

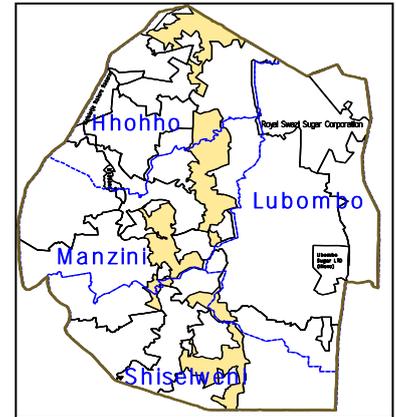
Swaziland Livelihood Profiles

The Dry Middleveld Livelihood Zone

August 2006¹

Main Conclusions and Implications

This is a zone where most people could not normally expect to grow all their basic requirements, since the average rainfall is too low to be conducive to the best results with maize, and soil conditions are comparatively unfavourable. The balancing element in the past for poorer people was earnings from local labouring work, self employment (selling firewood, marula beer, handicrafts). However, persistent drought in recent years has distorted the economy to the extent that even better off people are discouraged from maximising crop production, especially maize, which previously might have given them not only enough food but some income as cash crops - and a reason for employing their poorer neighbours. One particular sign of this decline is the fact that much of the land available to people is not cultivated; and even for wealthier people the high cost of fertilizers and other inputs is further discouragement. At the same time, although this is cattle country, failing pastures, endemic disease and cattle rustling have much damaged this sector, although livestock remain the one product which is significantly marketed beyond the zone.



Poorer people have needed food aid in order to continue a basic existence. Lack of activity by the National Maize Corporation means that for a part of the year people rely entirely on private traders to bring in maize grain on the market at whatever price, or buy maize meal at groceries. In the shorter term there may be room for official intervention on the staples market to regularise supply and ease prices. Further investment in veterinary protection would help restore the importance of livestock. In the longer-term, a basic need is to increase the value of local production, and in this respect it is noted that people have hopes for small-scale commercial sugar production but await official help through investment in irrigation. Also, the hope for poorer people is to get more than primary level education for their children, as a passport to better employment in the next generation. But school costs are a big burden and could do with some assistance - matching the undoubted benefit of school feeding.

Zone Description

The Dry Middleveld has a long-term mean annual rainfall of 600-650mm, as compared with the rainfall of some 900mm in the neighbouring Wet Middleveld. This makes for the difference between low maize production and satisfactory to good maize production, all other things being equal. But they are not equal: the Dry Middleveld is more prone to serious drought than the Wet Middleveld, and this has led to a cumulation of impoverishment in the present decade. Drought has also resulted not only in severe harvest losses but in the depletion of grazing areas affecting the production of livestock limiting the livestock sale income on which most households except the very poor rely for a slice of their annual income. The grazing areas are made worse by the invasion of alien plant species in the zone, especially the locally-named Sandanezwe. This aggressive plant destroys any useful natural vegetation cover and even occupies cropping areas, reducing arable land as well as grazing areas.

Maize is by far the major crop grown here, virtually all for home consumption. Other food crops, including groundnuts, field beans, cowpeas and jugo beans, are grown these days only by a minority, again only for home consumption. This zone was never self-sufficient in maize, let alone an exporter; but before the recent droughts it did export some of this other produce out of the zone - although such modest cash-cropping was again done by a small minority. But although this is a comparatively unproductive zone, poorer people tend not migrate to other

¹ Fieldwork for this profile was undertaken in late July-early August 2006. The information presented refers to the consumption year from July 2005, i.e. from the time when the maize harvest was largely in. Provided there are no fundamental and rapid shifts in the economy, the information in this profile is expected to remain valid for approximately five years (i.e. until 2011).

