

## Seasonal poverty in Zimbabwe and Cambodia: A comparative analysis of the developing world

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### សង្ខេប

គេបានលើកឡើងថា ធម្មជាតិនៃភាពក្រីក្រតាមរដូវកាលគឺកើតមានតាមបរិបទជាក់លាក់។ ប៉ុន្តែ ការអះអាងនេះកម្រមានការបកស្រាយឬភ័ស្តុតាងបញ្ជាក់ណាស់។ ការសិក្សានេះបញ្ជាក់ថា តើធម្មជាតិនៃភាពក្រីក្រតាមរដូវកាលពិតជាប្រែប្រួលតាមបរិបទមែនឬទេ? ការសិក្សានេះបានប្រៀបធៀបធម្មជាតិនៃភាពក្រីក្រតាមរដូវកាលក្នុងប្រទេសហ្ស៊ីមបាវេនិងប្រទេសកម្ពុជា។ ការសិក្សានេះបានប្រើវិធីសាស្ត្រស្រាវជ្រាវបែបរុករក ដោយប្រើប្រាស់ទិន្នន័យដែលមានស្រាប់ និងទិន្នន័យបឋមមួយចំនួនរួមបញ្ចូលគ្នា។ លទ្ធផលបង្ហាញថា (1) ទាំងកម្ពុជា និងហ្ស៊ីមបាវេ ធ្លាប់ជួបប្រទះស្ថានភាពពិតជាក់ស្តែងតាមរដូវដែលពាក់ព័ន្ធនឹងមិនពាក់ព័ន្ធនឹងអាកាសធាតុ។ ប៉ុន្តែទោះជាយ៉ាងនេះក្តី ស្ថានភាពបែបនេះមួយចំនួនជារឿងចម្លែកចំពោះប្រទេសកម្ពុជា។ (2) ភាពស្មុគស្មាញនៃភាពក្រីក្រតាមរដូវកាលទាំងនៅកម្ពុជានិងហ្ស៊ីមបាវេគឺមានលក្ខណៈដូចគ្នា។ (3) នៅក្នុងប្រទេសទាំងពីរ ភាពក្រីក្រច្រើនកើតឡើងនៅរដូវវស្សា។ ដូច្នេះ ទោះបីកម្ពុជានិងហ្ស៊ីមបាវេស្ថិតក្នុងបរិបទខុសគ្នាក៏ដោយចុះ តិចឬច្រើន ភាពក្រីក្រតាមរដូវកាលមានលក្ខណៈស្រដៀងគ្នា។ ដូច្នេះ ការសិក្សានេះបញ្ជាក់ថា ការលើកឡើងថាភាពក្រីក្រតាមរដូវកាលកើតមានតាមបរិបទគឺមិនត្រឹមត្រូវទាំងស្រុងនោះទេ។ ដោយសារភាពក្រីក្រតាមរដូវកាលជារឿងជៀសមិនផុត ការសិក្សានេះផ្តល់អនុសាសន៍ថា ប្រទេសហ្ស៊ីមបាវេ កម្ពុជា និងប្រទេសកំពុងអភិវឌ្ឍ

ដំទៃទៀតគួរដាក់បញ្ចូលវិសាលភាពនៃភាពក្រីក្រតាមរដូវកាលទៅក្នុងគោលនយោបាយ កាត់បន្ថយភាពក្រីក្រ ដើម្បីកាត់បន្ថយជាអតិបរមានូវឥទ្ធិពលនៃភាពក្រីក្រតាមរដូវកាល មកលើជីវភាពរស់នៅរបស់ប្រជាពលរដ្ឋក្រីក្រ និងដើម្បីលើកកម្ពស់សមត្ថភាព ជនក្រីក្រក្នុងការទប់ទល់នឹងបញ្ហាផ្សេងៗដែលកើតឡើងតាមរដូវកាល។

**Abstract**

It has been claimed that the nature of seasonal poverty is context-specific, but this claim is rarely substantiated. This study therefore ascertains whether the nature of seasonal poverty varies according to context. It examines this supposition by comparing the nature of seasonal poverty in both Zimbabwe and Cambodia. The study employed an exploratory methodology. It predominantly made use of secondary data, along with limited primary data. The results show that: (1) Both Zimbabwe and Cambodia experience climatic and non-climatic seasonal realities, however, some of these are peculiar to Cambodia. (2) The complexity of seasonal poverty in Zimbabwe and Cambodia is similar. (3) In both countries, seasonal poverty is more pronounced in the wet season. Thus, despite the remarkable contextual disparities between Zimbabwe and Cambodia, the nature of seasonal poverty in each country is, by and large, similar. Thus, the claim that seasonal poverty is context-specific is considered to be inaccurate. Since seasonal poverty is inevitable, the study recommends that Zimbabwe, Cambodia and other developing countries should factor the impact of this seasonal dimension into poverty reduction policies. The focus should be on minimizing the effects of seasonal poverty on the livelihoods of the poor and enhancing their resilience to seasonality.

