



## APRA COUNTRY BROCHURE: TOBACCO AND MAIZE COMMERCIALISATION IN ZIMBABWE

The Agricultural Policy Research in Africa (APRA) programme of the Future Agricultures Consortium (FAC) is a six-year research initiative (2016-2022) that is working to identify the most effective and inclusive pathways to agricultural commercialisation that empower women, reduce rural poverty, and improve food and nutrition security in sub-Saharan Africa.

### What is agricultural commercialisation?

We define commercialisation as a process occurring when farmers increasingly engage with the market, either to procure inputs and resources (such as fertiliser, seeds, hired labour, formal credit, and rented land), or to process and sell their produce. Commercialisation may occur through either external investment or market specialisation and farm consolidation, or a combination of the two. Commercialisation is successful if more people are 'stepping up', 'stepping out', and 'stepping in', and fewer people are 'hanging in' or 'dropping out' of productive agriculture.

### What will APRA do?

APRA researchers are examining how African farmers engage with four different types of commercial agriculture (estate/plantation, medium-scale commercial agriculture, contract farming, and smallholder commercialisation) and the effects this has on the livelihoods of rural people, particularly women and young people. The aim is to help inform future policy and investment decisions to promote inclusive forms of agricultural commercialisation in sub-Saharan Africa targeting six focal countries across East, West, and Southern Africa (Ethiopia, Ghana, Malawi, Nigeria, Tanzania, and Zimbabwe).

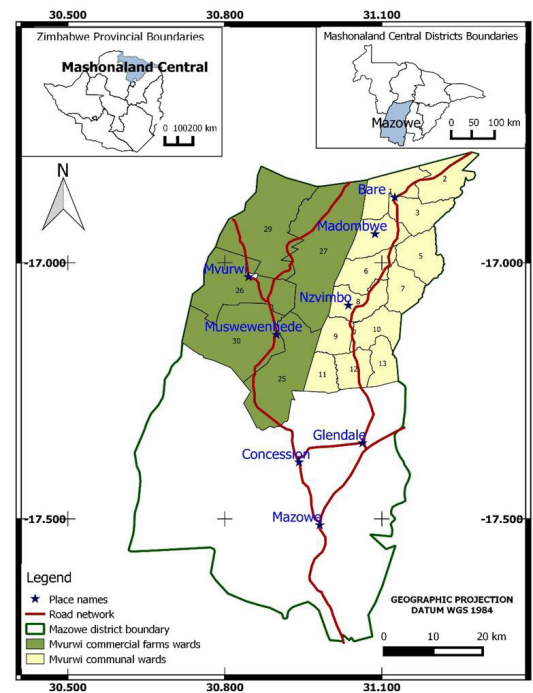
### APRA in Zimbabwe

APRA is working in Zimbabwe to explore the dynamics of the changing agrarian system and its impacts on livelihoods and economy over time by conducting medium- to long-term longitudinal studies. In Zimbabwe, APRA research involves:

1. **Analysing the effects of different forms of agricultural commercialisation** on poverty, food and nutrition security, and women's empowerment.
2. **Exploring how different pathways of agricultural commercialisation have evolved** to assess the dynamics of agrarian change, and how these have influenced the livelihood opportunities and outcomes for rural men and women.

### Research objective

To analyse the effects of different forms of agricultural commercialisation on poverty, food and nutrition security, and women's empowerment over time in the Mvurwi farming area in Zimbabwe.



### Study questions

- Does crop selection and the marketing of crops change over time due to external factors, such as price changes, government incentives, and the availability of contracting deals?
- Does the abandonment of tobacco cultivation result in declines in income, food security, and employment?
- What effect does a greater reliance on contracting by rural farmers have on income security and employment? How does contracting empower or disempower women and youths?



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- How has climate change figured across agro-ecological regions in Zimbabwe? How has this affected crop choices and income earnings for farmers across farming scales?
- How have labour regimes shifted after the land reform and to what end? What new patterns are emerging?
- How has the land reform and agricultural commercialisation impacted farm sizes, tenure, production, and accumulation over time?
- How has commercialisation impacted poverty, empowerment, employment, and food security for households and household members?
- Are there gender or social discrepancies in the impact of commercialisation on poverty, food security, and livelihood trajectories across farming scales?

## Research findings

The findings show that agricultural commercialisation is complex, takes multiple pathways (either singularly or in combination), and, due to many factors, can propel household livelihood trajectories forward or backwards, shaping class formation and social differentiation. Embracing non-linearity, uncertainty, and contingency can go some way to explaining the dynamics of change; accepting this as central to, and not a diversion from, a predicted pattern. What arises from our study is the multiplicity of forms and styles of commercial agriculture in Zimbabwe, and how these emerge or disappear largely in relation to social dynamics and political-economic-environmental shifts. There is no sole 'ideal type' or singular trajectory; instead, conditions – some are controllable through policy, although many are not – affect what form of commercialisation emerges.

