

# **In Search of a Great Leap Forward: Comparing State- and Private-led Contract Farming by Zimbabwe's Differentiated Resettled Small-Scale Farmers**

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## *Abstract*

One of the conceptual dilemmas faced by many agrarian political economists is that of the significance of contract farming in rural development. This study analyses contract farming production by small-scale (A1) farmers who benefitted from Zimbabwe's Fast Track Land Reform Programme (FTLRP). The study examines two contract farming strategic crops: maize as state-led, supported through Command Agriculture; and tobacco, as private-led - through private arrangements. It investigates contract farming power and social relations and their impact on production and accumulation patterns by socially differentiated households and vice-versa. Assessment is done even against non-contracted households to understand the fuller impact. The study contributes towards ongoing discussion of contract farming in general, based on the agrarian political economy theory focusing on the current wider Zimbabwean context. It builds on the trimodal agrarian approach which argues that the contentious land reform reconfigured land, creating space for more producers – from dual to trimodal arrangements. Therefore the study focuses on contract farming as a channel considered utmost popular for incorporating small-scale farmers into production chains, providing opportunities for the rise of petty commodity production and a vibrant form of accumulation from below. The study raises questions on how class-based production and accumulation patterns by rich, middle and poor farmers influence agrarian change and rural development. Recent academic studies on contract farming have mostly focused on production without engaging social and production relations which influence output. The study adds new insight to these earlier findings bringing in a class analytic perspective of FTLRP and continues with the question of what systemic transformation is required today to promote an appropriate 'peasant path' of rural reconstruction, for the foreseeable future, in synergy with sovereign industrialization. Class analysis is significant in highlighting power and social relations existent within groups in a capitalist development process. The study draws on survey and qualitative research in Goromonzi District, Mashonaland East Province conducted between 2019 and 2022. Study findings revealed that contracted farmers achieve higher agricultural output compared to non-contracted farmers. Richer farmers have better accesses to agricultural resources and have higher yields than poorer farmers. State-led and private sector-led contract farming have different interests and outcomes.

**Key words:** contract farming, land reform, fast-track land reform, small-scale farmers, Zimbabwe

## **INTRODUCTION**

One of the conceptual conundrums faced by many agrarian political economists is that of the role of contract farming in rural development. This relates to growth of contract farming in developing countries in the aftermath of decolonization, through agricultural liberalisation processes alongside the globalisation of agriculture (Vicol et al., 2021). Contract farming is an understanding between agricultural producers and processing or marketing companies for production and supply of agricultural produce, normally at stipulated prices, quantities, and quality standards (Vermeulen & Cotula, 2010). Vital questions within agrarian political economy have been forwarded - considering the importance of how historical processes have unravelled and as a perspective for studying contemporary social and production relations in

agricultural production and marketing (Vicol et al., 2021). Dating decades back, contract farming has been one of the channels to incorporate farmers into production chains. Around the 1980s and 1990s, mainstream agricultural economists and new institutional economists studied emergent contract farming arrangements to assess their potential contribution towards agricultural development and welfare of small-scale farmers in developing countries (Binswanger & Rosenzweig, 1986 and Glover, 1987, 1989). The studies were mainly empirical and descriptive and generally optimistic regarding contract farming as an institutional creation that afforded a “win–win” relationship and a private-led solution to known market failures (Vicol et al, 2021; World Bank, 2007; Kirsten & Sartorius, 2002; and Allen, 1972). Some scholars around that time critiqued contract farming’s influence on gender and intrahousehold production social and power relations (Currie & Ray, 1986; von Bülow & Sorensen, 1993) and on the socialization of risk and large-scale land concentration by corporates (Wilson, 1986) and on social differentiation and the possibility of accelerated proletarianization (Buch-Hansen & Marcussen, 1982; Korovkin, 1992).

However, the discussions only progressed towards a more political economy theorised framework when a book edited by Little and Watts (1994) titled *Living Under Contract* analysed contract farming incorporating the political, economic, historical and social contexts of contract farming (Little and Watts, 1994). This book benefitted from contributions of various scholars who covered the topic from diverse Sub-Saharan countries including Kenya, Gambia, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana and Zimbabwe. The book examined emergent changes and reconfigurations in Sub-Saharan agrarian sector in two to three decades prior, in the context of reorganization of a global agro-food system (Little and Watts, 1994). In contrast to dominant economic and new institutional viewpoints at that time that regarded contract farming to have been a voluntary or beneficial transaction for farmers, *Living Under Contract* rejected these notions from a political economy perspective highlighting power asymmetries underlying contract farming at farm household, national and international level in terms of production and marketing (Little and Watts, 1994). Over the years, debates on contract farming have sharpened and expanded to many other countries beyond Sub-Saharan Africa such as India (Vicol, 2019; Narayanan, 2014 and Singh, 2002), Southeast Asia (Thiers, 2019 and White, 1997), China (Zhang, 2012), and to some extent Latin America (Key & Runsten, 1999). In Africa, newer agrarian questions have emerged regarding rural livelihoods in the context of a “world of globalising capitalism” (Bernstein, 2009) or “contemporary capitalism” (Jha & Yeros, 2022) as new agrarian capital begun to infiltrate and as labour processes, production relations, surplus extraction and accumulation reconfigure. Studies have been conducted analysing contract farming and its influence on small-scale agriculture, rural development and agrarian change. These included work by Hall, Scoones, and Tsikata (2017); Smalley et al. (2014); Smalley (2013); Oya (2012); Vermeulen & Cotula (2010); Shivji (2009) and Fold (2008). In recent years, developing countries have progressively posed contract farming as main tenets of agrarian change policy (Vicol et al., 2021 and 2018; Mazwi, 2020) in response to an increased penetration of capital. States, international donors and agricultural corporations have advocated for contract farming as a ‘win-win’ rural development approach for small-scale farmers and agribusinesses (Vicol, 2021). Multilateral organisations such as Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations (FAO) (2018 and 2013) and the World Bank (2007, 2014) have re-positioned contract farming as a tool of