**Keywords:** seasonal poverty, seasonality, Zimbabwe, Cambodia

**Introduction**

Seasonal poverty entails realities<sup>4</sup> that people, especially the poor, experience repeatedly at certain times of the year brought about by marked

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<sup>4</sup> Realities refer to undesirable life or poverty conditions (Chambers, 2012; Gweshengwe, 2020)

changes of climatic and non-climatic seasons (Gweshengwe, 2020). It is multidimensional: manifests in financial, economic, material, social and environmental aspects of poverty (Chambers, 2012). Many scholarly studies have been conducted on the nature and effects of seasonal poverty (Chambers et al., 1981; Devereux et al., 2008, 2012; Devereux & Longhurst, 2009), as well as the significance of understanding seasonal poverty (Chambers, 1979, 1982, 2012). The studies claim that the nature of seasonal poverty varies by context (Devereux et al, 2012). However, little, if any, effort has been made to validate this claim. Does that mean that the nature of seasonal poverty is different from country to country? Motivated by this question, the current study offers a comparative analysis of the nature of seasonal poverty in Zimbabwe and Cambodia. These two countries have different geographical, economic, social, political and environmental contexts. This contrast poses the question of whether it is relevant to compare seasonal poverty in each case, as the countries do not appear to be comparable. This has influenced the choice for Zimbabwe and Cambodia for this study. The salient contextual disparities of each country are considered to enrich the analysis.

Seasonal poverty was first defined in the 1970s in a seminar at the Institute of Development Studies at the University of Sussex, and two seasonal poverty conferences were held in 1978 and 2009 (Chambers, 1981; Devereux et al., 2012). It becomes topical as it manifests in financial, economic, material, social and environmental dimensions of poverty and has an enormous effect on the livelihoods of people with limited means or opportunities (Chambers & Longhurst, 1981; Gweshengwe, 2020).

It emanates from both climatic and non-climatic seasonality (Devereux et al., 2012). Climatic seasonality, the change from wet to dry seasons and vice versa, triggers seasonal variations in production, labour requirements or employment opportunities, commodity prices, health, malnutrition and mortality (Devereux 1993, Devereux et al., 2008; Chambers 1979). It brings about or to peak realities, such as food shortages, high food prices, lack of money, indebtedness, diseases (such as malaria, diarrhea and skin infections), snakebites and weak social capital (Chambers & Longhurst, 1981; Devereux et al., 2012). Non-climatic seasonality refers to cyclical educational, social, religious, political and economic events, such as returning to school, festivals or religious celebrations, elections, and production cycles (Gweshengwe, 2020). These cyclical events are associated with realities, such as depressions, price hikes, financial stresses, debts, losses of household assets, and neglect (Chambers, 2012; Hadley, 2012; Lokshin & Radyakin, 2012).

Seasonal poverty has three main effects. First, it constrains livelihoods (Devereux et al., 2012). To cope with seasonal poverty, the poor often adopt desperate and irreversible measures, which include seasonal migration under distress, selling assets, eating less, and borrowing money and food at high-interest rates (Chambers, 1982; Sabates-Wheeler & Devereux, 2012). According to Chambers (1981), household assets are sold at a low price, without hope for recovery. These coping measures tend to adversely impact people's livelihoods. Second, it disempowers poor members of a community (Devereux, 1993). It subordinates the poor to the non-poor. Seasonal hunger and a lack of money compel the poor to accept low wages for their labour, as well as loans with higher interest rates as they are in a weakened position to

negotiate for better conditions (Chambers, 1981; Devereux, 1993). Consequently, non-poor members of a community tend to pass down seasonal stresses to the poor (Devereux et al., 2012). Third, it usually results in poverty traps that have adverse effects on livelihoods, and disempower the poor (Sabates-Wheeler & Devereux, 2012).

