

2nd June, 2022

SAFEGUARDING THE COUNTRY'S FOOD SECURITY

On 12th May, the Ministry of Agriculture announced that Zambia is projected to record a 25% drop in maize output from 3.6 million metric tonnes in 2020/2021 season to 2.7 million metric tonnes in the 2021/2022 season. The projected drop is attributed to drought and a reduced planted area. However, the ministry was quick to state that the drop will not affect the country's food security. The ministry arrived at this position based on the following facts:

1. The country had a carryover stock of 1.5 million metric tonnes of maize as at 1st May, which with the addition of 2.7 million metric tonnes would avail 4.2 million metric tonnes of maize for supply in the 2022/2023 agricultural marketing season.
2. The country's population is estimated at 19.2 million with the estimated national requirement for maize to meet consumption demand at 3 million metric tonnes. Therefore, the country is expected to have a surplus of 1.2 million metric tonnes of maize.

A number of eminent individuals have commented on this subject and have highlighted that there is no need to worry about the country's food security because the projected drop in maize output is very marginal. There is a general consensus that the country's food security will remain intact and that the likely negative impact of the decline in maize production will be on the budget, since there will be a shortfall of the commodity in some parts of the country. This means government will have to distribute maize in the areas that experienced drought and heavy rainfall and could not produce.

Working with these facts, JCTR is of the view that the Ministry of Agriculture needs to tread carefully especially on how it manages the maize stock when it comes to exportation of maize and its by-products such as mealie meal. Recently the ministry increased quantities of the commodity which millers export per month from 50,000 to 80,000 metric tonnes in order to allow millers to earn substantial profit to reduce the cost of production and subsequently reduce the price of staple food. At the same time, there are calls to ramp up exportation of maize especially that the regional prices are favourable given the crop failure in other countries of the region. For instance, Zimbabwe has forecast maize production for the 2021/2022 season at 1.56 million tonnes. Zimbabwe requires 2.2 million tonnes annually for both human and livestock consumption. Zimbabwean government has encouraged private millers and producers of livestock feed to import some grain to plug the deficit. Zimbabwe is therefore looking to import maize from Zambia.

Exportation of maize and mealie meal is likely to increase in the coming months due to huge export opportunities in the region. Therefore, there is a need for the Ministry of Agriculture working together with other stakeholders to carefully manage the maize stock in order to strike a delicate balance between ramping up of forex generation for the country on one hand, and ensuring that country's food security is adequately safeguarded at all times, on the other. The ministry must also ensure that the communities in some parts of the country that experienced drought and heavy rainfall are adequately supplied with the commodity.

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