inclusive growth, embedded in a primary ‘markets-plus’ conversation on rural development based on linking entrepreneurial small-scale farmers to markets via agricultural commodity value chains (Vicol et al., 2021).

In Zimbabwe, analysis of contract farming has broadened in terms of conceptualisation and theorisation as it now not only analyses it from a political economy theory but also in the context of land reforms and agrarian change in contemporary capitalism. Scholarly debates on contract farming have been revived in recent years as scholars take a more critical approach in analysing agrarian change in the context of capitalist development. This has seen more contemporary questions being asked in Zimbabwean studies relating to contract farming. There is a growing body of work by Zimbabwean scholars examining contract farming arrangements between contracting companies and small-scale farmers from a wide range of perspectives (Shonhe and Scoones, 2022; Shonhe et al., 2022; Mazwi et al., 2020; Scoones et al., 2017; Mazwi et al., 2020; Mkodzongi and Lawrence, 2019; Chambati et al., 2019; Mazwi, 2019; Sakata, 2017; Mazwi et al., 2019; Moyo, 2017). Since implementation of Fast Track Land Reform Programme (FTLRP) in the early 2000s, domestic and international capital has devised new channels of accumulation due to the consequent international isolation and capital flight that occurred immediately after, in contestation to how land had been redistributed (Mazwi et al., 2022; Shonhe & Scoones, 2021; Scoones et al. 2010 and Moyo and Nyoni 2013).

As the government of Zimbabwe (GoZ) employed different interventionist economic policies in order to alleviate challenges that had been brought about by isolation (Chambati & Mazwi, 2022; Moyo & Yeros, 2007), growth in contract farming as an alternative source of finance for resettled farmers ensued through a combination of private and state-drive financing arrangements (Chambati & Mazwi, 2022; Shonhe & Scoones, 2021; Moyo & Yeros, 2007). This was under the National Economic Revival Programme (NERP) that was launched by the GoZ in 2003, aimed at contract farming and farmer commodity association establishment (Moyo, 2010). This involved introduction of initiatives to increase agricultural production, improve food security and again boost GoZ’s political support among its supporters and rural land reform beneficiaries (Chambati & Mazwi, 2022). The government further made efforts to attract international capital under the ‘Look East’ policy and eased the foreign-exchange regulations to resuscitate the tobacco and cotton sectors through contract farming (Shonhe and Scoones, 2021; Binswanger-Mkhize & Moyo 2012; Moyo, 2012; Moyo and Nyoni 2013). Contract farming arrangements were introduced for a number of strategic crops that contribute towards food security and foreign currency exchange which had negatively been affected by FTLRP. Easing of foreign-exchange controls was implemented partially in 2006 for cotton, tobacco and horticultural crops, and was later expanded to all sectors of the economy in 2009 (Chambati & Mazwi, 2022). Consequently there was a ‘tobacco boom’ as a result of increased tobacco contract farming (Sachikonye, 2016). Meanwhile, cereals, especially maize, were not being supported by private sector contract farming in Zimbabwe due to susceptibility to droughts, inputs unavailability, and a move by farmers towards export-crop production. This led to complications in the food security and political situation of the country resulting in the GoZ introducing maize contract farming. The project was known as the Targeted Command Agriculture Programme (TCAP) {also called Command Agriculture (CAP)} (Chambati & Mazwi, 2022).

For small-scale farmers that benefitted from FTLRP, known as A1 resettlement farmers, whose main source of livelihood and food security is agriculture, they found themselves participating in contract farming as it appeared to be a popular mode of including them into production chains after land reform (Mudimu, Zuo and Nwalwimba, 2020). Their inclusion was for them to benefit through the growth of petty commodity production and accumulation from below (Scoones et al., 2018). However, since implementation of land reform, changes occurring in small-scale

agricultural production patterns suggest diverse forms of agricultural financing and marketing, and diverse priorities by differentiated A1 farmer classes in a transformed agrarian structure (Moyo, 2011). In this study I present a relatively different angle from a

production perspective on contract farming that argues that the impact of small-scale contract farming cannot fully be described without analysing patterns of social differentiation. The study poses questions that have remained pertinent and includes some newer questions as the country experiences agrarian change. What do we know about small-scale farmers who are participating in contract farming? How are they diversified? In what way (form and extent) is contract farming influencing the routes or trajectories of rural transformation? How are its social and power dynamics impacting on farmer differentiation and their patterns of accumulation from below? Understanding small-scale contract farmer intrahousehold and interhousehold dynamics and the social and power relations in contract farming post-FTLRP, is crucial in determining its contribution towards the search for a ‘peasant path’ of rural reconstruction, for the foreseeable future.