Seasonal poverty is a common phenomenon in developing countries. In The Gambia, for example, the wet season is associated with food shortages, a high incidence of infections, lower body weights of mothers, lower birth weights, and high child morbidity and mortality (Chambers 1979). In the Zaria region of Northern Nigeria, there is a distinct wet-season peak in malaria, measles, diarrhea and guinea worm. This coincides with the time of highest labour demand (Chambers, 1979). The wet season in Malawi is associated with food shortages and high food prices (Chirwa et al., 2012).

In Bangladesh, climate-induced seasonal poverty is characterized by seasonal hunger (Monga), limited work opportunities, water-borne infections (diarrheal disease) and problems with livestock diseases, among other realities (Conroy & Vignon, 2012). Rural communities in Lao People's Democratic Republic are more vulnerable to snakebites during the rainy season, between May and October (Vongphoumy et al, 2015). Moreover, seasonal hunger is common and usually occurs in March before the harvest of irrigated rice and mid-August through the end of October (World Food Programme, 2013). Prices of food items are beyond the reach of many poor people in the country the rural poor tend to depend on mushrooms and bamboo sprouts from forests during this time (World Food Programme,

2013). In Thailand, the rainy season is associated with a high incidence of diarrheal disease (McCormick et al., 2012).

According to Basu and Wong (2015), the poor in West Timor, one of Indonesia's poorest provinces, experience *musim paceklik* (seasonal hunger) from November to February. During this period, food prices are high and often the poor are required to borrow against future harvests (Basu & Wong, 2015). Lastly, in Brunei Darussalam, seasonal poverty is characterized by back to school and rainy season realities (Gweshengwe, 2020).

The study aims to ascertain whether the nature of seasonal poverty varies according to context. To this end, it examines, first, the characteristics of seasonal poverty in Zimbabwe and Cambodia; and then analyses if the characteristics vary between the countries. It advances knowledge on seasonal poverty as it tests the assertion that seasonal poverty is context-specific. This study is unique because it compares seasonal poverty between countries that are contextually very different, and challenges the conventional understanding that seasonal poverty varies according to context.

## **Research Methodology**

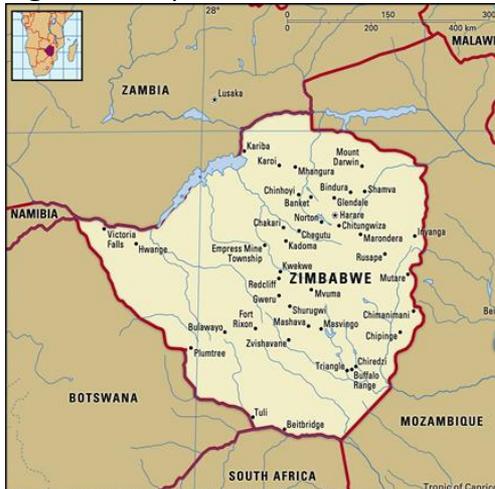
The study adopted an exploratory research method, which according to Gratton and Jones (2010), focuses on generating invaluable insights about a phenomenon with little or no available prior knowledge. The exploratory method was appropriate as little, if any, literature exists about how seasonal poverty varies according to context. It is also a flexible approach that enables different features of a phenomenon to be considered as they emerge (McNabb, 2010). Data were collected predominantly from secondary sources,

such as government and NGO reports, newspaper articles, and published scholarly material on the nature (dimensions, causes and effects) of seasonal poverty, using document analysis. The study also used primary data collected using unstructured interviews and observations. Unstructured interviews were conducted with two key informants from Cambodia, selected purposively on the basis of their in-depth understanding of Cambodia's education system and way of life. Observations were used to collect data on seasonal poverty in Zimbabwe (Figure 1 and Figure 2). The study used thematic analysis to induce knowledge about the nature, effects and period of seasonal poverty from the data. The data collected from Zimbabwe and Cambodia were not specific to particular provinces as the aim was to provide only a general picture of seasonal poverty for comparison. The countries were selected because of their contextual differences highlighted in the background section of this paper.

