

AGRICULTURE: THE UNSEEN EMPLOYMENT CREATION TOOL IN MASVINGO DISTRICT, ZIMBABWE

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ABSTRACT

Although agriculture has not always been a front page story in the local media, it has been a key antecedent to employment creation, poverty reduction and sustainable development throughout the history of Zimbabwe. Since time immemorial agriculture has consistently created jobs and sustained families and communities. The complexion of the role of agriculture in sustainable development however, changed in the twentieth century. Despite professional qualifications and eligibilities most Zimbabweans possess and the opportunities created by the agricultural sector, many people are still without meaningful and sustainable work. Patterns of unemployment are still persisting regardless of the effort exerted by various stakeholders to institute various employment creation strategies such as youth empowerment and cooperatives. Zimbabwe is an agrarian country which mainly depends on agriculture for employment creation, economic growth, sustainable development and poverty reduction. This study sought to investigate and establish the role of the agricultural sector in averting unemployment in Zimbabwe. This study explores various strategies, methods and approaches that can be employed to boost agriculture and make it a key antecedent to employment creation in Zimbabwe. The study employed both the qualitative and quantitative research methodologies with a questionnaire being the main data gathering tool. The findings of the study showed that agriculture can make a meaningful contribution to employment creation and sustainable development in Zimbabwe. In order to promote sustainable economic development and employment, farmers need to use modern technology and inputs, receive financial support and funding, increase the number of commercial farmers, develop Agro-Processing Industries and manage climate related shocks so as to make the sector contribute meaningfully to economic growth.

Keywords: sustainable development, agriculture, unemployment, Zimbabwe, farmers, technology.

INTRODUCTION

Historically the performance of the Zimbabwean economy has always depended and mainly rooted on the production of the primary sector that is mining and agriculture. Agricultural production, particularly of cash crops such as tobacco is very essential for sustainable economic development. Although unpredictable rains continue to adversely affect the sector, the 2000 land reform programme made significant strides in employment creation and improving the livelihoods of the generality of Zimbabwean (Herald 2010). The sector's growth rate however suffered some drawbacks and started to slow down since 2006 owing to a number of factors. Performance was affected by weather and input distribution issues. This has threatened the survival of commercial agriculture as people are losing interest in farming. Most people depend on imported goods such as clothes, fruits and vegetables from neighbouring countries and abroad. If goods are not imported in Zimbabwe, the people will buy food at very high costs since the costs of food production is very high, as there are few agricultural resources to sustain food production and security (Mandedu 2007).

To further compound the problem most youth in Zimbabwe are not keen to pursue agricultural sciences due to the stigma that students who usually chose agriculture were people who were academically inferior and not inclined to other sciences such as chemistry, biology and physics (Nyanga et-al 2011, Nickle 2003). The agricultural sector has suffered negative perceptions in the pre and post independent Zimbabwe. When the word agriculture is mentioned most people get the preconceived idea that it only involves the use of rudimentary tools and equipment such as fork, hoe, dirt and labour work with low pay. Much is needed to remove the stigma surrounding this science. Failure by youths to take up courses and programmes in agriculture limits the ability of the programme to absorb many school leavers in employment (Nyanga et-al 2011). Agriculture in Zimbabwe has the potential of making significant contributions to the GDP and employment creation which are key antecedents to sustainable development. The agricultural sector in Zimbabwe employs approximately 20% of the economically active population although much of it is employed only seasonal. The sector is also second in terms of foreign currency generation, supplying up to 47% of exports. In the absence of proper planning and organization of the sector national growth, employment creation, sustainable development and poverty would suffer. Zimbabwe is blessed with natural factors conducive to producing higher yields and high-value agriculture yet most people have remained unemployed, with unemployment currently pegged between 75% and 85%. All across the world people are in search of jobs yet jobs are very scarce especially in developing countries yet they are key to the well being of families and provide people access to social protection for themselves and their families (Tripathi 2004).

