



Command Agriculture Policy Engagement Dialogue Workshop Report

22 November 2018

Introduction

Zimbabwe Land and Agrarian Network (ZiLAN) hosted a half-day Command Agriculture Policy Engagement Dialogue Workshop at Crowne Plaza Monomotapa Hotel in Harare on the 22nd of November 2018 to discuss policy issues around design and implementation of the Command Agriculture (CA) Programme. The Dialogue Workshop was attended by 35 participants (18 Female and 17 male) drawn from Government Ministries and Departments, Research Institutions, Civil Society Organizations, Zimbabwe Gender Commission, Traditional Leadership, Farmer Group Enterprises, Community Based Organizations, and Commodity Association Representatives. To stimulate discussions, findings of a study conducted by the Sam Moyo African Institute for Agrarian Studies (SMAIAS) focusing on the efficacy of State-led contract farming models, with particular reference to implementation of the CA Programme in Zimbabwe. The findings were validated by narration of first-hand farmer experiences with participation in the Programme. A plenary session was then conducted to synthesize the day's deliberations and map the way forward with regards to policy recommendations.

Welcome Remarks

Welcome remarks were given by Mr Tobias Chipare from Zimbabwe Project Trusts (ZimPro) who is also a Board Member of ZiLAN. He began by asking all the participants to introduce themselves and the introductions were done. Mr Chipare informed the participants that the purpose of the workshop was to discuss issues around the design and implementation of the CA Programme. He indicated that the SMAIAS had conducted a study focusing on performance of the CA programme as a State-led CF model and was going to present empirical evidence generated. They were encouraged to freely participate and interact, and to respect each other's opinions since we all have different experiences and opinions.

SMAIAS research findings presentation

Mr Freedom Mazwi, a Research Fellow with SMAIAS presented findings of the study conducted by the Institute and began by pointing out that presentation of empirical evidence before stakeholders, particularly farmers, was meant to be a way of disseminating and validating the study. The study was said to have been motivated by lack of empirical evidence to back some claims on the implementation and performance of the programme. A number of factors were indicated to have affected agricultural production besides capital flight from agriculture, including droughts, learning curve for newly resettled farmers, etc. The presentation revealed that there has been underperformance of food crops such as maize, wheat and soyabeans, linked to inadequate funding from the private sector. Unlike cash crops (tobacco and cotton), which continued to attract private sector financing, food crops were said to have been neglected. This led to the emergence of the state as the largest financier of food production through CA contract farming, of recent, targeting small to medium scale farmers. Joint venture (JV) model of financing was also indicated to have emerged but it was highlighted that there is still more research work that is required to generate empirical evidence on the structural arrangements of JV model. The dual agrarian structure that traditionally characterized the country's agriculture was said to have been replaced by a tri-modal structure as a result of the FTLRP.

Production trends for key crops were presented, which revealed that key cash crops had not experienced significantly huge declines compared to food crops as a result of the flight of capital. The CA Programme was introduced as an import-substitution measure since the country's dependence on food imports had grown tremendously. Smallholders were found to commit an average of 1.5ha while A2 farmers commit 6ha to CA maize production. It was shown to have significantly increased the maize output by about 321% and profitability for farmers ranged between \$148 and \$2,510 per Ha depending on economies of scale. A critical review of debates surrounding CF were presented mainly focusing on pros and cons of the concept. Although recruitment terms and conditions are normally used as a tool to exclude smallholder farmers in CF arrangements, it was noted that as a result of lobbying and advocacy from various interested groups, the initial requirement for a farmer to have operational irrigation was set aside in subsequent seasons. The presenter indicated that there is no clause in the contract meant to protect farmers in the event of the contractor defaulting on its contractual obligations. The concessional interest rate of 5% was lauded as being fairly low compared to 12 – 20% currently obtaining on the market (other private CF arrangements). Motivations for participation in the CA programme included high producer price, affordability of loan and market assurance. Significant increases in production and productivity of food crops in recent farming seasons were said to be as a result of CA coupled with good rains. Although overall performance in terms of productivity fell below the set target of 5 tons/ha, there was great improvement for A1 and communal

area farmers who averaged around 2.2 mt/ha. The study noted that this set target of 5mt/ha is unrealistic for farmers in Natural Regions 3, 4 and 5. The challenge of satisfying product quality requirements, particularly with regards to moisture content, was alleged to have fuelled side-marketing, where farmer end up selling at low prices to middlemen who offer prompt payment in cash. Overall, distance to market was indicated to be the major challenge associated with CA since farmers are required to deliver to GMB. Other constraints highlighted include late supply, inadequacy and non-provision of inputs and unfavourable payment system owing to cash shortages and late payment. Default rates for the CA programme averaged 20%. The study concluded that the state-led CF model had boosted maize production and should be scaled up to other agricultural commodities but there is still need to improve on the adequacy and timely distribution of inputs as well as timeliness and modalities of payment to farmers.