This study analyses participation of differentiated groups of A1 farmers in maize and tobacco contract farming arrangements for 2017/18 and 2018/19 agricultural seasons. The farmers are located in Goromonzi district, Mashonaland East Province in Zimbabwe. I use class analytic perspective to investigate the differentiated dynamics of maize and tobacco production and contract farming arrangements. Class analytic perspective highlights the underlying social and power dynamics that confront contract farming by different farmer groups or classes. I uncover varied localised results of A1 contract farming participation in both crops by different farmers strongly elucidated by social differentiation. I draw from concepts within agrarian political economy which follow the Marxist approach and critically engage the current nature of arrangements and their impact. The paper asked newer questions relating to agrarian change, agrarian transition, social differentiation and rural transformation.

## **CONTRACT FARMING AND SOCIAL DIFFERENTIATION POST-FTLRP: A REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

The historical processes of contract farming in the then Rhodesia illustrating how contract farming began as far back as 1944 is detailed elsewhere (Jackson and Cheater, 1994; Chambati & Mazwi, 2022; Shonhe and Scoones, 2022; Sachikonye, 1989) when colonial models of plantation production were used (Vicol et al., 2021) and were highly skewed towards European farmers in terms of access to agricultural loans and state support (Phimister, 1986; Marongwe, 2008; Chambati, 2019 and Zamchiya, 2012). Jackson and Cheater (1994) discussed contract farming in Zimbabwe focusing on sugarcane, tea and cotton production highlighting its commencement with the purchase of Murray MacDougall's company Triangle Limited by the Sugar Industry Board (Shonhe & Scoones, 2022). Tea plantations later followed in 1925 (Sachikonye, 1989), with the first processing estate only being established in 1969 (Shonhe & Scoones, 2022). The estate purchased tea leaves from independent outgrowers, who initially were only European war veterans who had returned from World War II. In the 1980s, cotton contract production was introduced through the Cotton Marketing Board (CMB) parastatal and resulted in a large participation of small-scale producers (Shonhe & Scoones, 2022). This was the time that the newly independent Zimbabwe modified colonial plantation or estate production models to guarantee some autonomy from global capitalism, strengthen its political legitimacy and incorporate peasant agriculture into national revenue-motivated agricultural policies focused on increasing food security for a rising urban population, production diversification, upgrading to non-traditional high value exports, and increasing import volumes of manufactured goods (Jha and Yeros, 2022; Vicol et al., 2021; Watts, 1994). During this period, some farmers had private contract arrangements with large transnational agribusiness companies involved in sugar and tobacco production, whilst others remained in contract with state-owned estates involved in cotton and tea production (Shonhe & Scoones, 2022). Prior to Zimbabwean independence, dominant debates on agriculture including in contract

farming tended to be racialised comparing white ‘commercial’ farmers against a more homogenised ‘subsistence-based’ ‘peasantry or ‘proletariat’ (Nyambara, 1997). Post-



independence, debates were positioned in the context of a government that was re-organising its agriculture from a colonial structure in order to incorporate the land poor and landless peasants (Jha and Yeros, 2022; Vicol et al., 2021). The debates later progressed in the 1990s period which was dominated by policy discussions inclined towards economic structural adjustment programme (ESAP) implemented in 1991, and agricultural liberalisation towards a framing of agricultural liberalisation and increased globalised commodity trading as there was increased “rolling back” of the state in terms of financing and marketing (Shonhe & Scoones, 2022; Vicol et al., 2021). Structural adjustment programmes privatised the state sector, and private contract farming was at that time considered to be more efficient than the uneconomical state marketing boards (Amanor, 2022). The 1990s saw horticultural crops become significant contracted crops in Zimbabwe which were supplied to local supermarkets, and progressively more for global exportation (Shonhe & Scoones; Binswanger-Mkhize & Moyo, 2012). Therefore contract farming filled the gap left by parastatals and led to the commodification of access to finance, input supplies, extension services and marketing in what was presented as market-based contract arrangements for rural development targeting small-scale farmers (Vicol et al., 2021; Oya, 2012).

Whilst there is a growing body of research in Zimbabwe analysing the nature of dominant contract farming arrangements in recent years, they have failed to adequately capture the social and political dynamics of agricultural production from a strong theoretical perspective. The studies analyse the topic from a generalised viewpoint without delving much into empirical data to get insight on localized dynamics. A study by Scoones et al (2010) asserts that a process of accumulation from below was underway in Mvurwi, located in Mazowe district based on contract-based tobacco farming. The study yielded four classes of farmers: accumulators, aspiring accumulators, peasant producers and diversifiers and strugglers. It reveals that four contracting companies in Mvurwi provided farmers with tobacco inputs, fertilisers, agro-chemicals and coal for curing and, in some instances, cash for hired labour. Participant farmers accumulated significant assets compared to non-contracted farmers. Shonhe and Mtapuri’s (2020) social differentiation analysis’ designed a Quadi-PMMR drawing out four farmer classes in a study in Hwedza district. Their results argue that social differentiation is intensified by international and domestic at household level and at a much broader level, and so promoting accumulation from below in the countryside. Mazwi, Muchetu & Mudimu (2021) adopt agrarian political approach in their analysis of differentiated Goromonzi and Zvimba districts farmers’ tobacco production. They challenge the Quadi- PMMR by Shonhe & Mtapuri (2020) instead referring back to a Tri-Modal Agrarian Structure (TMAS) as forwarded by Moyo and Yeros (2005), Moyo (2011, 2013, 2016), and Chambati (2011, 2017). However Zamchiya (2023) expressed concern over Mazwi et al.’s (2021) conceptualisation of ‘class’ as it was not representative of concrete structures that form over time, but only showed farmer groups with mutual tendencies at a certain time period. Similar to Scoones et al.’s (2010) study, their findings suggest contract farming as a key driver of differentiation. Shonhe, Scoones, Mutyasira and Murimbarimba (2022) provide a class- analytic perspective using empirical data collected from tobacco-producing A1 resettlement farmers from Mvurwi located in Mazowe district of Mashonaland West province. The study presented differences in farmer typologies and reveals how class, gender and age dynamics influence complex patterns of accumulation and social differentiation. Chambati, Chemura, Mudimu and Chambati (2022) analyse the political economy of command agriculture. Nonetheless the above analyses are mainly conducted at a macro analysis and do not address intra-household dynamics associated with contract farming. Whilst the above-mentioned studies took a class-analytic view, they failed to illustrate how the social and political dynamics within and between the farmer groups and even with their contracting companies influence on their production and social differentiation. Whilst scholars have made efforts to analyse socially differentiated process of production under

