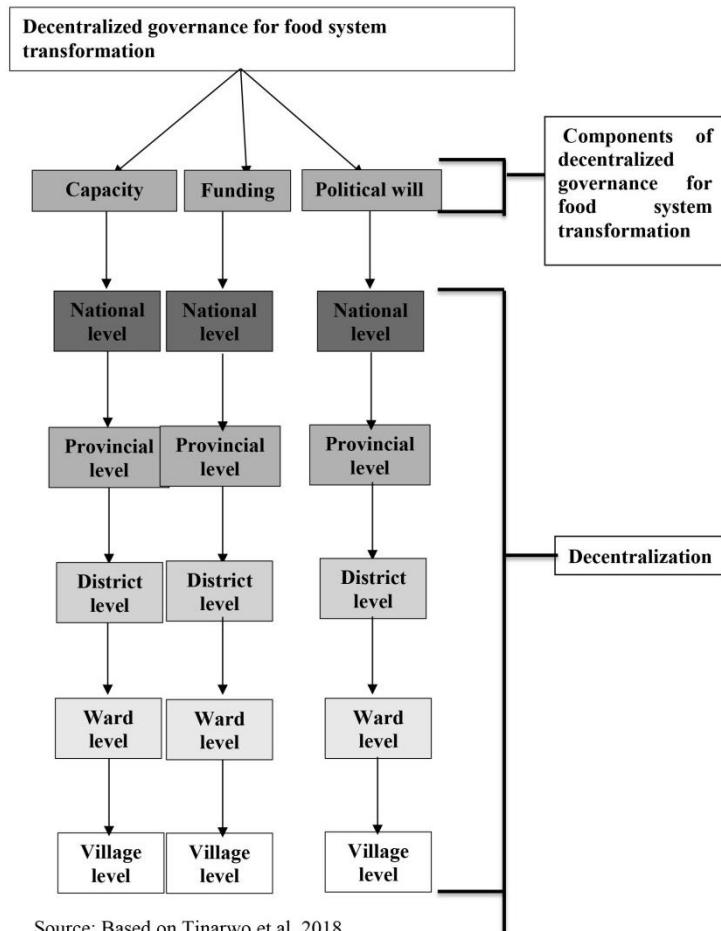
The rest of the sections of the paper are organized as follows: The next section develops a conceptual framework to identify and study the decentralized governance mechanisms for achieving food and nutrition security and the governance mechanisms for achieving food and nutrition security-related SDGs. Section three reviews the literature and develops an approach to enhanced decentralized food and nutrition security governance –the Food and Nutrition Security Committees and their roles in improved food and nutrition security governance. Section four presents a case study of Zimbabwe's food and nutrition security committees (FNSCs). Section five presents the results, while section six examines the lessons from the case study and derives policy implications for the future. Concluding remarks form the final section of the paper.

## **2. Conceptual Framework and Methodological Approach**

To enhance food system transformation, figure 1 below shows the components that are essential to building capacity at the local levels for strengthening decentralized governance for food system transformation to achieve food and nutrition security (Babu & Blom, 2014). It also

shows how FNSCs can decentralize community mobilization efforts and how such a structure could be enhanced and well-preserved.

Figure 1: Pathways to decentralized governance for food system transformation



Designing and implementing food and system transformation requires capacity at all tiers of government (Webb et al., 2020). Creating more representation of local institutions and stakeholders within the governance of food system transformation introduces a range of distinctive strengths. Such stakeholders bring skills that enhance communities' resilience and rural revitalisation (Kosec & Resnick, 2019; Kahkonen & Lanyi, 2000). Inherently, decentralised governance of food system transformation by including local actors in decision-making increases the effectiveness of programme interventions. Moreover,

implementing good governance by creating well-established and capacitated institutions and structures at the local level may contribute to the resilience of food and nutrition security. In other words, the strong integration of local actors into the decision-making process enriches the implementation of decentralised mobilisation efforts, essentially contributing to food and nutrition security. This robust representation of these players at province, district, ward and village level platforms results in the sustainability of interventions (Kosec & Resnick, 2019). Fundamentally, these institutions enact several community resilience-building initiatives and are involved in disaster preparedness and relief. This process strengthens transparency and accountability, and communication linkages are reinforced. However, in most developing countries, the capacity needs are essentially met by external technical assistance, which does not adequately invest in building local capacity (Babu, 2020). Thus, to change this approach, serious efforts should be made to assess the capacity of the different stakeholders involved in food system transformation.