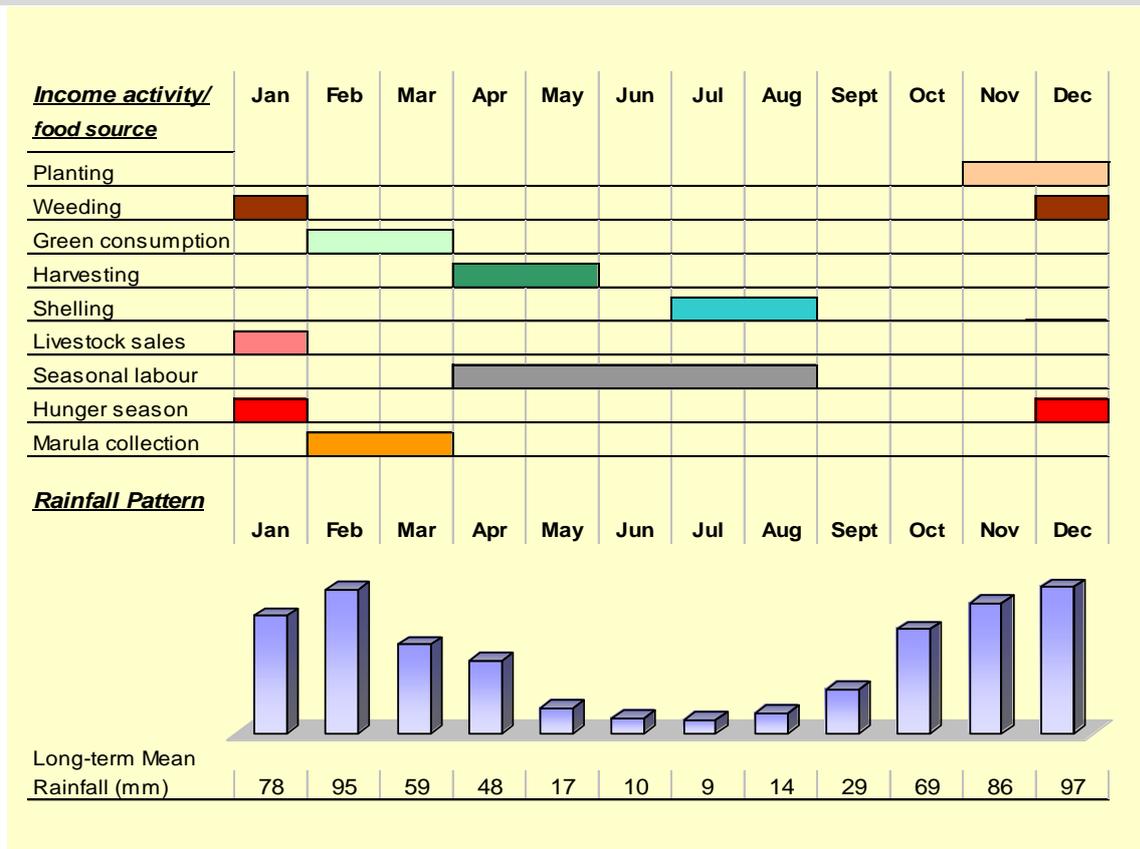
zones seasonally to find work but rather move within the zone trying to find income to make ends meet. Partly they do labouring work for wealthier households, but equally importantly they rely on self-employment, selling firewood and artisanal / handicraft products. However, in recent years the sum of their efforts has not given them sufficient produce or income to support their basic requirements in food and cash, and it was decided that they must receive food aid as a support. Wealthier people, especially the better off, overwhelmingly have employment or businesses outside the zone.

Markets

Market access is relatively good, with a network of major and minor trading points for basic food including maize meal, bread, sugar, beans, milk etc.. However there is no active, official maize grain outlet - i.e. via the National Maize Corporation. Maize meal does get distributed to all small traders, i.e. groceries within the zone. But maize grain is either brought in by small informal traders at high prices or imported by some rich individuals. During food shortage periods, marketed grain is normally obtainable from other zones - at a cost, since a high proportion of the population normally needs to purchase maize over several months and has little alternative but to meet the prices. But in recent years of food aid distribution this market demand has diminished.

Due to drought, this zone has not been exporting produce in any significant amount. A few areas were reported to be exporting sweet potatoes and vegetables (especially Nkwene community) to other zones. Where livestock movements are not restricted by quarantine, cattle and goats are sold out of the zone. But livestock diseases, especially black quarter, and Newcastle amongst poultry, have over the years resulted in serious depletion of livestock as a fall-back asset for sale during food shortage times.

Seasonal Calendar

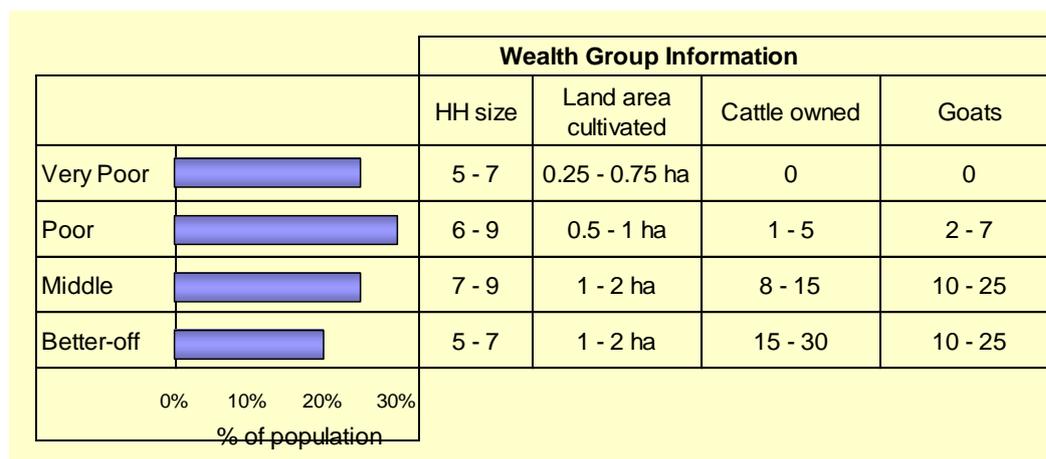


Agricultural activities continue from November to August: planting, weeding, pest control, early picking of green maize to diminish the hunger period, harvesting and shelling of mature grain). These days people no longer put aside a separate period for land preparation: they just go straight to tilling and planting after early rainfall.