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Land use in Zimbabwe and elsewhere is largely influenced by a number of factors, the main ones being climate, socio-economic (culture and population dynamics) and government policies. The agricultural sector in Zimbabwe suffered so many shocks which include among others economic and political distresses, climatic and environmental changes. This has slowed or created stagnation in achieving sustainable development goals and employment generation through the agricultural sector. The unemployment rate in Zimbabwe has been pegged at around 85% for past decade. The high level of unemployment in Zimbabwe serves as a clear testimony and indication that the main employment generation sectors such as mining and

agriculture have not been producing the expected results. To avert the problem of unemployment the government encouraged youths to embark on entrepreneurship exercises and also seriously participate in agricultural activities. However the efforts by government seem to have not produced the desired results. What has remained unclear is the role agriculture can play to create employment in Masvingo district, Zimbabwe. Sustainable development can only be achieved if the agricultural sector is performing well.

OBJECTIVES

To establish the extent at which the agricultural sector influence sustainable development in Masvingo district.

To establish and document various interventions that can be employed to make the agricultural sector contribute significantly to employment creation and sustainable development in Masvingo district, Zimbabwe.

To harness opportunities for employment and wealth creation through agriculture.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study employed a descriptive survey design within the quantitative research paradigm. The design was employed to gather the opinions of employees who work in agricultural institutions and farmers on how the agricultural sector can be reengineered to generate employment in Zimbabwe. 100 participants participated in the study. The participants comprised farmers, youths, human resource practitioners and employees drawn from agricultural institutions in Masvingo district. Fifty four (54) participants were below 35 years of age, while forty six (46) were aged 35 and above. A questionnaire with three sections was used to collect data for the research. The first section gathered biographical data while the second section collected information on the participants' perceptions of the role of agriculture in generating jobs. The questionnaire was the preferred data collection instrument because it is the most commonly used tool to obtain facts and opinions about a phenomenon from people who are informed on the particular issue (De Vos et al. 2002).

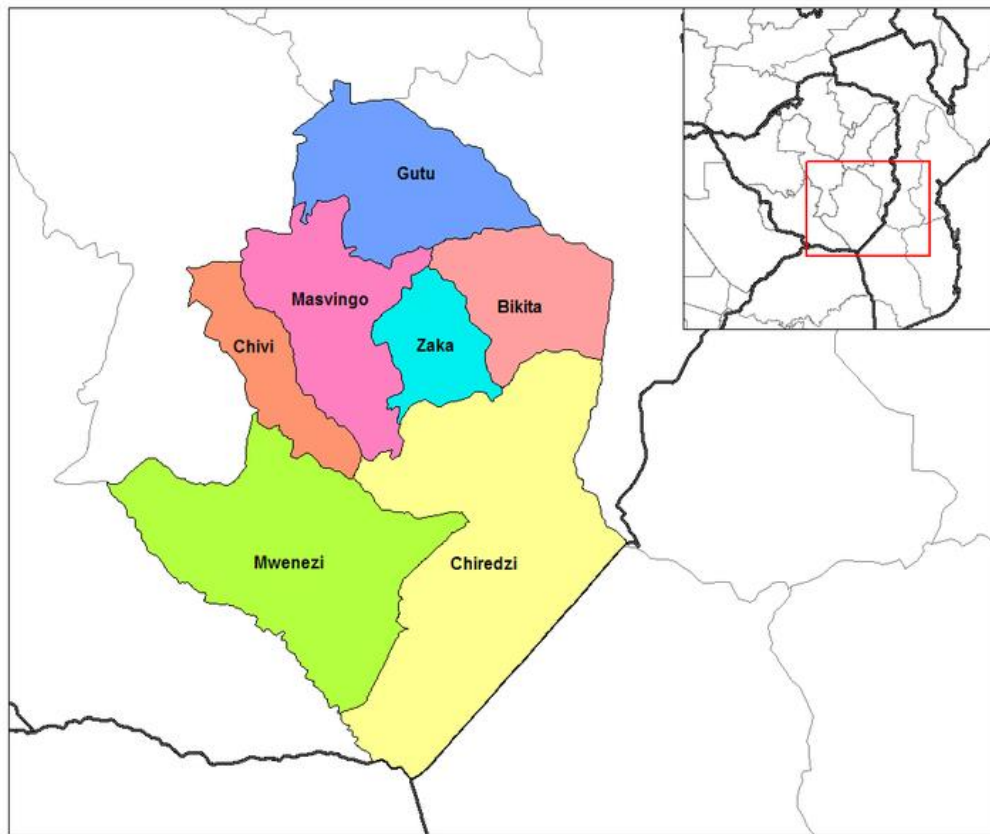
Participants were randomly selected from ten agricultural institutions in Masvingo district. To ensure a fair representation of the institutions, the stratified sampling method was employed to select the sample. The desired number of hundred participants was selected proportionally from each of the ten institutions. Randomisation of selection at institutional level meant that every employee had an equal chance of being chosen. Stratification consisted of the institutions being regarded as the strata that are mutually exclusive, and the employees who are homogeneous with regards to some characteristic (de Vos et al. 2002). Prior to the administration of the questionnaire to the participants, a pilot study was conducted with 15 participants who did not form part of the sample. The questionnaires were hand delivered to the participants and group administered, hence a maximum return rate of 100 completed questionnaires was realised. The study used descriptive statistics to analyse the collected data. The computed percentages indicated the point at which items tended to cluster (Kothari 2004). The statistical technique was preferred for its simplicity.