There is an increasing call by the development community for governments to demonstrate the political will to ensure food system transformation (Tinarwo et al., 2018). Political will and a good policy environment are essential for transforming food systems. Strengthening the food policy system helps generate more significant support for transformation. Understanding the roles of various actors and players in the food policy system and their capacities for designing, adopting, implementing, monitoring, and evaluating policies is critical for effectively translating the food system transformation approach into measurable SDG2 outcomes (Babu, 2020). In this context, the Kaleidoscope Model is used to determine the conditions under which policy reform may occur, and it traces how policies are developed on the agenda stage and eventually implemented (Hagblade et al., 2019). The Kaleidoscope Model can be an effective tool that offers a realistic framework for researchers and development practitioners to assess the appropriate time, resources and circumstances under which policy reforms in the food system transformation process may occur (Resnick et al., 2018).

Adequate budgetary support is another crucial aspect of transforming food systems (Lipper et al., 2021). Countries that have successfully enhanced food system transformation invest heavily in agriculture research and development, technology-driven agribusiness, climate-smart innovations, and private-sector investments (FAO et al., 2021; Webb et al., 2020). The policymakers must strengthen domestic resource

mobilisation to finance food system transformation rather than rely on donor support, which is usually project-based and comes with strict conditions (Chaudhury & Hasnain, 2021).

### **Methodological Approach:**

The methodology used in this article primarily follows a qualitative methodology to understand the decentralized governance for food and nutrition security for growth and structural transformation. The author conducted key informant interviews and focus group discussions, which were supported by reviewing past studies on food and nutrition security governance, particularly at decentralized levels. Key informant interviews were conducted with 12 purposively sampled participants, of which six were from the government working on food and nutrition security issues (one from the Office of the President and Cabinet, two from the Ministry of Agriculture, one from the Ministry of Health, one from Ministry of Labor and Social Welfare and one from Food and Nutrition Council), one development partners, three from academia, and two from the private sector. Two focus group discussions were conducted, one with the farmers and the other with the academia at the University of Zimbabwe. Responses from farmers were transcribed into the English language after capturing them with a voice recorder. Data analyses were based on thematic analysis. Ethical clearance for this study was sought from the School of Public Management, Governance & Public Policy at the University of Johannesburg with the reference code 20PMGPP10.

### **3. Literature Review**

#### ***Conceptualizing Decentralized Governance for Food System Transformation***

Governance includes the capacity of the government to effectively formulate and implement sound policies, as well as the respect of citizens and the state for the institutions that govern economic and social interactions among them (World Bank Group, 2019). Decentralised governance, on the other hand, is defined as a gradual process of reform that addresses a range of administrative, political, fiscal, and land issues to transfer power and resources to a level of government that is closer, better understood, and more easily influenced than the central government (Wekwete, 1990). UNDP (2004) provides a more refined definition of decentralised governance, postulating that it refers to the

restructuring of authority so that there is a system of co-responsibility between institutions of governance at the central, regional, and local levels to transfer functions (or tasks) to the lowest institutional or social level that is capable (or capable) of completing them. Implied in the above definitions of decentralised governance is the intention to enhance the level of participation of civic actors in the local governance and development process. FAO (2018) defined a food system as the entire range of actors and their interlinked value-adding activities involved in the production, aggregation, processing, distribution, consumption, and disposal of food products originating from agriculture, forestry, or fisheries and parts of the broader economic, societal and natural environments in which they are embedded. Fundamentally, a food system is composed of sub-systems, including a farming system, waste management system, and input supply system, and it interacts with other vital systems, such as the energy system, trade system, and health system among others (Lartey et al., 2018). Therefore, food system transformation seeks to address several related concerns, including reducing all forms of malnutrition, sustainable use of natural resources, achieving high productivity and profitability of farming systems, reducing the drudgery of farm work, equality for women, engaging rural youth in agribusinesses, and other objectives (Babu, 2020).