Zimbabwe is a landlocked country in the southern region of Africa. It has a total population of 13,572,560, comprising 6,514,829 males and 7,057,731 females (Zimbabwe National Statistics Agency, 2019). Shona and Ndebele are the main ethnic groups in the country. Politically, it is ruled by a democratically elected president, with an economy anchored on agriculture and mining. Zimbabwe, in 2018, had a GDP per capita of around 2,146 USD (World Bank, 2018). In 2017, 70.5% of the population was living in poverty (Zimbabwe National Statistics Agency, 2019). Poverty in the country is a result of factors such as a lack of employment opportunities, poor wages, inconsistent monetary policy, natural disasters, and weak social capital (personal communication, April 30, 2020). Climatically, Zimbabwe has marked

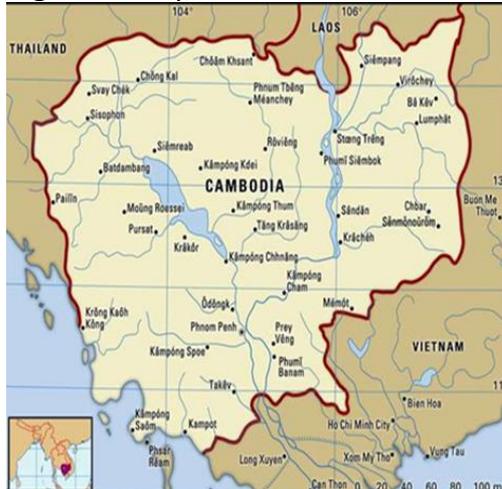
wet and dry seasons; with the wet season runs from October to April and the dry season from May to September.

**Figure 1. Map of Zimbabwe**



Source: Sanger et al. (2020)

**Figure 2. Map of Cambodia**



Source: Overton and Chandler (2019)

Cambodia is located in Southeast Asia, and according to National Institute of Statistics (2018), it has an estimated total population of 15.8 million, comprising 7.7 million males and 8.0 million females. Khmer is the main ethnic group and the economy is mainly supported by the garment industry, tourism, construction, agriculture and fishing (Officer, Ministry of Tourism, personal communication, March 8, 2020). In 2018, the GDP per capita was 1,520 USD (World Bank, 2018), with about 12.9% of the population living below the national poverty line (ADB, 2020). According to Culas and Tek (2016), the poorest people in Cambodia are isolated and usually live in remote villages with limited access to basic social services and facilities. Widows, orphans, street children and people with disabilities are among the most vulnerable groups in the country; they have limited access to education, training and employment opportunities (Naron, 2012). Cambodia has a

monsoonal climate, with a distinct wet and dry season. The wet season usually runs from May to November and the dry season from December to April (UNESCAP, 2002).

## Results and Findings

### *The characteristics of seasonal poverty in Zimbabwe*

Seasonal poverty in Zimbabwe is characterized by both climatic and non-climatic realities (Table 1).

**Table 1.** Characteristic of seasonal poverty in Zimbabwe

<b>Climatic realities</b>	<b>Non-climatic realities</b>
Seasonal hunger	Back-to-school stresses
Human and cattle diseases	Festivals
Shortage of money	Seasonal economic stresses
Debts	
Powerlessness	
Uncomfortable housing	
Transport challenges	
Weak social capital	
Snakebites	

Climatic realities are more pronounced in the wet season (October to April) and less in the dry season. Non-climatic realities emanate from the school calendar, festivals and the production cycle. Seasonal hunger occurs from January to March. For instance, in 2013, about 1.6 million people required food assistance during this time (UNOCHA, 2013). In 2019, approximately 8 million were considered to be food insecure during the peak of this hungry season (Chingono, 2020).

Seasonal hunger in Zimbabwe is more extreme in rural areas, where people depend on farming for food (Chingono, 2020). During the wet season, the poor usually exhaust their food reserves and food prices peak beyond their reach as demand exceeds supply (personal communication, December 28, 2019). To cope with seasonal hunger, the poor reduce quantity and number of meals each day, eating less nutritious meals. This occurs at a time of the year when immune systems are also challenged by seasonal infections and increased agricultural work requirements (personal communication, December 28, 2019). Labour during this time is poorly remunerated and is hired out at the expense of own production, trapping the poor in poverty. Also, the poor sell their productive assets, especially livestock, to purchase food (personal communication, December 28, 2019).

The wet season in Zimbabwe tends to coincide with a high incidence of human diseases, such as malaria and diarrhea (Gunda et al., 2017; Simango & Mbewe, 2000; Tshuma, 2019; Tunhira, 2012). The malaria season runs from mid-February to May (Ruzvidzo, 2017). In February 2013, for example, over 20,000 malaria cases were recorded in the country (The Herald, 2013a) and in Manicaland Province, malaria claimed 10 lives in one week (Chipunza, 2013). Diarrheal diseases, such as cholera, typhoid fever and dysentery, peak during the wet season (Simango & Mbewe, 2000). According to Manangazira (2017), in January 2017, 52 people died of diarrhea, and 39,766 cases of the disease were recorded countrywide. The incidence of diarrhea is higher in rural areas, where the practice open defecation is rampant during the wet season caused by the collapse of latrines due to excessive rains (personal communication, January 14, 2020; Tshuma, 2018).