contract, I note in this paper that more critical analysis from an agrarian political economy is still needed in the context of contemporary issues that farmers not only in Zimbabwe but globally, find themselves grappling with to capture the full dynamics of contract farming. With the restructuring of a



global agrarian system, newer questions that are context specific and global reaching need to be raised.

## STUDY SITE, RESEARCH METHODS AND DATA ANALYSIS

I made an iterative use of Mixed Methods Research (MMR) approach informed by Critical Realism (Eastwood et al., 2014; Stutchbury, 2022) to examine contract farming and social differentiation. Following the mixed methods research approach, I collected data for investigation from 58 A1 resettlement farmers based in Ward 22 of Goromonzi District located in Mashonaland East province, one of the ten provinces of Zimbabwe. Zimbabwe is distributed into five agro-ecological regions mainly based on rainfall characteristics, average temperatures and land-use patterns. Mashonaland East province is located in natural region II and is characterised by rich fertile soils conducive for agricultural production. Goromonzi district is located 50km east of the capital city Harare which makes it convenient for transportation and marketing of agricultural produce. Goromonzi district was purposively selected for its suitability in agricultural production and its level of production intensity.

The survey was conducted between 2019 and 2022 in two phases. The first phase involved collection of both quantitative and qualitative data. The study combined purposive, stratified and random sampling techniques. After purposively selecting Goromonzi district, the population was divided into segments (strata) so that I could narrow down on A1 areas only. Household respondents for the survey were randomly selected. Data collection was carried out through an interviewer-administered tablet-based mobile questionnaire that was designed by Kobo Toolbox5. The pre-testing exercise to check its validity was conducted among selected farm households in the district. Phase 1 of data collection allowed more quantitative learning about maize and tobacco contract farming patterns and socio-economic dynamics of the A1 contracted farmers. Data collected during this phase assisted with the understanding of social and economic contexts of the A1 resettlement study area in relation to contract farming and included data such as land ownership and land use patterns, household size and composition, labour dynamics. This is because different households possess differentiated distribution of class positions of capital and labour within the household associated with gender and labour dynamics, age, household size and composition and/or other influencing dynamics (Cousins, 2022; Bernstein, 2010; Cousins, 2010).

The second phase involved collection of qualitative data to further elaborate on the qualitative results from the data that I had collected in 2019 (Creswell, 2006). This enabled clarification of the farmer categories that had been generated from Phase 1 survey results and explained the dynamics surrounding the different farmer social groups or classes. The second phase of data collection involved Focus Group Discussions (FGDs), in-depth interviews (2) and a series of key informant interviews (KIIs) with 13 key interviewees. An MMR approach provided a complete answer to the research problem being studied than either solely quantitative or qualitative (Creswell, 2008). Hence the study benefitted from the strong points of both methods. The iterative process employed in the study followed Marx's dialectical idea of investigating reality and appearance. Therefore it involved a series of re-assessment between theorisation, data collection and data analysis with an aim of understanding underlying social and production relations that could explain certain small-scale contract farming phenomena (Fine and Saad-Filho, 2010).

As the study made use of a Mixed Methods Research approach for data collection, it similarly followed data analysis approaches that were suitable for both quantitative and qualitative data. After data collection through the mobile questionnaires, I downloaded data from Kobo into a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet and converted to Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS)

application. Using the Two-Step Cluster Analysis in SPSS, I statistically clustered farmer households into four relatively homogenous groups based on specific underlying variables. For the quantitative data analysis, I used multivariate analysis, a statistical approach used in SPSS to comprehend the association between different variables from my dataset which had

many variables. I carried out the process by starting off with factor analysis (reducing the variables) to get the main variables important for analysis. It was followed by cluster analysis which was the categorisation of the interviewed small-scale farmers into the four groups which are: poor (10.3 percent), worker peasants (20.7 percent), medium-rich (50 percent) and rich farmers (19 percent). The process was finalized by descriptive analysis of socio-economic data, production information and dynamics relating to maize and tobacco contract farming using descriptive statistics. I employed cross tabulations to compare the farmer groups, assessed significance of relationships using Pearson Chi-square tests and associations between variables. On the other hand, I analysed qualitative data following the Thematic Analysis approach. Thematic Analysis is used for identification, analysis, organisation, description, and reporting of research themes revealed from a data set (Nowell et al, 2017). It involved familiarizing myself with collected data, followed by creation of a coding framework which comprised of the central themes from my research questions (Nowell et al, 2017). The process was done for all interviews (FGDs, KIIS and IDIs) to create a list of mutual issues, and to identify repeated cohesions and contradictions. The main identified themes and sub-themes then represented the analytical categories for reporting results for this paper.