The general linkage between decentralised governance and food system transformation refers to the rules and formal and informal processes through which public and private actors articulate their positions and interests for decision-making and implementation (Babu, 2019; HLPE, 2017; Smart et al., 2018). Ensuring more representation of local institutions and stakeholders within a food policy system ensures a variety of unique strengths in ensuring food system transformation (Battista & Baas, 2004). In other words, decentralised governance for food system transformation ensures the effectiveness of food and nutrition security interventions. Through well-established decentralised coordination structures, food and nutrition security governance may contribute to strong and vibrant technical support needed for implementing food and nutrition security interventions (Tinarwo et al., 2018). Effectively integrating local structures into the food policy system and implementing decentralised mobilisation efforts increase accountability, contributing mainly to sustainability (Kosec & Resnick, 2019). These robust multi-sectoral coordination platforms at the provincial, district, ward, and village levels put these stakeholders in a situation of responsibility (Tinarwo et al., 2018). Well-capacitated and supported with adequate resources, these coordination platforms can

initiate food and nutrition security programmes within their communities and are involved in emergency preparedness and relief (Resnick et al., 2019). As a result, both the horizontal and vertical linkages of communication channels are strengthened in this process.

It is worthwhile to look at countries that have successfully enhanced decentralised governance for food system transformation to address hunger and malnutrition. For instance, Ghana has been committed to decentralisation since the country transitioned to democracy in the early 1990s (Resnick, 2018). In a bid to implement decentralisation efforts, the Government of Ghana has implemented several reforms, including a National Decentralization Action Plan (2004), a Local Government Instrument (2009), a Decentralization Policy Framework (2010), and a Second National Decentralization Plan (2012). In 2016, Parliament passed the Consolidated Local Governance Bill further to streamline the range of decentralisation laws and frameworks and eliminate inconsistencies. Agriculture is one of the first sectors to be legally devolved to the country's 216 Metropolitan, Municipal, and District Assemblies (MMDAs) (Resnick, 2018). Food system transformation in Ghana occurred as a result of the policy reforms focusing on changes in a) production (area, yield, output, crop mix); b) technology (fertiliser, seeds, pesticides, mechanisation); c) land and labour (employment, wages, productivity, farm size distribution); and d) rural incomes (farm income, nonfarm income diversification, total income, expenditure) (Hazell et al., 2019).

Similarly, India's food system transformation efforts are also rooted in its decentralised system of governance known as Panchayati Raj (Lerche, 2021). The Constitution 73rd Amendment Act 1992 of India provides the basis for creating a Panchayati Raj system of decentralisation that allows each village to be responsible for its affairs, including implementing food system transformation programmes and policies (Vareed, 2021). Through the Panchayati Raj system, India has been in a better position to improve food production and reduce the adverse effects of droughts and other shocks through resilience-building initiatives (Sharma, 2021). Brazil is another country that has managed to achieve food system transformation by moving away from being a net food importer characterised by a traditional, low-productivity agriculture sector in the 1960s and early 1970s to one of the greatest breadbaskets of the world in recent years (IFPRI, 2016). Brazil's primary agricultural support services (training, extension, research, fertilisers, seeds, irrigation) and policies are determined by individual states with solid support from the central government (Reardon et al., 2019). Financing these services is

shared by the national government and the states with private sector support, particularly the supply of agricultural inputs. All in all, strong macroeconomic policies, political stability, technology-driven agribusiness, forward-thinking investments in agricultural research and development, promotion of public-private partnerships, and effective, long-term investments to support agriculture helped Brazil to achieve food system transformation and become a global powerhouse in agricultural trade (IFPRI, 2016).

#### **4. Case Study of Zimbabwe's Decentralised Governance for Food System Transformation**

##### ***History of Food and Nutrition Security Committees in Food System Transformation in Zimbabwe***

Soon after independence in 1980, the government of Zimbabwe established Food and Nutrition Management Teams (FNMTs) at the sub-national level to enhance food system transformation (Lenneiye, 2000). The main purpose of FNMTs was to coordinate an integrated system for addressing food and nutrition insecurity (FNC, 2014). Profoundly, FNMTs carried out two programme interventions: the Child Supplementary Feeding Program (CSFP) and the Supplementary Food Production Program (SFP). CSFP gave food supplements to children under five, while SFPP implemented nutrition gardens to enhance food production at the household level (Lenneiye, 2000).