Mr Godfrey Magaramombe moderated plenary discussions after the presentation. Participants wanted to know whether there have been consistence in terms of the inputs package and adequacy thereof. A farmer narrated her observation that most farmers initially thought the inputs provided were for free like in previous seasons, which resulted in them defaulting on their loans. It was revealed that there are farmers who divert inputs like diesel to other uses for quick personal gain and some who side-market part of their produce to avoid paying back. One contributor noted that government support programmes to agriculture have continued to be biased towards large-scale (A2) farmers who have continued to default and recommended that it was high time that focus should be diverted towards the smallholder sector, where default rates are lower. The farmers suggested that owing to the current volatile pricing system that has evolved, there is need for farmers to also be paid in a stable currency (USD) to cushion them against the price volatility.

The low participation and beneficiation of women in the CA Programme, when they constitute the greater proportion (52%) of the population and workers of the land (70%) was questioned. In response: presenter pointed out that there are still very few women who own land in their own capacity due to the dominance of the patriarchy system in the country. It was recommended that more education and capacity building programmes are still needed on CF and contracts, especially related to understanding and interpretation of the legal jargon used. The sustainability of the CA Programme in terms of how well the farmers have been capacitated to continue producing and being productive in the event of the government pulling out. The farmers lamented delays caused by bureaucracy and corruption at AGRITEX which result in inputs becoming readily available on the black market while farmers face challenges in accessing them through the formal channels.

Farmer Experiences with Command Agriculture

A plenary session was open for farmers to narrate their experiences with participation in and observation of implementation of the CA Programme. A woman from Mash Central narrated that in their area, AGRITEX and Zimbabwe National Army officials moved around prior to recruitment, informing would be beneficiaries not to misconstrue the Programme with free hand outs but that it was a CF arrangement in which farmers were expected to pay back after harvesting. She noted that although it was initially difficult for female farmers to benefit under the Programme, in the subsequent seasons, provisions have been made them and others lacking ownership of land to bring affidavits stating how they would access land so that they can also benefit. These mitigation measures have however opened avenues for abuse and corruption. Fuel ends up benefitting or being sold to community. The major challenge highlighted was that of shortages of inputs during the critical period of the onset of the farming season, when farmers are made to directly approach inputs suppliers, thereby increasing their transaction costs since the suppliers are geographically dispersed and several visits may be required for the full consignments to be obtained.

A representative from Women and Land in Zimbabwe indicated at the beginning, the programme was moving on very well when all inputs were obtainable through the Grain Marketing Board, until political patronage and nepotism set in. A female representative from ZimSOFF decried the lack of inclusion of smallholder farmers in communal areas in the Programme by not embracing traditional and organic crops like small grains, which are adaptable in these areas. It was suggested by a ZiWFAT representative that herbicides should be included in the CA inputs package and that as the programme is now extending to other crops and livestock, there is need to ensure that economically viable varieties and breeds are distributed to farmers to ensure commercial viability. Wadzanai Women's Group leader narrated her group's experience with CA where they have contracted with the CA Programme as a group. They have found the set target of 5mt/ha to be unattainable at the smallholder level, particularly in the communal area setting. As a result, they end up using income from other sources to repay the CA loan shortfalls. She lamented the late distribution of inputs, which render the set productivity targets unattainable.

Chief Makoni, a traditional leader, recommended for soil sampling and analysis to be carried out first before contracting to ensure distribution of appropriate varieties and inputs. He also indicated that appropriate scale mechanization is required due to limited availability of draught power in the smallholder farming areas. He suggested that there is need to have mechanization service providers premised at the local level i.e. at least one at the ward level to mitigate against the challenge of draught power shortage and ensure timeliness in execution of farm operations. An important recommendation that was also provided was the need for training in productivity enhancement, grading and product quality improvement to be provided to reduce incidences of cheating and loan defaults by farmers. A representative from Zimbabwe Progressive Tobacco Producers Association highlighted that in tobacco CF, farmers are being exploited through price

manipulations. Contractual arrangements are biased in favour of the contractor, who does not get prosecuted in the event of failure to meet their obligatory side of the bargain. The Association advocated for the CA programme to also be extended to cash crops like tobacco farming to minimize exploitation of farmers. Nepotism among traditional was said to be hampering smooth running of government programmes like CA since some of them were alleged to have been corruptly distributing inputs.