## **SOCIALLY DIFFERENTIATED PATTERNS OF AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTION**

### **Maize production**

#### *Overview of maize production and participation in contract farming*

Study results revealed that a total of 60.3 percent A1 farmers were engaged in the government's maize contract farming programme, Command Agriculture Programme (CAP). Of the maize contracted farmers, 11.4% were poor, 11.4% worker peasants, 48.6% medium-rich and 28.6% rich. Within their farmer 'classes', poor contracted farmers occupied a proportion of 66.7% of their category; 33.3% of wage workers were contracted whilst the medium-rich and rich farmers occupied a proportion 58.5% and 90.2% of their respective 'classes'. A low proportion of contracted farmers within the wage worker farmer group demonstrates that their involvement in off-farm wage work negatively influences their ability to participate in crop production. Through an FGD, some farmers cited major challenges associated with programme participation especially for poor farmers. They highlighted the confrontations that poor farmers are faced with in terms of qualifying into CAP as they usually fail to meet the "not friendly" conditions for selection into the programme. In order to qualify, farmers needed to submit as part of their application their production history, bank account and letter from extension officer supporting their application. Farmers from all farmer groups complained of how it was tedious and unaffordable for them in terms of time and resources to follow-up on all processes needed to apply, access inputs and collect output payment. Other farmers alleged that in order to get inputs or output payment on time, one has to have someone from inside the programme to assist them. The major participation of medium-rich and rich farmers in CAP suggests that involvement in the programme by the farmers is class-linked, benefitting farmers in proximity to power. Previous studies (Shonhe et al., 2022; Mazwi et al., 2021, Mazwi et al., 2020; Shonhe and Mtapuri, 2018; Scoones et al., 2018; Matondi, 2012, Chambati (2019); Moyo (2011a); Scoones (2015) have highlighted how state subsidy programmes such as Command Agriculture were dominant among the richer farmers compared to poorer farmers which is in line with this study's findings. Patnaik (1988) notes the importance of initial resource endowments for farmers, and Shonhe and Scoones (2021) emphasize on the importance of pre-existent patterns of differentiation in the participation of

CAP. These still point to the class dynamic nature of the Command Agriculture programme.

### *Land utilisation patterns for maize*

Contracted farmers allocated larger portions of land towards maize production compared to non-contracted farmers as they had better access to resources from CAP. Contracted poor A1 farmers allocated on average 2.5ha compared to 1.5ha by non-contracted poor farmers. Medium-rich farmers who were contracted allocated an average of 2.9ha compared to 1.7ha by their non-contracted counterparts. Contracted worker peasants and rich farmers allocated an average of 2ha and 4.6ha compared to 1.8ha and 6ha of uncontracted worker peasants and rich farmers respectively. Maize production is dominant among small-scale farmers, and differences in allocation of land towards its production suggested some ‘class’ dynamics among A1 farmers from a food security perspective for both contracted and non-contracted farmers. This presents food security connotations among non-contracted households highlighting the ability of contracted farmers to allocate more land for production than non-contracted farmers. However analysis by ‘class’ demonstrates the ability of richer farmers to allocate more land for production than poorer farmer withing both the contracted and uncontracted categories. Farmers had different objectives for maize production, and this affected their land allocation for production thereby intensifying their social differentiation. Although maize was not necessarily profitable, 54.5 % of contracted farmers indicated that they produced maize because it offered more secure income and market through CAP. A proportion of 40.9% indicated that produced maize for household consumption. On the otherhand, almost 100% of non-contracted farmers had produced maize solely for household consumption citing profitability challenges outside of contract farming. Farmers’ land allocation was also differentiated along lines of cattle ownership for use for draught power. About 60 percent of A1 Command Agriculture farmers had used their cattle for draught power and had cleared more land for maize production than farmers with little or no cattle ownership.

In 2017/18, the area allocated towards maize was higher than in 2018/19. When CAP commenced in 2016, farmers were guaranteed 100 percent output payment in United States Dollars (USD) and so it was attractive and profitable at the time. During FGD conducted in 2022, A1 farmers cited several challenges that had ensued in the following agricultural seasons that affected their area allocation. Some grievances were related to insufficient inputs distributed for production and late supply of inputs under the programme. Another concerning issue for farmers was about the deterioration in the value of output payment as the programme progressed. Due to the uncertainties surrounding Zimbabwean currency stability, the government’s Grain Marketing Board (GMB) had adjusted its payment structure from compensating farmers 100 percent in United States Dollars (USD) to compensating farmers 30 percent of the delivered maize payment in USD whilst the other 70 percent would be in Zimbabwean (RTGS) dollars (ZWL). This was challenging for A1 farmers as it was unviable for their operations and left them feeling like they were being shortchanged by CAP. CAP had become unattractive for them with some A1 farmers having doubts about upcoming seasons. This was around the period when the country was experiencing maize grain deficit, due to farmers withholding their produce because of lower producer prices that were paid by the government (Practical Action, 2022). Farmers channeled their grain towards side-marketing to private buyers who paid more for the maize than CAP (Ibid).