FNC (2014) revealed that the FNMTs were chaired by the Department of Agricultural Technical and Extension Services (AGRITEX) in the Ministry of Agriculture, while the Nutrition Department in the Ministry of Health and Child Care played a secretariat role. Furthermore, the Ministry of Health and Child Care managed the funds. It, therefore, took the lead in coordinating nutrition issues and logistical aspects of the food and nutrition programme while AGRITEX led food production interventions (Lenneiye, 2000). Provincial and District Administrators were key in strengthening the participation of relevant ministries and partners. The programme resources were from the Zimbabwe government, complemented by international donors, mainly the Swedish International Development Agency (SIDA) and NORAD. They were channelled through the Ministry of Health and Child Care. The specific functions of FNMTs are as follows:

- Promoting the production, preparation, and consumption of relevant diverse foods.
- Mobilize the community to participate directly in programme interventions, including analysis of problems and identification and implementation of relevant projects, e.g., Nutrition Gardens and Zunde raMambo.
- Assessing/appraising and monitoring the implementation of the Provincial, District and Ward FNMTs approved projects, including mobilisation of resources and their allocation.
- Influence sector policies and practices.

The FNMTs successfully coordinated food system transformation in most districts and provinces (FNC, 2014). However, with the termination of funding for the operations of the FNMTs, the teams either stopped or reduced their functionality, and their lapse witnessed increasing evidence and a growing gap in capacity for the co-ordination of sub-national response to food system transformation (Lenneiye, 2000). The dis-functionality of the FNMTs may be attributed to the heightened national socio-economic challenges amid shifts in development planning and funding relations between the Zimbabwean state and international partners soon after the Land Reform Programme in the year 2000.

### ***Food and Nutrition Management Teams to Food and Nutrition Security Committees***

In 2013, the Zimbabwean government enacted the Food and Nutrition Security Policy (FNSP) with the objective of always promoting and ensuring adequate food and nutrition security for all people in Zimbabwe, particularly amongst the most vulnerable (FNC, 2013). The FNSP advocates for a decentralized multi-sectoral coordination framework that supports coordinating, planning, monitoring, and evaluating food and nutrition security programs and projects (FNC, 2013). Central to attaining the objectives of the FNSP is addressing hunger and malnutrition through the promotion of coordinated multi-sectoral interventions by all relevant sectors concerned. As part of operationalizing the FNSP and enhancing coordinated efforts toward food and nutrition security, the government established the decentralized Food and Nutrition Security Committees (FNSCs), a prototype of the FNMTs, in all the rural provinces and 42 districts of Zimbabwe (FNC, 2014). The functions of the FNSCs include coordinating food and

nutrition security programmes, prioritizing food and nutrition security responses in line with the FNSP, monitoring the allocation of resources and gaps, monitoring the implementation of programs, and providing technical advice to lower-level structures (FNSP, 2014).

Moreover, the government of Zimbabwe's long-term commitment to prioritising food and nutrition security through decentralised coordinating structures has been supported by several stakeholders at provincial, district, ward and village levels (FNC, 2014). The Food and Nutrition Council (FNC), which is a technical arm in the Office of the President and Cabinet (OPC), spearheaded the establishment of the FNSCs and is responsible for coordinating the implementation of different food and nutrition security programmes in the country (Sadza et al, 2015). FNC's functions include multi-sectoral coordination, livelihoods assessments (food and nutrition security assessments), research, food safety and nutrition standards, monitoring and evaluation and policy analysis (FNC, nd). To effectively carry out its functions and programmes, FNC established decentralised multi-sectoral food and nutrition security coordination structures from the national to the provincial, district and ward levels. The composition of the FNSCs includes various ministries, such as Ministries responsible for Labour and Social Welfare, Health, Agriculture, Finance and Economic Development, Local Government, Water and Education.

