

## Zimbabwe: Wild fruits instead of food aid

During the nearly three months that nongovernmental organisations (NGOs) in Zimbabwe were banned from operating by President Robert Mugabe's government, people desperate for food foraged for wild fruits to survive, in some cases with tragic consequences.

NHARIRA, 3 September 2008 (IRIN) - Janet Chagwiza, 70, who lives in Nharira village, about 40km south of the Mashonaland East town of Chivu, told IRIN that two of her grandchildren were thought to have died from eating too much of a wild fruit that grows abundantly during the dry season.

"This fruit has become our staple food. We don't have mealie-meal [maize-meal] and our vegetable garden have been overwhelmed by the daily demand, leaving whole villages in this area to depend on wild fruits," Chagwiza told IRIN shortly after burying her grandchildren in a single pit "because people here no longer have the energy to dig graves."

The fruit's pulp is separated from the hard seed by pounding it in pestles, but if eaten in excess it can cause extreme constipation, a nurse told IRIN at a nearby referral hospital where the two children were taken.

A nationwide strike by government doctors began a few weeks ago, which meant that the two children were unable to receive medical attention at the hospital.

Zimbabwe's hunger rates will peak early next year at about 5.1 million people in an estimated population of 12 million, according to the UN, but the ban put aid agencies on the back foot because they rely on NGOs to distribute food aid.

In the absence of food aid, villagers have been competing for the wild fruits with baboons and monkeys, sparking conflict between people and animals, and also between people.

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