By December or January virtually everyone is in the market to buy maize, but purchase may well start earlier
 Dry Middleveld Livelihood Zone

depending on the household's harvest. The price of maize is usually low after harvest from July to September and then rises up to January during the hunger period. On the other hand food aid may delay as well as diminish purchase requirements. Local labouring employment peaks during the maize harvesting and shelling time, but by the same token people have to find other cash-earning occupations for six or more months of the year, depending on how much work they invest in their own land. But one occupation, marula fruit collection and brewing (*Sclerocarya birrea* subsp. *caffra*), occurs in the rainy season, as does the major sale of livestock when animals are in the best condition after using the regenerated pastures.

Wealth Breakdown



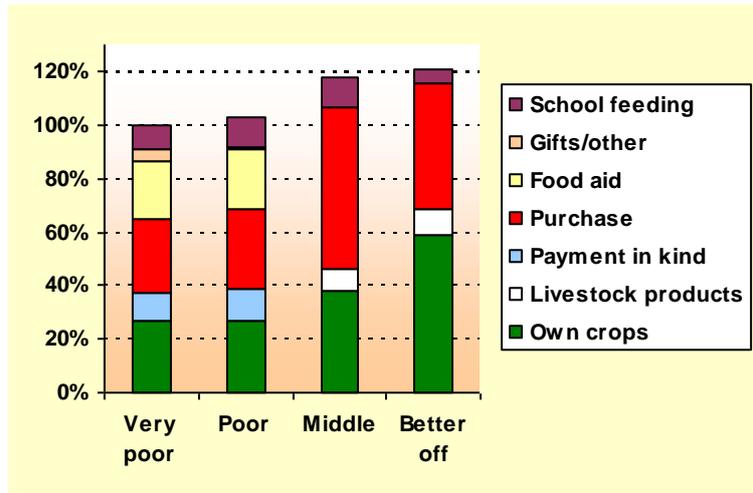
Ownership of land is not a direct determinant of wealth; rather, what matters is how much of the land owned is actually cultivated by a household. In this case a majority in all wealth groups tend to actually own two or three times as much land as they cultivate, i.e. some three hectares allocated to them during a resettlement process. But whether because of the influence of drought or other opportunity cost considerations, or because of a lack of labour in the family, land areas cultivated are comparatively low for any group. Some poorer families rent out land they cannot use to wealthier people. In some communities there are ambitions for commercial uses - i.e. sugar cane, but they await financial assistance to invest in irrigation. Otherwise, there are different patterns in land use. The poorer farmers tend to intercrop pulses and tubers with maize, whilst the wealthier go for one or two crops which promise some cash return when the drought breaks, and are therefore worth the investment of inputs and even of tractor hire. The ownership of livestock is as usual heavily skewed towards wealthier people, who benefit not only from sales but from the kraal manure for their fields - and also from milk which is a major addition to the quality of their diet.

However, the crucial determinant is not amongst these physical factors: it is the level of education of the breadwinners and the level they can afford to promote their children to - i.e. secondary and tertiary education. This determines the greater part of the income of middle and better off households through formal employment, and guarantees their future. Conversely, the usual restriction of poorer households to primary education limits their long term capacity to do more than just make ends meet - if there isn't drought.

