

COVID-19 and the Maize Value Chain in Zambia

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**Covid-19: new challenge or new opportunity to enhance sustainability of
agricultural and fisheries value chains in EU partner countries?**

Disruptions in the VC and pathways

- Input sector – mixed effects
 - inputs for 2020/21 agricultural season somewhat disrupted due to border closures, and trucks held up at borders
 - Input prices almost doubled e.g. fertilizer prices from K250 (€10) to K450 (€19) per 50kg bag
- Extension activities halted by movement restrictions
- Maize production – minimal to no disruption
- Maize marketing experienced mixed effects:
 - Export ban amidst bumper harvest depressed prices
 - Cash payments reduced, slowing down payments and creating liquidity problems in the trade
 - Reduction in activities of grain aggregators
 - Millers and breweries experience fall in demand, which limited their grain absorption capacity – their operating costs rose due to steps taken to be COVID-safe

Solutions undertaken and effectiveness

- Use of digital platforms by seed and fertilizer companies increased but problems for smallholder farmers who do not have smartphones and have limited network coverage
- At own cost, businesses invested in Covid-19 control measures for their staff (sanitizers and masks) – creating market for these products
- A shift from storing maize in bags to bulk storage in silos being to take place among larger traders – reduces human interaction in grain storage operations and also cost in terms of loading and offloading
- New markets and marketing methods emerged – e.g. some millers introduced sales in communities using vans but can lead to marginalization of small shop owners

New challenge or new opportunity

Both a challenge and opportunity

Challenge:

- Ease of doing business become a big issue leading to increased cost for registered entities
- More scrutiny and health check by health officials

Opportunity:

- Use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) in extension and marketing likely to increase
- Wellness and sanitation at workplaces been enhanced
- More opportunities for collaboration between international and local researchers due to travel restrictions

Concluding remarks: lesson learned

- Food production and supply systems need to be sustained during crisis, hence need to develop protocols and logistics systems to avoid disruptions
- Social safety nets are needed to protect low-income people during pandemics, especially those in rural areas