According to the Zimbabwean FNSP, the roles and responsibilities of FNSCs include the coordination of food and nutrition security; prioritising food and nutrition security responses in line with the FNSP and the National Food and Nutrition Security Strategy (NFSS); monitoring allocation of resources and gaps; monitoring the implementation of programmes; providing technical assistance and advice to lower-level structures informed by food and nutrition security assessments (FNC, 2013). Furthermore, FNSCs ensure that food and nutrition security is an essential pillar of planning under the development committees, with each ministry and sector representative being accountable for multisectoral collaboration (FNC, 2013). Local authorities play a critical role at district, ward and village levels.

The FNSCs in Zimbabwe play a central role in the relationship between the national policy space and the community. Guided by the FNSP, these committees implement food and nutrition security programmes and activities from the national to the village level (FNC, 2014). Moreover, it is the responsibility of the District Food and Nutrition Security Committees (DFNSCs) to document day-to-day FNS activities that will enable the measurement of the success or impact of

interventions (FNC, 2014). However, the effectiveness of FNSCs in Zimbabwe has constantly been confronted with challenges, including poor coordination and harmonisation, lack of budgetary support and other recourses, lack of capacity, and poor documentation, among others.

## **Mapping Coordination Platforms for Food and Nutrition Security in Zimbabwe**

Implementing food and nutrition security is done through FNSCs that cascade from higher levels of government to sub-district levels, with several multi-stakeholder coordination platforms in between, as indicated on the organogram in Figure 2 below.

### ***Cabinet Committee on Food and Nutrition Security***

At the apex level of the organogram of the food and nutrition coordinating platforms, the Standing Cabinet Committee on Food and Nutrition Security. The Cabinet Committee on Food and Nutrition Security comprises Ministers of the critical ministries that deal with food and nutrition security. The Vice President is chaired and deputised by the Minister of Lands, Agriculture and Rural Resettlement. The Standing Cabinet Committee on Food and Nutrition's primary function is to oversee the implementation of the Food and Nutrition Security Policy.

### ***National Steering Committee on Food and Nutrition Security***

Below the Standing Cabinet Committee on Food and Nutrition Security lies the National Steering Committee on Food and Nutrition Security, also called the Working Party of Permanent Secretaries. The National Steering Committee on Food and Nutrition Security comprises the relevant ministries to food and nutrition security. The Deputy Chief Secretary chairs it to the Office of the President and Cabinet.

### ***National Food and Nutrition Security Committee***

The National Food and Nutrition Security Committee (NFSNC) is comprised of senior technical representatives from key food and nutrition security ministries, the Zimbabwe Statistical Agency, the National AIDS Council, donors, UN agencies, NGOs, academia, and the private sector. The Ministry of Lands, Agriculture, Water, Climate and

Rural Settlement chairs the NFNCS. At the same time, the Ministry of Social Services co-chairs with the Ministry of Health and Child Care and acts as the secretariat. The terms of reference for the NFNCS include the following:

- To monitor and guide the implementation of the Food and Nutrition Security Policy.
- To guide and support strategies for integrating food and nutrition security within economic growth and development.
- Advocate and lobby for prioritising food and nutrition security programming within their relevant sectors.
- Facilitate and strengthen multi-sector consultation for food and nutrition security.
- To ensure the effective functioning of sub-national Food and Nutrition Security Committees (FNSCs).
- Participate in and support assessments and early warning activities as needed.
- Participate in capacity building of sub-national Food and Nutrition Security Committees.
- Participate in support visits, monitoring and evaluation of work of the Food and Nutrition Security Committees.
- Review FNSCs quarterly reports and provide feedback.

### ***Subnational Food and Nutrition Security Committees***

Below the NFNCS are the Provincial, District, Ward and Village Food and Nutrition Security Committees (FNC, 2014). Membership of the Subnational Food and Nutrition Security Committees at these different subnational levels reflects the same stakeholders in the NFNCS. The Ministry of Lands, Agriculture, and Rural Settlement maintains the chairing role, while the Ministry of Labor Social Services co-chairs, with the Ministry of Health and Child Care acting as the secretariat (FNC, 2014).

Figure 2: Coordination Platforms for Food and Nutrition Security in Zimbabwe



Source: Food and Nutrition Council (n.d.)