### *Maize yields*

Yield variability between different A1 farmer groups were influenced by their differences in participation in CAP, differentiated forms of labour use, access to inputs and household dynamics. Shonhe and Mtapuri (2020) and Mazwi et al., (2020) describe the importance of contract farming in the provision of agricultural inputs and credit for A1 farmers in the context of no alternate financing channels. The study conformed to these findings showing how

contracted farmers had achieved higher maize yields than non-contracted farmer. CAP farmers had higher input use per hectare due to the provision of input credit services by merchant companies. Contract farmers therefore managed to financially invest more into their

maize production compared to non-contracted farmers. A1 contracted farmers produced an average yield of 3.0tonnes/ha compared to 1.7tonnes/ha of non-contract farmers. A1 farmers displayed a general positive relationship between maize yield levels and farmer group suggesting that the higher the social status of the farmer, the higher capacity to produce. For the A1 farmers, land was not much of a key driver of social differentiation as they had all acquired similar land sizes under FTLRP. This revealed that other underlying relations influenced yield productions such as access to capital (inputs, machinery and equipment, household labour and gender dynamics). For example Cousins et al. (1992), argues that differences in cattle ownership result in higher production levels by households owning cattleas they have access to manure harvested from their cattle kraals which they applied when necessary (1.7 percent A1 worker peasants and 6.9 percent A1 medium-rich). A1 contracted worker peasants had a yield of 2.3 tonnes/ha compared to 1.1 tonnes/ha of non-contracted worker peasants. Medium-rich contracted farmers and contracted poor farmers had a yield of 3.3 tonnes/ha and 1.3 tonnes/ha compared to 1.9 tonnes/ha and 1.25 tonnes/ha respectively by non-contracted farmers in the same farmer groups, highlighting internal social differentiation patterns. The CAP contract between the farmer and the state required farmers to produce 5tons/ha of maize, while the state provided inputs such as seed, fertilizers agrochemicals and extension service.

Maize yield variances between contracted and non-contracted farmers displayed a positive outcome of the Command Agriculture programme, congruent to findings by Mazwi et al., (2021); Shonhe (2019) and Scoones et al., (2017), who note that government-supported programmes increase agricultural yields of beneficiaries as compared to non-beneficiaries. In addition to the inputs, contract farmers benefited from the technical advice, tillage services and fuel that they received from the programme which assisted them in achieving higher yields. However, differences in the amount/quantity or quality/intensity of assistance received by farmers, which was dependent on allocated area, also intensified differentiation between farmers which in turn influenced their maize yields. This highlights the positive potential of the programme if proper support and management is provided to beneficiaries (Mazwi et al., 2021). Allegations by some farmers of receiving fewer resources because of their poor class positions cast a light on the neutrality of the programme. Furthermore, allegations of corrupt dealings by some programme officials, the programme benefiting to those in proximity to “people in the inside”, inconsistencies in payment to beneficiaries have resulted in the “economics of the programme achievement” being “seriously questioned” (Scoones, 2021). Therefore, the government needs to do more to manage the discrepancies both from the point of programme planning and of implementation. The study therefore concludes that contract farming is one of the main drivers of social differentiation and agrarian change in Zimbabwe among small-scale farmers.

### **Tobacco production**

From the surveyed A1 farmers sample, a proportion of 15.5% were involved in tobacco production. Study results demonstrated that tobacco production attracted a mix of farmers from the poor (22.2%), worker peasants (22.2%) and medium-rich (44.6%) categories. The rich A1 farmers were not involved in tobacco production. These findings were in contrast to those by Chambati (2019) and Mazwi and Muchetu (2015) who argue that post-FTLRP, contract farming saw massive growth in tobacco farming, which largely featured richer farmers, who had urban connections, were in easy access of private domestic and international agribusiness companies in major urban centres for contracts, and could put up collateral of their urban assets as required (Mazwi & Muchetu 2015; Sakata 2017). Richer farmers from this sample were more involved in CAP than in private tobacco farming. They were more concerned about



problems associated with tobacco production such as health issues linked to harvesting and fire of flue-curing which heavily relied on deforestation because they had to collect firewood for curing. Another concern was that of the labour-intensive nature of tobacco production compared to maize. Poorer households seemed to “self-exploit” (van der Ploeg,

2013 and Shivji, 1992) in tobacco production at a higher level than richer households as they used more family labour, including women and children, highlighting a powerful relation between ‘class’ position and self-exploitation (Ibid). All tobacco farmers were contracted to companies such as Zimbabwe Leaf Tobacco Pvt Ltd (ZLT), Boka Tobacco Floors and the state regulator, Tobacco Industry and Marketing Board (TIMB) with majority farmers being contracted with the latter. The different companies offered farmers different options. Survey data showed that medium-rich farmers received contracts with the highest value of support compared to the poor and wage worker farmers. Medium-rich farmers got contracts valued at an average of USD 1,759, minimum received being USD1,200 and the maximum being USD2,600. Poor and wage worker farmers received contracts worth USD1,200 and USD1,000 respectively.