Participants indicated their consent verbally before completing the survey questionnaires. The researchers assured participating employees of the confidentiality of their responses. All answers were recorded anonymously. Before analysing

employees' responses, each questionnaire was assigned an appropriate code for researchers' identification. The participants were informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any stage. The study did not subject them to psychological or physical harm.

STUDY AREA

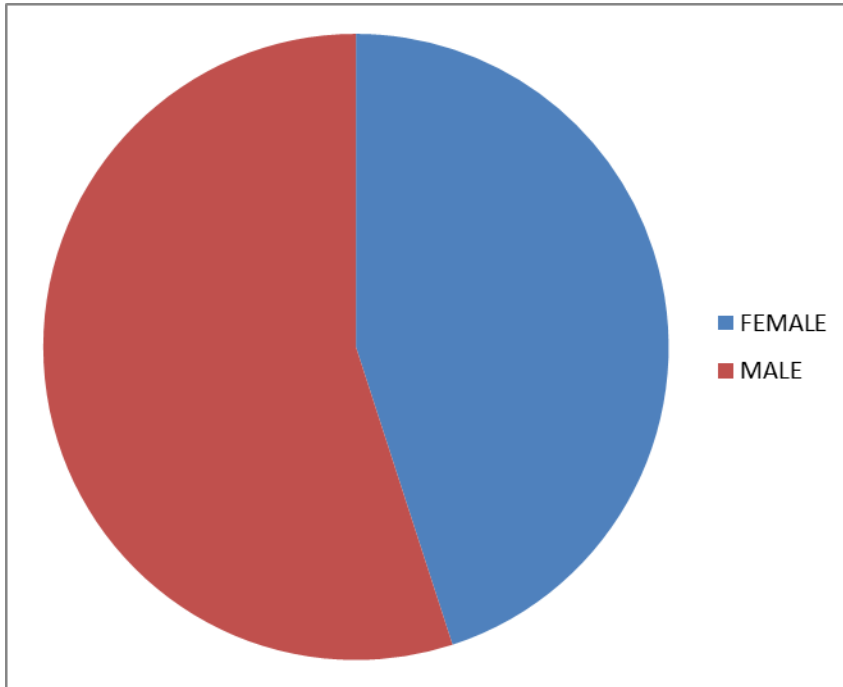
Figure: 1 Map showing the study area of Masvingo District



Adopted Nyanga T and Nyanga T (2013).