Cattle, which are essential for rural livelihoods, are vulnerable to lumpy skin and theileriosis diseases during the wet season. For instance, in February 2013, at 1 112 lumpy skin disease cases were recorded in just a week in Mashonaland West province (The Herald, 2013b). In 2018, 50,000 cattle were lost to theileriosis, which is known locally known as 'January disease' and affects both commercial and subsistence farmers (Munjenjema, 2019). Thus, these seasonal livestock diseases threaten rural livelihoods.

The rainy season in Zimbabwe is associated with a lack of money and increasing debt. For the most part, the rural and urban poor depend on outdoor livelihood activities, such as vending, hand quarrying, brick molding and *maricho* (piece work) (personal communication, February 7, 2020). These livelihood activities rarely generate sufficient income and are affected by the rain. This compels the poor to borrow money at high-interest rates to meet household expenses, such as food, rent, utilities, and school fees. In some parts of Chipinge Rural District, the poor experience acute shortage of money between December and February, it is common for them to fall into debt (personal communication, February 7, 2020).

The wet season in Zimbabwe tends to disempower the poor: their bargaining power to negotiate for fair prices for goods and services is weakened as they become more desperate for food, health services and other essentials (personal communication, February 7, 2020). Moreover, during the wet season, they are usually not in a position to bargain for fair wages due to urgent need of money and a labour surplus. Non-poor people take advantage of this situation and exploit the poor.

Uncomfortable housing is another reality associated with the wet season in Zimbabwe (personal communication, December 29, 2019). In rural areas, houses of the poor are usually built of mud or farm bricks, with grass-thatched rooves. In urban areas, rooves for some poor families are either poorly corrugated or crudely 'thatched' with plastic. Hence, leaking and collapsing rooves as well as dampness in houses are common.

The rainy season is also a challenging time for public transport users in Zimbabwe. Public transport or *kombi* operators tend to charge exorbitant fares from town to residential areas when it rains. One operator was quoted as saying: *"We want to maximize on these rains so that we cash on time. Also, our trips would be few due to rains as traffic of people travelling will be low"* (Chirisa, 2019). For instance, in November 2019, fares from the Harare Central Business District to Chitungwiza and Ruwa increased from 10 to 15 ZWD, while to Glenview, Kuwadzana and Hatcliff, the fare increased from 5 to 8 ZWD (Chirisa, 2019). These fare hikes shift the burden of the wet seasons onto the poor, who are already experiencing other wet season realities such as a shortage of money and food.

Social networks, which are a form of social capital and essential for livelihoods (Tenzin et al., 2015; Yanlong Zhanga et al., 2017), are also generally weak during the rainy season in Zimbabwe (personal communication, December 29; 2020). Family visits strengthens social networks. However, families rarely visit each other during the rainy season due to high transport costs, a lack of money and food, and unpleasant home environments (personal communication, December 29; 2020). Rural people are most

affected: their urban relatives usually wait until the end of the rainy season to visit them.

Snakebites are also a common wet-season reality in the country (Mupangi, 2014). Four species of venomous snakes: colubrids (boomslang), vipers (puff adder), elapids (mambas and cobras) and atractaspids (bibron stilleto snakes) are active between November and April, and is when snakebites are at the peak (Muguti et al., 1994; Nhachi & Kasilo, 1994; Tagwireyi & Ball, 2011). As there is a shortage of anti-venom in Zimbabwe; bites from poisonous snakes have the potential to lead to instant death (Moyo, 2018; Mupangi, 2014). At the beginning of 2018, around 320 snake bites were recorded in the country (Moyo, 2018). In rural areas, women are more vulnerable to snakebites as they work in fields and fetch water and firewood; however, in urban areas, men are more prone to snakebites as they engage more in outdoor livelihood activities (Tagwireyi and Ball, 2011).

Winter in Zimbabwe, which runs from May to July, is also a difficult time for the poor (personal communication, February 7, 2020). When the weather is cold, prices for blankets and winter wear extend beyond the reach of poor and some go without warmth and experience health problems, such as colds and flu.