Sources of Food

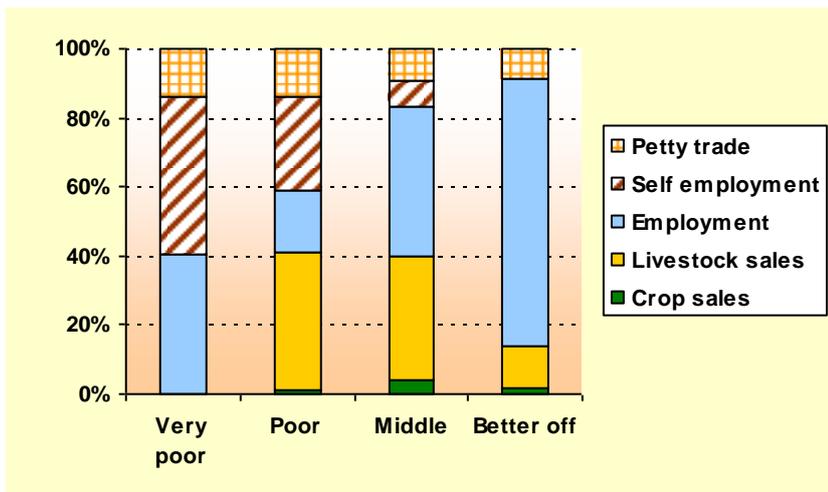
This is a picture of a deficit production area, although it does show that despite problems of low rainfall and other constraints, food consumption from own production is not negligible. With their cash earnings, the wealthier households are well able to cover the balance of their needs from purchase. In fact, in better years they produce substantially more than they consume, selling some harvest early in the year to avoid storage losses and to substitute with preferred foods.

But the poorer households, unable to earn enough to make up this balance, have had recourse to relief food aid - and even then, school feeding is depended upon significantly.



In the graph, food access is expressed as a percentage of minimum food requirements, taken as an average food energy intake of 2100 kcals per person per day.

Sources of Cash



The income of the poor and very poor is partly from casual and seasonal work, although self employment is more important. This dominated by marula fruit collection and brewing, but also features firewood and grass sales, and handicraft sales which the middle households also undertake. All groups are engaged in petty trade, and all but the very poor sell some livestock - although the high proportion of income gained from this by the poor should not mask the fact that in cash terms this represents only half of what the middle get and one-quarter of what the better off get.

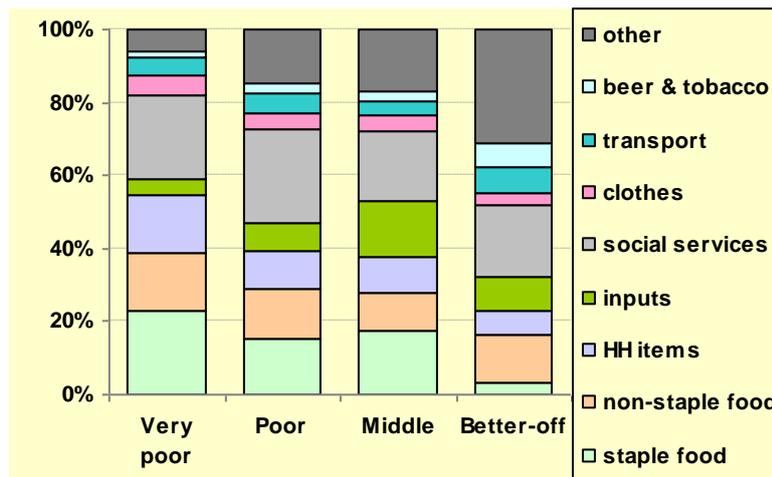
The graph provides a breakdown of total cash income according to income source.

Annual Income in emalangen	Very Poor	Poor	Middle	Better Off
	2179	6063	22,958	53,075

The difference in employment between poorer and wealthier household is not just in the amount of money earned but in the fact that for poorer people work is very seasonal, whilst for the wealthier it is year-round, whether salaried or skilled work. The very poor seek town work in the off-season, such as house-construction labour and domestic work. The low level of crop earnings even amongst the wealthier reflects the result of drought, which in the long run discourages efforts to use all the available land and gives a poor return on investment in inputs

Expenditure Patterns

The purchases of staple food by poorer households are rather low because they have received food aid. It should be noted that in absolute cash terms, for roughly the same size of household the better off spend twice as much on maize as the very poor and fully twelve times as much on non-staples - this is as much as anything an indicator of a great difference in the standard of living amongst a 'rural' population where wealthier people get most of their income from urban earnings. Similarly the wealthier are able to spend far more on education (social services) and on ceremonies, Church tithes etc. ('other').



The graph provides a breakdown of total cash expenditure according to category of expenditure.

Hazards

Chronic hazards: Black quarter disease in cattle is the most serious cause of mortality.

Yellow leaf affects maize before the tasseling stage

Newcastle disease regularly reduces poultry numbers

Cattle theft, especially rustling across the eastern national border has been at a level where most households are now discouraged from trying to maximise numbers kept.

Periodic hazards: Drought in recent years has perhaps felt like a chronic hazard, but in the longer term this must be seen as just a particularly long episode, ravaging harvests and weakening livestock.

Response Strategies

- Increase in staple food purchases
- Minimising other expenditure (to spend more on staple food)
- Unusual out-migration of poorer people to seek work
- Reduction of the number and quality of daily meals

Indicators of Imminent Crisis

Month	Early Warning Indicator
January	
February	
March	
April	
May	
June	
July	
August	
September	
October	
November	
December	