Masvingo district is situated on the southern part of the country along Harare – Beitbridge main road. Masvingo comprises of several irrigation schemes which are however underutilised because of inadequate and outdated irrigation equipment. During the colonial era to date Masvingo district is inundated and domiciled by subsistence and commercial farmers. It is however dominated by subsistence farmers who in most instances produce low yields owing to low rainfall patterns that characterise the district. Livelihood activities for most households in Masvingo are centred on vending and petty trading other than agriculture. Most farmers have given up farming because of the losses they incur every agricultural season. Masvingo has a small agricultural industry despite its proximity to lake Mutirikwi and Tokwe-Mukosi dam and several other major water reservoirs. Although the district has a weak industrial base, it has experienced phenomenal spatial and demographic growth over the years.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION



The pie chart shows that respondents are fairly distributed according to age. Although males are slightly more than females, the difference is not significant for this study.

Figure 2: Strategies of Creating Employment in the Agricultural Sector

Employment Creation Strategy	Yes	No
1 Use of Modern Technology and Inputs	88	12
2 Funding New Farmers	87	13
3 Increasing the number of commercial farmers	70	30
4 Developing Agro-Processing Industries	86	14
5 Managing Climate related shocks	83	17
6 Educating traditional leaders and farmers on modern farming methods	74	26
7 Forming Co-operatives	65	35

The study revealed that the overall objective of the agriculture sector and environmental management systems in Zimbabwe is to contribute, in a sustainable way to poverty reduction and to promoting sustainable economic growth and employment creation through increasing the productivity of production factors, diversifying lines of production, adding value to agricultural products, creating better market linkages, and protecting the environment and the natural resource base. Participants overwhelmingly agreed that the use of modern day technology and inputs play a critical role in economic growth and employment creation. The findings are in sync with Kanyenze et-al (2011) who argues that the agricultural sector can

create employment through intensifying the use of modern inputs which can help it to increase production rapidly. The use of modern technology also helps it create an environment favorable for enhancing the skills of the rural farmers and newly resettled farmers. Furthermore the use of modern day technology and the composition of a macro soil plan for the Zimbabwe's newly resettled farmers can boost crop and livestock production thereby creating employment for people at various levels of employment (Kanyenze et-al 2011, De-Vose et-al 2002). One of the participants said that if employment is to be created in the agricultural sector agricultural scientists should be involved in different farming systems. Employment creation is also key factor to promoting sustainable development in Zimbabwe.

The study also established that research projects aimed at the development of economic farming practices should be carried out. The findings confirmed (Nyanga et-al 2012) who argues that research helps in the development of production practices and environmental management schemes which could stabilize both wet and dry land production. Priority should be given to research that can help to improve the agricultural practices such as utilizing rain effectively and managing out breaks. Different irrigation methods may be employed which can help to keep farm workers in employment and those who are employed in agricultural support institutions such as Agri-Bank. Extension services rendered to farmers by the agricultural extension officers should be effective so as to promote sustainable growth and productivity within the agricultural sector (Kanyenze et-al 2011). Agricultural development committees may also need to be institutionalized to deal with the identification and analysis of problems, determining priorities and evaluating development projects and make appropriate decisions. (Gitau et-al 2008, Martz 2012) also say that research and development projects should be carried out by multidisciplinary teams within a holistic farming context. The projects should be aimed at improving farm management and optimizing agricultural products and resource utilization. Irrigation farming and the effective utilization of water should be given priority.