Back-to-school stresses, non-climatic realities, are also common in Zimbabwe and are brought about by the schooling calendar (personal communication, February 7, 2020). Primary and secondary schools have three terms in a year. The first term runs from early January to March, the second from May to early August and third from September to early December. The beginning of the first term is the most stressful for families. Learners starting

new grades or levels need new uniforms and stationery in addition to school fees and, for some, bus fares. Poor families struggle to raise money for these expenses (personal communication, February 7, 2020). Prices for school materials and uniforms usually go up during the back-to-school season due to increased demand, causing many families, come out of Christmas and New Year celebrations broke, greater stress. This pushes some families into debt as they borrow money, usually from illegal money lenders (loan sharks), to meet schooling expenses (Zijena, 2015).

Festival stresses are another non-climatic seasonal realities experienced in Zimbabwe. The most common ones are those associated with Christmas and New Year celebrations, which are of both religious and social significance (personal communication, February 7, 2020). Sufficient money is required for special meals, clothes and gifts as well as groceries and transport for visiting parents and extended family members in rural areas. Poor families struggle to raise this money and often resort to borrowing or mortgaging household assets to meet festival expenses (personal communication, February 7, 2020).

Seasonal economic stresses, such as price hikes and limited employment opportunities are also common in Zimbabwe and they are usually caused by seasonal agricultural production and festival cycles (personal communication, January 14, 2020). For instance, tobacco is a major source of foreign currency in Zimbabwe. During the post-tobacco-selling season, from late August to March, prices of basic goods and services usually rise as foreign currency—required for the importation of fuel, raw materials, medicines and other essentials—becomes scarcer (Sibanda, 2018). Job opportunities are also limited during the period and some workers get laid

off. Festivals, such as Christmas and New Year, fuel demand for groceries and clothing: this results in price hikes (personal communication, January 14, 2020).

Many climatic and non-climatic dimensions of seasonal poverty, previously outlined, occur at the same time and reinforce each other. For instance, seasonal hunger, human and cattle diseases, a shortage of money, weak social capital, back-to-school stresses and festival stresses all occur in the wet season, peaking in January. In Zimbabwe, January is the most stressful month of the year as people experience multiple seasonal realities, infamously referred to as 'January diseases'.

### ***The characteristics of seasonal poverty in Cambodia***

The nature of seasonal poverty in Cambodia also takes both climatic and non-climatic forms (Table 2). Seasonal hunger, in Cambodia, usually begins in August and extends to November (World Food Programme, 2010) and rural communities are the most affected. About two-thirds of the country's 1.6 million rural households experience seasonal hunger each year (Culas & Tek, 2016). This fuels food-price hikes as many households rely on the market for food (World Food Programme, 2010). To cope with seasonal hunger and the associated food price hikes, households increase their exploitation of common property; reduce the number of meals they eat each day and mothers and elder sisters eat less than others; borrow food and money; rely on help from outsiders; and increase migration for work, among other strategies (Cambodia Development Resource Institute, 2008; Tango International, 2019).

**Table 2.** Characteristics of seasonal poverty in Cambodia

<b>Climatic realities</b>	<b>Non-climatic realities</b>
Seasonal hunger	Back-to-school stresses
Low income from fishing	Festival stresses
Human diseases	
Snakebites	

Low income from fishing is also a wet-season reality faced by Cambodian communities, especially those in rural areas whose livelihoods are ‘fishing-dependent’ (Marschke & Berkes, 2006; Sok, 2013; Sok et al., 2014). Fish production, growth and migration are affected considerably by temperature and rainfall; thus, fish catches are lower during the rainy season and peak during the dry season (Joffre et al., 2010). The rainy season is a difficult period for communal fishers as fishing is disturbed by increased rains and storms (Marschke & Berkes, 2006).

Cambodia also experiences a higher incidence of some human diseases, such as malaria, dengue, diarrhea or dysentery, cholera, influenza, fever, and leptospirosis during the rainy season (Sotheary, 2019; Xinhua, 2018). Many rural Cambodians are also vulnerable to faecal infections as the practice of open defecation is rampant: Some people abandon their pit latrines during the rainy period due to odour problems, unhygienic conditions, flooding and collapse (Chambers, 2012; Kunthy & Catalla, 2009; Robinson, 2012).

Floods in Cambodia are seasonal, they are caused by monsoonal rains and the Mekong River flood pulse (Mekong River Commission, 2015; Saulnier et al., 2018). The flood season typically runs from July to October (World Food

Programme, 2010). In rural areas, floods constrain the access of clean drinking water for the poor, destroy properties, diminish fishing opportunities, and results in a peak of diarrhea and other water-borne diseases (Jensen, n.d.). Moreover, floods affect school children from poor families more acutely as they struggle to access schools causing a high dropout rate and it can be common for classes to start late in the term (Asian Disaster Preparedness Center, 2008).

