



STATEMENT BY THE CIVIL SOCIETY FOR POVERTY REDUCTION (CSPR) ON ZAMBIA'S PROJECTED 4.9 MILLION TONNES MAIZE BUMPER HARVEST: EXCEEDING THE 2026 ANNUAL TARGET AND CHARTING THE PATH TO 10 MILLION TONNES BY 2030

The Civil Society for Poverty Reduction (CSPR) has noted from the Zambia Statistics Agency Zambia's projected bumper maize harvest of approximately 4.9 million metric tonnes for the 2025/2026 farming season way above the 3.6 million metric tonnes recorded in the last farming season. This marks a significant recovery for the agricultural sector and demonstrates renewed potential for Zambia to reclaim its position as a regional food basket within Southern Africa after experiencing climate related shocks in 2023/2024 season. The projected harvest is an important step toward strengthening national food security and reduced dependency on imports as a harvest of this magnitude if well managed has the potential to positively impact poverty levels through increased rural incomes, improved household food availability and enhanced economic activity along agricultural value chains. Increased production can contribute to further lowering food inflation which had remained within a double digit for the past 2 years and guarantee inflation stabilization

However, CSPR wishes to place this achievement in its correct context. The Government's annual maize production target for 2026 is set at 4.5 million metric tonnes. The projected 4.9 million metric tonnes therefore surpasses this annual milestone by approximately 400,000 metric tonnes a commendable result that reflects steady and tangible progress toward the longer-term national goal of 10 million metric tonnes by 2030. All things being equal, the 10 million tonne ambition remains achievable. CSPR cautions that this trajectory still faces significant risks, most critically: the inadequacy of investments to address water for agricultural production, and the intensifying impacts of climate change, which threaten to erode the gains made and destabilize future production seasons. Other risks include weak post-harvest management and market access limitations.

Rain-Fed Agriculture: A Structural Vulnerability

A foundational vulnerability that underpins these risks is Zambia's continued and heavy dependence on rain-fed agriculture. The vast majority of smallholder farmers who form the backbone of national maize production rely almost entirely on seasonal rainfall, with minimal access to irrigation infrastructure or supplementary water sources. This structural dependence exposes the entire agricultural sector to extreme year-to-year production variability driven by erratic rainfall, prolonged dry spells, and shifting seasonal patterns attributable to climate change.

CSPR therefore calls for deliberate and scaled-up public investment in irrigation infrastructure, water harvesting systems, and small-scale dam construction, particularly in agro-ecological zones where climate impacts are most acute. Without reducing rain-fed dependence, even well-intentioned production targets remain fragile and hostage to weather events beyond farmers' control.

Post-Harvest Losses: A Risk That Cannot Be Ignored

Even where strong harvests are achieved, the risk of significant post-harvest losses poses a serious threat to the value realised from increased production. Inadequate storage infrastructure, limited access to hermetic bags and grain management technologies, poor rural road networks, and limited processing facilities across many farming areas result in substantial losses that erode farmer incomes and reduce the effective food supply available to households and markets.

CSPR urges Government to prioritise urgent investment in post-harvest management, including:

- Increased, community-level grain storage facilities in rural farming areas;
- Accessible storage solutions for smallholder farmers;
- Strengthened partnerships with the private sector in grain handling and agro-processing
- Farmer training and extension on best practices in post-harvest handling and storage.

Market Absorption

A bumper harvest only translates into tangible benefits for farmers if there are reliable, fair, and accessible markets to absorb the produce. CSPR raises serious concerns about the capacity of current market structures to effectively absorb a 4.9 million tonne harvest considering the Government's limited budget allocation for the Food Reserve Agency. CSPR therefore calls on Government to urgently address the following:

- **Food Reserve Agency (FRA) Capacity:** Whether the FRA will have additional financing and is ably equipped with sufficient storage capacity and logistical reach to purchase higher than planned quantity of maize at fair prices and in a timely manner across all farming districts — including remote and hard-to-reach areas where farmers are most vulnerable to exploitation by middlemen in the absence of a reliable buyer of last resort.
- **Export Market Access:** What concrete and actionable plans Government has to facilitate Zambia's access to regional and international export markets, particularly within the Southern African Development Community (SADC) and the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) framework. Zambia must explore these channels proactively to prevent a domestic supply glut from depressing farm-gate prices.
- **GMO Price Competition:** Zambia's maize prices are structurally uncompetitive against Genetically Modified Organism (GMO)-based grain produced in the region, which benefits from lower production costs and is widely traded in Southern African markets. Government must critically assess how this competitive disadvantage affects Zambia's export viability and develop a strategy — including diplomatic engagement within the AfCFTA and beyond Africa to protect and grow Zambia's market share.
- **Enabling Grain Traders:** Government must take deliberate steps to facilitate and support grain traders as leaving traders to navigate structural price disadvantages alone, without policy support, market intelligence, or trade facilitation, risks leaving much of the bumper harvest unsold or sold at a loss.

Failure to address market absorption proactively risks a situation where a record harvest paradoxically impoverishes farmers through collapsed farm-gate prices; a scenario Zambia has experienced in previous bumper harvest seasons and must not repeat.

Strengthening the Food Reserve Agency, improving national grain storage systems, and supporting value addition along the maize value chain will be critical in maximising the economic value of increased production and ensuring that the benefits of this bumper harvest reach farmers, processors, and consumers alike.

CSPR also encourages Government to promote agricultural diversification and resilience. Sustainable poverty reduction cannot depend on maize alone. Increased investment in livestock, fisheries, legumes, cassava, millet, sorghum, and other climate-resilient crops is necessary to build a more stable and inclusive agricultural economy.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Even as Zambia develops the 9th National Development Plan as well as works toward the 10 million tonnes target by 2030, CSPR calls for a people-centred agricultural strategy that:

- Prioritises the welfare of smallholder farmers and protects vulnerable households;
- Addresses the structural risks of rain-fed agriculture through scaled irrigation investment;
- Tackles post-harvest losses through targeted storage and handling infrastructure;
- Ensures credible market absorption pathways through the export market facilitation;
- Develops a competitive strategy to navigate GMO price competition in regional markets;

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