Instead of exporting raw materials companies and farmers should process them in local manufacturing systems so as to add value to them before sending them to the global market. Raw sugar, banana, beans, tobacco and others need to be processed in the local industry thereby creating employment for people in manufacturing companies. The system provides employment for people from the farm right to the manufacturing stage. According to McKinsey Global Institute (2010) the other strategy which can contribute to job creation is to develop agro-processing industries. Innovating new agricultural industries is key to creating sustainable national wealth and security. The innovation promotes agriculture to become a key antecedent to sustainable development and job creation in rural areas. Developing industry such as bio-fuels will create massive demand for agricultural products and that demand will create potentially thousands of new rural jobs and sustainable development, (Vilsack 2001). As the country develop the agricultural sector and the number of jobs in agriculture generally increases. Masvingo district, with its vast tracts of arable land and conducive climate can create employment by developing agro-processing systems. From 1960 to 2008 Thailand managed to grow the number of stable jobs in agriculture from 519,000 to almost three million. This was the result of a continuous expansion of farming onto previously uncultivated land and a focus on labour-intensive crops such as rice and developing agro-processing industries and companies (McKinsey Global Institute 2010). At current projections for agriculture Africa, it is estimated that the continent will create eight million wage-paying

jobs in agriculture by 2020. This could only be possible if Africa were to accelerate sustainable development of the sector (McKinsey 2010, Vilsack 2000, Gitau et-al 2008, Nyanga et-al 2013).

The study also established that since independence the Government of Zimbabwe has demonstrated the will and commitment to maintain and improve performance in the agricultural sector. The findings concur with (Gitau et-al 2008, Nyanga et-al 2013) who asserts that the government of Zimbabwe is committed to specific actions geared towards improving the agricultural sector and ensuring a sustainable pattern of economic growth and employment creation. Increasing the number of farmers and also empowering them gives them room and the zeal to expand their agricultural activities hence creating employment. One of the interviewees remarked in her home language, *'Hurumende ngaiwedzere varimi vemachokwadi vanodakurima not cellphone farmers.'* (The government should allocate inputs and resources to those people who are committed farming). The commitment by the government needs to be fully supported by the farmers themselves. Farmers should show high level of commitment and be prepared to expend their energy towards achieving local and national agricultural ambitions and goals.

The other strategy to create employment through the agricultural sector is by expanding commercial farming onto arable land that is currently not in use. Masvingo district has a lot of uncultivated arable land which if utilized can help to create employment for farm workers and other agriculture related ventures. One of the respondents remarked that Zimbabwe has the potential of creating employment if they fully utilize all the commercial and subsistence farming areas. The findings are in sync with (Rwanda Strategic Report 2006, Kanyeze et al 2010) which suggested that employment creation can only be possible in Africa if hillside irrigation, horticulture, the provision of agricultural inputs (seeds and fertilisers), livestock development (beef and milk in particular), land and water conservation, the rehabilitation of degraded soils, agro-forestry, rural infrastructure such as electrification and feeder road upgrading, the diversification of agricultural exports and the provision of market information can be improved (Ndlovu 2007). Appropriate soil and water management structures and systems such as progressive terraces, radical terraces and water harvesting structures in Masvingo need to be improved. One of the participants said soil erosion has compromised ecosystem integrity, eroded riverbanks and led to nutrient loading of water bodies. It has also led to reduced soil fertility in the acid-soil, mountainous areas resulting in lowered agricultural yields and loss of employment. However, McKinsey (2010) notes that to achieve this would require the continent to formulate new policies on land rights, integrated water management, access to inputs and finance. To summarize it one of the participants who is a senior agriculture consultant said, *panofanira kuiswa simba rakawanda pakupindura zvinhu muminda mitsva nemisharu kuti pagowanikwa mabasa.* (Enormous efforts must be made in order to ensure that agriculture changes its nature and that both newly resettled and seasoned farmers change their vision, mode of work and mode of life). Masvingo district is full of 'cell phone' farmers who rarely put foot on their farms thereby creating room for low productivity and pilferage of both inputs and harvested products.