Snakebites in Cambodia, are also most common during the rainy season, especially in areas along the Mekong River and Tonle Sap floodplains (Bual, 2018; Cox, 2015). The country has at least 17 known species of venomous snakes, such as Malayan pit viper, cobra and krait (Cox, 2015). According to Bual (2018), *“snake bites hit the poorest of the poor: farmers who work barefoot in fields and people living in the most remote areas who have minimal access to health education and medical care.”*

Back-to-school stresses are a common non-climatic seasonal reality in Cambodia. They emanate from the school calendar. The first school-term, which runs from October to April, is the most challenging for poor families in the country, who experience financial stress resulting from the need to pay for new uniforms, books and other schooling materials as well as transport (Officer, Ministry of Tourism, personal communication, March 18, 2020; Student, Royal University of Phnom Penh, personal communication, March 26, 2020).

Festival stresses are another seasonal reality experienced by the poor in Cambodia (Officer, Ministry of Tourism, personal communication, May 9, 2020). It is worth noting that Khmer New Year (Cambodian New Year)

celebrations held around 14<sup>th</sup> April every year, have high cultural and religious significance (Officer, Ministry of Tourism, personal communication, May 9, 2020). The celebrations involve visiting relatives, hosting visitors, sharing special meals, exchanging gifts and giving to less privileged people. (Officer, Ministry of Tourism, personal communication, May 9, 2020). The poor rarely participate in many of the celebratory activities due to financial problems (Officer, Ministry of Tourism, personal communication, May 9, 2020).

Many of the seasonal realities explained above occur in the same season and interlink and reinforce each other. For instance, in the rainy season, seasonal hunger makes people less immune to seasonal diseases and at the same time families, especially, those who depend on fishing as a livelihood do not have income to buy food or seek medical help. At the same time, families struggle with raising money for back to school stresses and coping with floods.

### ***Nature of seasonal poverty between Zimbabwe and Cambodia***

As highlighted in the introduction, the nature of seasonal poverty is claimed to be context-specific. This study tests this claim by comparing the nature of seasonal poverty in Zimbabwe and Cambodia. The preceding sections have revealed information about seasonal poverty in each country. This section compares these results (Table 3).

In Cambodia, the study mainly accessed secondary data, which is hard to come by for the winter season and non-climatic seasonal realities. In the future, empirical studies will be needed for these aspects. Nevertheless, from the comparative analysis of seasonal poverty between Zimbabwe and Cambodia in Table 3; three observations were noted. First, Zimbabwe and Cambodia experience both climatic and non-climatic forms of seasonal

poverty. The nature of both forms of poverty is mostly the same in each country. For example, both countries experience seasonal hunger, a shortage of money during the rainy season, seasonal human diseases, snake bites and significant back-to-school stresses. There are, however, seasonal realities that are peculiar to Cambodia, such as realities induced by seasonal floods.

Second, seasonal poverty in Zimbabwe and Cambodia is complex: the realities interlock and reinforce each other. For instance, in both countries, seasonal hunger weakens the immune system of the poor making them more vulnerable to seasonal human diseases. Additionally, seasonal hunger fuels food price hikes, which occur at a time when the poor generally lack income basic needs. This causes difficulties in meeting back-to-school expenses.

Third, seasonal poverty is more pronounced in the wet season in both countries. Many of the seasonal realities highlighted in this study are more intense during the rainy season. Interestingly, climatic seasonal poverty realities, such as seasonal hunger, seasonal human diseases, and snake bites coincide with non-climatic seasonal poverty realities like back-to-school stresses. As an illustration, seasonal poverty in Zimbabwe and Cambodia occurs in both cases during the wet season. Based on these observations, this study concludes that the nature of seasonal poverty in Zimbabwe and Cambodia is similar to a large extent. As outlined in the introduction, the contextual disparities between Zimbabwe and Cambodia are remarkable. Thus, the claim that the nature of seasonal poverty varies according to context is considered inaccurate.

