The New York Times

# In Zimbabwe, World Bank Decrees Misery

To the Editor:

Since Zimbabwe is composed primarily of rural farmers, I found it curious that your July 10 report on the negative effect that the country's economic troubles are having on the stature of President Robert G. Mugabe quotes only businessmen, bankers and government officials. Had your reporter spoken to the many grass-roots groups working with the country's rural poor, she would have discovered that Zimbabwe's crisis is as much attributable to the policies promoted by the World Bank and International Monetary Fund as it is to the lack of rainfall.

Since entering into a structural adjustment program approved by the International Monetary Fund-World Bank in 1990, the Zimbabwean Government has increased producer prices for export crops, such as tobacco, cotton and cut flowers, while at the same time it has paid farmers little for growing corn, the country's staple crop.

Not surprisingly, large-scale farmers have responded to these incentives by switching to export crops, while small peasant farmers have seen their food crops wither in the hot sun. Adding to the food shortage has been the I.M.F.-World Bank requirement that the Grain Marketing Board, which handles most grain transactions, balance its books every year. This condition led the Grain Marketing Board to sell last year's surplus, with the result that last February, even when the extent of the crop failure was clear, grain was still being exported to honor previous sales contracts.

As in many of the other 70 countries that have adopted adjustment programs over the last decade, the International Monetary Fund and World Bank have done far more to exacerbate poverty than they have to alleviate it. By forcing the adoption of an economic program that has both undermined food security and made the rural poor more vulnerable to the vagaries of the weather, these institutions have directly contributed to the famine that is now impending in Zimbabwe.

ROSS HAMMOND
Washington, July 10, 1992

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