The study also established that farmers should abandon food crops and emphasize on cash crops such as tobacco, cotton, beans, groundnuts and sugarcane which can help them generate revenue for consumption and meeting manpower bills. What has been lacking until recently has been an emphasis on improving productivity and product quality of cash crops (Ndlovu 2007, ILO. 2002a). The naturally good quality of agricultural products such as tobacco and sugarcane that results from

Masvingo district soils, climate and altitude is sufficient to create employment of various forms and categories such as accountants, labourers, marketing professionals, bankers and many others. One of the participants remarked that horticulture crops also have the potential of generating much higher levels of income and employment per hectare than domestic food crops. Apart from growing cash crops the other strategy is to strengthen cooperatives within the agricultural fraternity. McKinsey (2010) argues that cooperation has been important in the agricultural sector in all countries of the world, and it has taken many forms, depending on the historical, cultural and economic context. Cooperatives in agriculture often play a vital role in purchasing inputs, procuring farmer advisory services, and marketing outputs thereby creating employment. However in Masvingo district the development of farm cooperatives suffered historical obstacles hence failed to survive during the period when the country experienced some economic challenges.

The other approach that can be employed to create employment is by effectively managing climate-related shocks such as drought and flooding which are becoming more regular in Zimbabwe. Newly resettled farmers are particularly vulnerable to these shocks because of their poor financial positions. Masvingo district is one of the most affected by prolonged drought hence there is need to effectively deal with it (Twagiramungu 2006). More water harvesting reservoirs need to be put in place such as the completion of the Tokwe- Mukosi Dam which is 100km from Masvingo town. The dam can help to boost and resuscitate agricultural production. These extreme climate events have adverse environmental impacts on agricultural productivity. For instance in 1990, 2005, 2008 and 2010 harvests were both negatively affected by severe droughts that came in at the beginning of the planting season (The herald 2011).

Research (Rwanda Strategic Plan 2006, Ndlovu 2007, The herald 2011, NISR et.al. 2008) has shown that even subsistence farmers benefit from intensification of agriculture through the opportunities it creates for them to work on farms and in enterprises such as collection centres, pack houses, and processing facilities. This provides additional employment opportunities which in turn provide appropriate incentive structures needed to drive the desired transformations of the sector. Subsistence farmers need to be given incentives for producing more cash crops until they can generate enough revenue to take on cost burdens and meet their labour bills themselves. Many farmers have relegated agriculture to their subconscious. They plow through their lives and careers oblivious, discombobulated and disconnected from the soil beneath their feet. All the while it is agriculture that is keeping many communities going by feeding families and creating jobs (Vilsack 2001, ILO. 2005b).

CONCLUSION

The study concluded that despite the decline in share of the agricultural activities in Masvingo in the last decade, agriculture still remains crystally important for economic growth, sustainable development and employment creation. The sector provides employment for the majority of people in the country's working population. If properly managed the sector has the potential to create more employment opportunities for the various groups and levels of people in Zimbabwe. Properly managed agricultural systems create functional structures that enhance employment creation. Employment creation can be promoted by using advanced technology which gives birth to efficiency and effectiveness in conducting agricultural businesses. All the land that is available needs to be fully utilized so as to boost production and inturn create employment.

Regarding the role of agriculture in creating employment the study concluded that technical changes are needed to reduce manual work and traditional farming methods which are usually not popular with young farmers. In an agrarian country, employment creation, sustainable development and economic growth depend on agriculture.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- The government should increase ownership of land and intensify both crop and animal husbandry practices so that they provide more income.
- Farmers need to be trained using participatory approaches on how to effectively and efficiently operate an agricultural systems and institutions. Most farmers do not have good financial, human capital and material management skills hence there is need to impart these skills on them so that they can run their agricultural businesses like all other profit making businesses.
- Farmers need to improve cultivation practices and develop sustainable production systems in order to generate higher levels of production and farm incomes from the limited base of arable land.
- Farmers should be given incentive for increasing production and also the number of employees.
- Make Agriculture Science more attractive by including more ICT systems. This helps to de-stigmatize 'Traditional' mind-set towards agriculture.

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