**Table 3.** Comparison of seasonal poverty between Zimbabwe and Cambodia

<b>Zimbabwe</b>	<b>Cambodia</b>
<b><i>Climatic Seasonal Poverty</i></b>	
<i>Wet season (October - April) realities</i>	<i>Wet season (May - October) realities</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Seasonal hunger</li> <li>- Seasonal human diseases</li> <li>- Snake bites</li> <li>- Shortage of income &amp; indebtedness</li> <li>- Uncomfortable houses</li> <li>- Transport challenges</li> <li>- Weak social capital</li> <li>- Cattle diseases</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Seasonal hunger</li> <li>- Seasonal human diseases</li> <li>- Snake bites</li> <li>- Low income from fishing</li> <li>- Flood-induced realities</li> </ul>
<i>Winter season (May -September) realities</i>	<i>Winter season (November to February/March/April realities</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Winter health problems (colds and flu)</li> <li>- Price hikes for blankets and winter wear</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- No data</li> </ul>
<b><i>Non-climatic Seasonal Poverty</i></b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Back-to-school stresses (<i>January</i>)</li> <li>- Festival stresses (<i>December and January</i>)</li> <li>- Seasonal economic stresses (<i>August/September to March</i>)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Back-to-school stresses (<i>beginning of the first term, around October</i>)</li> <li>- Festival stresses</li> </ul>

### ***Policy recommendations***

The alleviation of seasonal poverty starts at the policy level, where it may be integrated into the design of poverty eradication efforts (Devereux, 2012; Longhurst et al., 1986). For Zimbabwe, Cambodia and other developing countries to reduce seasonal poverty, it must be considered from the conception to the termination of both policies and programs. Seasonal

realities are evitable; hence, the focus should be on minimizing the effects of seasonal poverty on livelihoods through the implementation of social protection programs, such as cash and asset transfers and food aid programs. Social protection programs prevent the sale of household assets or the borrowing of money to cope with seasonal stresses. Moreover, the programs that strengthen the negotiating power of the poor should be considered as they help address poverty traps. The policies or programs should be local, flexible and timely in approach if they are to effectively reduce the effects of seasonal poverty (Conroy & Vignon, 2012; Longhurst et al., 1986). This implies that the design of social protection programs should be decentralised and implemented at the onset of seasonal realities.

Poverty reduction policies or programs should also focus on enhancing the resilience of the poor to the effects of seasonal realities and not weaken existing coping mechanisms (Conroy & Vignon, 2012; Longhurst et al., 1986). The policies or programs should be designed and implemented in a way that the livelihood opportunities that poor people use to cope with and recover from the adverse impacts seasonality are strengthened. This will enhance the resilience of the poor to the effect of seasonal realities.

## **Conclusion**

This study examines the nature of seasonal poverty in Zimbabwe and Cambodia and analyzes whether seasonal poverty varies between each country. The intention was to test the claim that the nature of seasonal poverty varies according to context. It found that the nature of seasonal poverty in Zimbabwe and Cambodia is, by and large, similar. Both countries experience climatic and non-climatic forms of seasonal poverty, which include

seasonal hunger, human diseases, insufficient income, snake bites and onerous back-to-school expenses. However, there are seasonal realities that are unique to Cambodia, such as flood-induced realities. The complexity of seasonal poverty in both countries is also similar. The seasonal realities noted in Zimbabwe and Cambodia interlink and reinforce each other in the same way. In both countries, climatic and non-climatic seasonal realities are more noticeable during the wet season. Thus, this study concludes that the claim that seasonal poverty is context-specific is not factual.

Regarding the reduction of seasonal poverty in Zimbabwe, Cambodia and other developing countries, this study recommends that the seasonal dimension of poverty should be factored into the design and implementation of poverty eradication policies. As seasonal poverty is inevitable, these policies should focus on two aspects. Firstly, they should strive to minimize the effects of seasonal poverty on livelihoods and the dignity of poor people. This may be achieved through the implementation of social protection programs that enable the poor to avoid desperate coping measures to manage seasonal stresses. These programs should be designed at a local level and implemented before the onset of seasonal realities. Secondly, policies should aim to enhance the resilience of the poor in response to the effects of seasonal realities. This may be achieved through poverty reduction programs that bolster livelihoods that the poor adapt to cope with the adverse effects of seasonality.

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### **Brief Biography**

Blessing Gweshengwe is a multi-skilled development planner. He holds a PhD in Geography from the Universiti Brunei Darussalam; an MA in Poverty and Development from the Institute of Development Studies at the University of Sussex; and BSc in Rural and Urban Planning from the University of Zimbabwe. He is a lecturer at the Department of Rural and Urban Development at Great Zimbabwe University. His research interests include poverty, quality of life, sustainable livelihoods and urban planning.

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