### *Land utilisation patterns for tobacco*

Variances in contract value reflect social differentiation patterns within tobacco farmers highlighting how medium-rich farmers were able to allocate more land towards production compared to the other farmers. Tobacco producers allocated an average of 1.8ha in total. Medium-rich farmers allocated on average 1 ha (by 11.1%), 2ha (by 22.2%) and 3ha (by 33.3%) while poor farmers (22.2%) and wage worker farmers (11.1%) allocated on average 1ha of land. The low land allocation for tobacco production was hinted on how some peasant farmers were entering the sector as a survivalist strategy to try and make a living from the sector synonymous with what Akram-Lodhi (2019) observed as poorer farmers substituting their crop production patterns to cash crops in order to fulfil debt commitments and consumption demands. This casts light on sustainability and the potential by survivalist tobacco farmers for further accumulation given the widely debated nature of the power struggles associated with tobacco contract farming (Mudimu et al., 2020; Mazwi et al. 2020 and Mkodzongi and Lawrence, 2019). Study findings highlighted that age was one of the key differentiators in tobacco production. Tobacco, as a high labour demand crop, demonstrated to have a high ratio of younger to older farmer participation, with older farmers allocating smaller areas towards production than younger farmers. The poor farmer category consisted of older farmers averaging 68 years (with a minimum age of 63 and maximum of 73 years). The medium-rich farmers who averaged 52.4 years of age, had a minimum and maximum age of 41 and 60 years respectively. Their average area for tobacco was 2.2ha. Worker peasants were younger and were average 47 years old with a minimum age of 45 and maximum of 49 years.

### *Tobacco yields*

Similar to maize, tobacco yield was differentiated among farmer groups. However, the relationship for tobacco yields was non-linear unlike that of maize suggesting that the performance of tobacco production is determined by several factors. Yields analysis showed that worker peasants achieved the highest yields (18.0tonnes/ha) followed by the older poor farmers (12.4tonnes/ha) and medium-rich (9.5tonnes/ha). Yields by poor farmers ranged between a minimum of 0.7 tonnes/ha to 18 tonnes/ha. Poor farmer group of older farmers consisted of farmers who had previously been employed as farm workers and having acquired vast experience for tobacco farming, had competitive advantage over other farmers. They were more acquainted with skills required for tobacco production such as curing and grading the leaves. Worker peasants, on the other hand, had a better advantage than the other groups because their employment and interaction with colleagues assisted accessing information and financing production for their production as echoed by Shonhe and Scoones (2022). They usually have better access to agricultural capital and information than farmers who are not engaged in wage work or engaged in skilled off-farm labour (Cousins et al., 1992).

Even though study findings display higher yields through contract farming compared to non-contracted farmers, surveyed farmers reported of various challenges they experienced as a contract farmers. One big challenge which has also been discussed in other studies by Shonhe

& Scoones (2022); Mudimu et al. (2020); Mazwi et al. (2020) and Mkodzongi and Lawrence (2019) is that of exploitation of farmers as a result of uneven power relations under contract farming. These were reported largely as low out prices (23.1%), while others complained of being paid in local currency, instead of United States dollars, which lowered their profit margins. Mkodzongi and Lawrence (2019) posited that contract farming benefited through extraction of surplus labour through taxing farm labour aided by agricultural extension officers employed by the contracting companies. Extension officers ensure that farmers spend comply with working in their tobacco fields so that they satisfy their contractual obligations. Consequently, production risks are shifted to the farmer who ultimately are left in debt in the event of bad weather patterns and crop failure (Ibid). Shonhe and Mtapuri (2021) illustrate how tobacco production largely benefits global markets and finance more than the local farmers and they usually afford to subcontract smaller local companies.

## **TWO DIFFERENT CONTEXTS: STATE-DRIVEN AND PRIVATE SECTOR CONTRACT FARMING**

The paper illustrated that maize and tobacco contract farming highlight the different positions of the state and private sector as contracting companies. The previous section demonstrated the role of the state and the private sector in both value chains albeit to different degrees. Under Command Agriculture, data displays that the private sector plays a supporting role of supporting farmers with resources and credit to ensure the smooth flowing of the government programme. In the tobacco value chain, the state plays a regulatory role (Shonhe, 2022). From the study, it was revealed that even though farmers are contracted for both maize and tobacco value chains, their institutions and their regulations are different resulting in different relationships between the contractor and the farmers. The contractor's interests and incentives are different in each scenario.

In the case of Command Agriculture, the state's interest is largely political. The government largely focuses on the post-FTLRP needs of the country, the success of which is a different empirical discussion. In the context of isolation and economic challenges facing the country, which have been compounded by an increase in prices of basic commodities, including food and agricultural inputs, and a disruption in global supply chains have negatively affected rural households. The state's chief interest is therefore in supporting A1 farmers who form a large proportion of beneficiaries of FTLRP and so are a political strategic group. Participation of A1 farmers puts the government in good standing politically and proves that land reform has been successful in expanding beyond social reproduction of beneficiaries. Moreover, given the increased participation of small-scale farmers in tobacco production, the state has to avert a mass shift towards tobacco production, which is more profitable to farmers than maize, risking food insecurity (Shonhe, 2022; Chambati & Mazwi, 2022). The state is interested in ensuring that there is no shortage of food supply. Through CAP, the state ensures that there is continued production of maize to ensure sufficient food supply for domestic consumption. Command Agriculture is a programme that can also demonstrate that land beneficiary farms are not idle but active, highlighting how access to land to beneficiaries goes beyond farm residency. Class-analytical perspective helped me to unpack the production dynamics dominant under state-driven contract farming and how they affect different farmer groups. For tobacco production which falls under private contract farming, the interests are different from state-driven arrangements. The interests are mostly capitalist, although in some ways the same could be argued for CAP. Tobacco contract farming is vital to Zimbabwe as the crop is the second-biggest foreign currency earner for the country after gold (The Sunday Mail, 2023). Whilst the state's role is dominant in maize state-driven CAP, its role is not as large in tobacco private contract farming. Using a broad base of producers in tobacco contract farming, the state plays a