The prevalence of corruption in State-led agricultural support programmes like CA was said to be working as a tool for sidelining and segregating against most women since women shun such vices. However, the dominance of man in leadership of these empowerment programmes was indicated to expose women to sexual exploitation in their quest to benefit. Political patronage was also said to be rife in CA, especially around beneficiary selection as the programme gets hijacked by dominant political party activists, particularly in the distribution of the inputs. The sustainability of CA was said to be hinged on provision of adequate funding, particularly for capital investments like irrigation infrastructure and mechanization equipment.

Stakeholder Experiences

This session was moderated by Ms. Phides Mazhawidza (Women Farmers Land and Agriculture Trust) who invited panelists from Local Government (Department of Traditional Leadership Support Services), Min of Women Affairs, Community and SMEs) and the Zimbabwe Gender Commission to talk about what their respective organizations do to support women and implementation of Government programmes like CA.

First to present was Mrs Christine Chideme, Acting Director – Community Development in the Ministry of Women Affairs who informed the participants that there are standalone Departments of Women Affairs and Gender in the Ministry which focus on issues affecting women, and promotes gender equality and integration issues respectively, while the Department of Community Development, which she heads, promotes community development projects, including skills development. The participants were told that there is also a Business Linkages Department which promotes market participation of women through linkages and value chain development. They were also informed about existing funding opportunities for women such as the Women Empowerment Fund and the Community Development Fund that have been put in place to empower people and communities. She raised concern over the disproportionate participation of women in development projects and programmes like CA and blamed child marriages and low literacy rates as the major problem areas hindering effectiveness of women empowerment programmes. She encouraged farmers and community members to work closely with her Ministry in identifying issues that

need to be tackled, and revealed that the Ministry has since decentralized its offices down to the ward level. She invited all interested organizations to register with her Ministry for regular consultations. She encouraged all stakeholders to work hard to ensure that CA becomes more inclusive in its approach.

Mr Muchenje, who works in the Department of Traditional Leadership Support Services, Ministry of Local Government, Public works and National Housing revealed that his department works with 283 Chiefs, 484 Headmen, about 24,000 Village Heads throughout the country. At the core of his Department's work are training and capacity building programmes for these stakeholders. He indicated that his Ministry works collaboratively with other ministries, government departments and NGOs on various cross-cutting issues. Traditional authorities were said to play a critical role in ensuring nature conservation and preservation of traditional norms and values. It was revealed that there are still some resettlement areas that are yet to be gazetted under the Traditional Leadership Act and thus, traditional leaders are discouraged from exercising jurisdiction over such areas since such actions may lead to legal issues and prosecutions. In the agriculture domain, the Ministry was said to have more oversight on the Presidential Inputs Scheme more than the Command Agriculture Programme.

Ms. Agnes Nhengo representing the Zimbabwe Gender Commission (ZGC) indicated that her Commission is one of the five independent commissions instituted to look into human rights and respect of democratic principles in line with the country's constitution. The Commission, reports to Parliament, receives complaints from individuals and communities, institutes investigations and findings lead to recommendations, including for prosecution. Focus of ZGC's mandate is on monitoring and providing oversight on gender issues in line with the country's constitutional dictates. As such, the ZGC monitors economic, social and political rights of men and women as they are espoused in the country's constitution. She indicated that as a Commission, they have noted with regret that most of women's economic rights are generally being violated and that issues of sexual harassment are rampant and constitute the greatest form of violations against the rights of women. She encouraged women groups and interested stakeholders to work together with the Commission in ensuring satisfactory discharge of its mandate. She also called upon all stakeholders to work towards ensuring gender equality in all their programming. The ZGC encourages affirmative action against violations of fundamental rights related to gender. It was pointed out that the Commission has made great strides in terms of promoting gender equality in the country. The need to ensure mainstreaming of gender in all government ministries and departments and capacity development for gender integration in all aspects of development was emphasized.

Way Forward and Closing Remarks

As a way forward, the participants in the half-day dialogue workshop recommended that:

- There is need for a multi-stakeholder monitoring mechanism for CA to be put in place
- Gender rights need to be written in vernacular for wider comprehension, particularly by those whom they are intended to protect.
- Contracts need to contain fair terms and conditions which clearly specify obligations for each contracting party and equally apportion risk between the contracting parties.
- Appropriateness of inputs and crop varieties need to be accorded the highest consideration possible.

There being no further issues to discuss, Mr Tobias Chipare gave closing remarks in which he thanked all the participants for their attendance and active participation in the dialogue workshop. He declared the workshop officially closed.