## **5. Results of the KII and FGDS on the Role of Fnscs in Enhancing Decentralized Governance for Food System Transformation in Zimbabwe**

There was a consensus amongst Key Informant Interviews and Focus Group Discussions about the potential of decentralised governance for food system transformation concerning local development, particularly improving food and nutrition security. It was noted that decentralised governance for food system transformation addresses many key issues, such as the severe limitations of centralised planning and management, the over-concentration of power, authority, and resources at the centre, and the weak contact between the central government and local people. The following verbal quotes illustrate the above:

There are various reasons for the growing faith in decentralized governance for food system transformation, as it ensures equity in the allocation of resources, maximum participation of local people, and sufficient representation of various stakeholders such as civil society, farmers, research organizations, and the private sector in the decision-making process. Furthermore, it is thus responsive to implement pro-poor interventions to address hunger and malnutrition at the community level (M&E Advisor of the country's biggest Donor Agency in Food and Nutrition Security).

Findings from both KIIs and FGDS unanimously agreed that Food and Nutrition Security Committees in Zimbabwe are important coordination structures to ensure effective food and nutrition security interventions in the province. The following verbal quotes illustrate the above:

FNSCs ensure a multisectoral response to food system transformation, particularly to end hunger and malnutrition. They help in mobilizing different stakeholders' resources and expertise to fight hunger and malnutrition in the province. As you are aware, our province is the region that is the worst affected by droughts, hence bringing together different stakeholders to combine their efforts to increase the effectiveness of our interventions. Food and nutrition security is a complex field that an individual sector cannot solve.

Responses from KIIs reveal that decentralized governance for food system transformation is lauded due to their contribution to agriculture food production and nutrition security. Most key informants praised decentralized governance for food system transformation, and they

argued that it is better than a centralized, top-down approach, which is out of touch with the reality of the community's needs. Key informants argued that with decentralized governance for food system transformation, interventions are now more responsive to community needs; the flow of authority is more direct; monitoring becomes faster; feedback mechanisms become easier; and transparency and accountability are enhanced. The following verbal quotes illustrate the above:

Decentralized governance for food system transformation ensures a shorter interval between planning and implementing interventions. In essence, decentralized FNSCs are more accessible than the central government, which is overloaded with activities, and the flow of authority is relatively faster and more direct. Before the devolution of governance, food and nutrition security programmes emanated almost entirely from the central government and flowed downward to the provinces and districts and that compromised effectiveness and sustainability

Notwithstanding the arguments and support for decentralized food system transformation, FNSCs face several challenges that, if not urgently addressed, may compromise their effectiveness in ensuring food and nutrition security. Responses from KIIs revealed that FNSCs lack harmonization and coordination among key stakeholders. The linkage between the governments, NGOs, research organisations, and the community is often tenuous and sometimes rocked with conflicts. This is partly due to mistrust between government, NGOs, and community members. Most NGO interventions, especially food aid and agriculture input assistance, are often interred by political leaders who think that some programmes have a hidden political agenda. The following verbal quotes illustrate the above:

Since food and nutrition security is a complex problem, it is addressed by multiple actors, and sometimes, conflicts arise among FNSC members. Several government ministries and departments have priorities and plans, sometimes dictated to the FNSC members. There is also duplication of roles and competition among government ministries, and on the other hand, donors and NGOs have their priorities; thus, harmonizing the different preferences and plans of different actors proves to be a big challenge to FNSCs. Political interference from the lower-level political structures is one of the challenges, as some people think some food and nutrition security

programs aim to unseat the current ZANU PF government through vote buying on behalf of the opposition.

Responses from the KIIs show that FNSCs lack budgetary support from the government, which has hindered their food system transformation efforts as they rely on donor support. With the macroeconomic challenges that Zimbabwe is facing, government resources are not enough to finance their individual ministries' line budgets, let alone extend support to FNSCs. The following verbal quotes illustrate the above:

FNSCs face a horde of challenges, including a lack of budgetary support. The provincial, district, ward, and village structures lack government support for financial and material resources. Here in the province, we do not have a vehicle; hence, we rely on sector ministries or NGOs for food and nutrition security monitoring visits. We also do not have an office or stationery in our boardroom to conduct meetings. Most of our activities are donor-funded, and as you know, donors only fund their priorities, not everything we want.