balancing act and encourages tobacco production to generate needed foreign currency exchange through exportation and for the generation of tax revenue for repayment of debt (Mutenga, 2017). The private sector depend on the state for provision of finance, infrastructure, services and policies to support the pricing structures and their oligopsonic rights that sponsored outsourced production (Vicol et al., 2021). Shone and Scoones (2021)

assert that these ‘public–private’ partnerships obscure the inherent political transactions that occur, citing as an example of the involvement of RBZ in the issuance of Treasury Bills, to Sakunda Holdings for Command Agriculture.

The paper again demonstrated that although farmers receive assistance as various incentives under contract farming through a “win–win” relationship (World Bank, 2007; Kirsten & Sartorius, 2002 and Glover, 1984) which help alleviate some challenges they faced, offering them prospects for petty commodity production and accumulation from below, the relationships are in fact askew in favour of contracting companies. The above corresponds to sentiments forwarded by some authors regarding contract farming as an approach to extract surplus value from farmers from which they receive low earnings per labour unit (Clapp 1988; Derman et al., 2006; Hall et al., 2015; Davis, 2014; Shivji 1992; Vermeulen and Cotula, 2010 and Singh 2002). Scholars have illuminated the asymmetrical power relations connected to contract farming contending how issues such as debt accumulation, loss of autonomy by contracted farmers, transformation of contract farmers to ‘proletariats’ overshadows the gains as agribusiness companies’ main intention is to profit maximise whilst exploiting the labour given by producers at minimised cost (Hall et al., 2015; Davis, 2014; Shivji 1992; Watts, 1994; and Clapp, 1994). This was observed in the case of Command Agriculture in which the government requires output from the farmer regardless of the fact that they distributed inputs to the farmer late or inadequately or that their output payment value is reducing as the seasons continue or that they receive the payments late. In tobacco, farmers work intensively with a high chance of receiving low output prices. Recently, the government has announced that tobacco farmers would retain 85 percent of proceeds from their tobacco sales in hard currency, up from 75 percent with the rest of the output payment being paid in the local currency at the prevailing interbank market rate (The Sunday Mail, 2023). All these point to the common unequal power dynamics between contracting companies and farmers. There are differences in the contract relationships between the two crops. In CAP, farmers experience higher transaction costs for contract application, production and payment as they have to make many follows before finalization. These costs are cheaper in tobacco contract farming as they are guaranteed payment not long after delivery. There is stiffer competition between farmers in tobacco private contract farming compared to maize contract farming under CAP. The differences have to do with the value of commodity produced and the relationship that the contracting firm has with the commodity.

## CONCLUSION

This paper has shed light on the experiences of farmers in maize and tobacco contract farming that provoke many questions regarding the contribution of contract farming for small-scale farmers. On one hand, they link entrepreneurial small-scale farmers to markets via agricultural commodity value chains, offering them prospects for petty commodity production and accumulation from below. On the other hand, the power relations dominant in contract farming arrangements mainly benefit contract companies because of the loss of autonomy that are experienced by contracted farmers as they have to perform as ‘proletariats’ surpassing the gains they get as they have to self-exploit in order to profit maximise the contracting companies. The aim was to provoke a conversation regarding the question of what systemic transformation is required today in Zimbabwe to promote an appropriate ‘peasant path’ of rural reconstruction, for the foreseeable future, in synergy with sovereign industrialization. The answer is linked to whether the aforementioned benefits outweigh the negatives. Furthermore, it is linked to understanding the sets of interests and regulation mechanisms that are being pursued by the public and private sector around contract farming be they for economic development, political, capitalist or a combination. Due to the macro-economic challenges affecting Zimbabwe, many

farmers find themselves participating in contract farming because they have limited options. The current economic environment obligates them to participate in these contract farming arrangements for survival. For rural reconstruction that influences economic development, the government has massive as regulator and



supporter of contract farming to develop distinct-defined institutional and political frameworks that promotes appropriate ‘peasant path’ of rural reconstruction in synergy with sovereign industrialization. For farmers to benefit from contract farming, the government needs to protect farmers from extraction by contracting companies by creating effective economic business environment. This means that the government also needs to amend the CAP arrangements as a start, for them to be able to leverage on the changes that need to occur especially with private companies that intend on business. Any changes that are made towards a “win-win” scenario, benefitting farmers in turn, have broader implications on not only land use, yields and income but on the forms of configurations of social differentiation and agrarian change that eventually shape agrarian transition in the country. In order to address the aforementioned issues, there is need to examine localised dynamics of social differentiation in small-scale farming areas where contract farming is happening. Investigating the inter- and intra- household dynamics together with the dominant power dynamics in contract farming is critical in defining this path.

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