## Key takeaways

### 1. Differentiated land, credit, and markets access:

- Land reform reconfigured land sizes, tenure, and improved access among smallholders in ways that changed accumulation trajectories for farming families.
- State support and politics moderate access to land and credit, and, in turn, prospects for social mobility and the escape from poverty among farmers.
- Agricultural commercialisation is primarily being driven by contract farming and command agriculture support from the private sector and the state respectively. In turn, these shape the marketing structure for cash and food crops respectively.
- The input and output markets changed following the land reform and imposition of sanctions on Zimbabwe: new markets are dominated by small players and former white commercial farmers.

- A sustained unstable macro-economic condition continues to impact farm viability. For example, the unpredictability of the foreign exchange system now places a premium on businesses and reduces commodity prices and business viability.

### 2. Changing social and labour dynamics:

- The participation of women in contract farming is an approach taken to increase the area allocated to the husband. Contracting companies offer inputs at an average of 1ha per household; and, to increase this amount, tobacco farming households enlist women on a separate contract. However, the revenue from her portion of cropped land remains controlled by the man, who makes the overall decisions.
- The land reform process has created new forms of access to land for former farm labourers who previously worked for commercial farmers. Today, due to increased access to land, farmworkers compete in commodity production and marketing; and, as a result, labour time is shared between own farm production and wage work on smallholder and medium-scale farms.

### 3. Household trajectories: food security and poverty alleviation

- A complex set of variables influence household trajectories across farming scales in Mvurwi. Those who have political connections and can 'step-up' by accessing farming inputs under 'command agriculture' (state mediated contract farming for food crops), along with smallholders who access contract farming support, join medium-scale farmers who increase agricultural commercialisation and often accumulate from below. In addition to accessing farming inputs, medium-scale farmers can also secure access to agricultural productive assets through political connections and contract farming.



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- Smallholders relying on the re-investment of their income – derived from the sale of agricultural commodities – are increasing their capacity to produce and accumulate cattle and urban properties. They are ‘stepping in’ but can also ‘step-out’ into non-farm activities by investing farming income.
- Through vernacular land access, diaspora and urbanites are either securing their land through purchases or renting land to produce on a commercial basis. For the urbanites, the reduction in opportunities in urban centres has intensified urban-rural migration and increased involvement in farming, increasing the scope for ‘stepping-in’ by many households. Some former farmworkers are also accessing land in similar ways and producing on a commercial basis.
- Those who have no access to state assistance and credit continue to ‘hang in’ and rely more on the selling of their labour and renting of portions of land in return for farm input support. Among this group, poverty and food insecurity are most precarious. There is no evidence of complete ‘dropping out’ in our study.
- Political connections and privately-mediated financing options, such as command agriculture and contract farming, combine to generate accumulation and class formation trajectories that differ from those established in other settings.
- The increasing prevalence of contract farming among smallholders on communally-owned land, along with those with access based on state permits, challenges the myth that tenure is a major variable for agricultural revival in Zimbabwe.

### Policy messages

- The democratisation of land ownership has reconfigured agricultural commercialisation and accumulation in Zimbabwe, but this change is not enough to spur upward mobility for all farming households. Access to finance and markets remains critical in ensuring improved productivity among farmers.
- Farm labour is changing: access to land means an increased ability to compete in the production and marketing of farm produce and a reduced appetite for wage labour. Only those ‘hanging in’ remain available for employment.
- Aside from the adverse incorporation of farmers in contract farming arrangements, the invasion of corporate finance into rural spaces defies the private property logic. There is scope to revisit and clarify policy in this regard.

### Conclusion

- The livelihood trajectories for Zimbabwean farmers is a crystallisation of the complex interaction of social, political, and economic factors that have a bearing on agricultural production and accumulation.

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### For more information:

**<https://www.future-agricultures.org/apra/>**

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The APRA Directorate is based at the Institute of Development Studies (IDS), UK ([www.ids.ac.uk](http://www.ids.ac.uk)), with regional hubs at the Centre for African Bio-Entrepreneurship (CABE), Kenya, the Institute for Poverty, Land and Agrarian Studies (PLAAS), South Africa, and the University of Ghana, Legon. It builds on more than a decade of research and policy engagement work by the Future Agricultures Consortium ([www.future-agricultures.org](http://www.future-agricultures.org)) and involves more than 100 researchers and communications professionals in Africa, UK, Sweden and USA.

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