FNSCs in Zimbabwe are also hampered by a lack of human and institutional capacity to carry out their duties effectively. Capacity development is the process by which individuals, organizations, institutions, and societies develop abilities individually and collectively to perform functions, solve problems, and set and achieve objectives. It is critical to decentralized governance for food system transformation. Capacity development must be addressed at three interrelated levels: individual, institutional, and community. Therefore, the capacities of government, civil society, research organizations, farmers, the private sector, and the local community must be developed to ensure effective decentralized governance for food system transformation. The following verbal quotes illustrate the above:

Institutional capacity building is imperative, especially for our government ministries and departments, to carry out their duties effectively. This is because they are the custodians of the Food and Nutrition Security Policy and must ensure food and nutrition security for the people. The systems need to be strengthened while transparency and accountability need to be enhanced. Corruption needs to be addressed before decentralized governance for food system transformation can be realized. FNSC members from the province down to the village level need to be capacitated in monitoring and evaluation, information management and report writing, as this is

critical to ensure evidence-based food and nutrition security programming.

The results also found that, despite the various food and nutrition security activities by FNSCs, they are usually poorly documented or not documented at all, especially at lower levels. Despite its importance, only a few respondents appreciated the importance of documentation; most, however, perceived it as time-wasting and that it could not be prioritized over performing actual programme interventions. Moreover, respondents highlighted some of the hindrances to documentation, including lack of documentation-related equipment, tools, and budgets, documentation skills, and unclear roles and responsibilities. The following verbal quotes illustrate the above:

Those at the higher level tell us to document our work, but the challenge is that we do not know how some work is done. Though we were trained a long time ago, there is a need for some refresher courses so that we are continuously capacitated, especially in data entry and analysis. Moreover, we have not met some deadlines for submitting reports due to persistent power cuts and poor internet connection. Most FNSC members we work with at the ward and village level sometimes drop out of working with us because there is no remuneration for them, only allowances sometimes given by NGOs when organising workshops.

## **6. Lessons Learned**

The case study above provides several lessons in enhancing decentralized governance of food system transformation.

For decentralized food system transformation coordination structures to increase efficiency, they need to have the authority to respond to local demand and adequate mechanisms for accountability. Conceding authority without accountability can lead to corruption and poor interventions. The transformation of the decentralized food system needs to be accompanied by reforms that increase the transparency and accountability of government institutions.

There is a need for a concerted effort on the part of the government to allocate set budgets for the FNSCs to enhance the transformation of the decentralised food system. Reliance on donor support is not sustainable as it primarily addresses humanitarian and not development interventions. A multisectoral approach to resource mobilization is also important, including harnessing the resources from the private sector,

especially through public-private partnerships. Strengthening domestic resource mobilization is crucial in transforming food systems at the decentralised level.

Developing and strengthening a coordinating mechanism for food system transformation is entirely in the interest of the government and its development partners. However, while the government has established task forces and special committees for food and nutrition security with the support of development partners, the mechanisms for implementing the committees' activities are rarely reviewed. Communities should have channels to communicate their preferences and make their voices heard when designing and implementing food and nutrition security programs. Citizens must know about government policies and activities to effectively influence food and nutrition security policies. Although limited capacity exists, the media must be crucial in this area.

## **7. Concluding Remarks**

In most developing countries, enhancing decentralized governance for food system transformation has recently been recognized as more appropriate for addressing hunger and malnutrition. This research paper uses key informant interviews and focus group discussions to understand the factors necessary for enhancing decentralized governance for food system transformation to attain SDG 2 and other related objectives. Findings from this research indicate that decentralized governance for food system transformation is central to ending hunger and malnutrition as it involves the participation of people affected by the problem in decision-making. There is a need for the government to increase budgetary support for food and nutrition security interventions at the local level since reliance on donor support through NGO-implemented projects and programs is not sustainable. Further, the national system needs support by strengthening human and institutional capacities from the provincial to the community level where activities occur. Furthermore, building partnerships and engaging in stakeholder dialogue should be promoted at all levels to effectively design and implement context and locality-specific food and nutrition security interventions.

Using the case study of FNSCs in Zimbabwe, the paper draws lessons for other developing countries on enhancing food and nutrition security through improved decentralized governance. Further research is needed to understand the experiences of other countries in promoting

decentralized governance for food system transformation for the attainment of Agenda 2030 as a basis for south-south learning.

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