



**SAM MOYO AFRICAN  
INSTITUTE FOR AGRARIAN STUDIES**

# POLICY BRIEF

POLICY BRIEF: June 2018

## **CONTRACT FARMING ARRANGEMENT AND POOR RESOURCED FARMERS IN ZIMBABWE**

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### **ABSTRACT**

This study sought to understand the impact of contract farming on livelihoods among the small-scale farmers in two study districts of Zvimba and Goromonzi which are located in the Mashonaland Provinces. This was done through examining different levels of income earned between contract and non-contract tobacco growers, food consumption rates, land use patterns and asset accumulation among other indicators. The asymmetric power relations between farmers and buyer firms was as well examined. Evidence shows that contract farming has improved access to high-yielding input, better extension service, incomes, while also contributing to asset accumulation when compared to non-contract farming households. However, lack of platform in the contract design process disadvantages farmers and exposes them to different forms of buyer firm exploitation such as the charging of high interest rates on inputs. Further, the study observes the less allocation of land towards food crops among contracted growers when compared to non-contract farmers which poses a threat to household food security. Women's participation in contract farming was noted to be low due to lack of access to land as the means of production. It is therefore important for government and other relevant stakeholders to come up with a conducive policy environment, that encourages the growth of input/credit market to avoid farmer agribusiness exploitation. Appropriate legislation is required that govern contract farming agreements and implementation. Land policy specifically for women should be put in place that can help to redress the historical male-female land ownership imbalances.

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## Introduction

Contract farming in Africa predates the Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs) of the 1980's as it was first implemented by newly independent states as a strategy of supporting small-scale farmers and generating foreign exchange (*Ochieng 2010*). The introduction of SAPs, facilitated by multilateral agencies such as the World Bank (WB) and the International Monetary fund (IMF), resulted in a decline for state support for small-scale farmers and the promotion of private investments in the agricultural sector. Private investments in the sector were viewed as a vehicle for agrarian development and the eradication of poverty (*World Bank 2007*). Supported by African governments, the expansion of private capital in various crop commodities in the 1980s and 1990s had a huge impact on export-oriented production, while also negatively impacting on cereal crop production (*Patnaik 2011; Moyo 2011a*). Generally, contract farming is an agreement which is entered into between producers and a buyer, with sets of conditions in the production and marketing of the commodity (*Little and Watts 1994*). Proponents of contract farming such as the WB, the IMF and the Food and Agricultural Organisation (FAO) see it as a win-win arrangement and poverty reduction tool likely to reverse years of agrarian stagnation on the continent through its technology transfer mechanism and enhanced access to input and output markets (*FAO 2012*). Multi-lateral bodies thus see contract farming as a panacea to Africa's development quagmire as it links them to more rewarding regional and international markets (*World Bank 2007; Food and Agricultural Organisation 2012*). Critics of contract farming, however argue that the model is premised on unequal power-relations between agri-business and the farmer, leading to the exploitation of the peasantry (*through extraction of surplus value and working beyond normal hours*) (see *Clapp 1989; Shivji 1992*). Other analysts posit that contract farming turns farmers into propertied "proletariats" "wage-workers" due to the perceived lack of autonomy

and the persistence of indebtedness among small-scale farmers (*Clapp 1989*). In a case study conducted in Chile, Karovkin (1992) argues that contract farming results in "dependent capitalisation" where farmers cannot prosper outside the boom of a commodity. Such a situation was witnessed in Zimbabwe among cotton growers in the 1990's in Gokwe (*Hove 2014*).

Zimbabwe's agrarian structure prior to the FTLRP was bi-modal, composed of poor-resourced farmers who constituted the majority operating alongside 4500 white large-scale farm owners who received finance from private commercial banks (*Moyo 2013*). However, the FLTRP reconfigured the agrarian structure and transformed it into a tri-modal, largely dominated by small-scale farmers who now own the majority of the land (*Ibid*). Apart from transforming the agrarian structure, the FTLRP also induced capital flight as agricultural credit was withdrawn by private commercial banks leaving newly resettled farmers without alternative sources of agricultural finance (*Moyo and Nyoni 2013*). The collapse of the credit market and adoption of policies such as the Look East policy in 2005, and relaxation of exchange regulations, fuelled the rise of contract farming post-FLTRP. Noting the importance of tobacco which has always been an important foreign exchange earner, the Government of Zimbabwe (GoZ) invited China to embark on the revival of the tobacco sector through contract farming.

## Approach

This study used a mixed method approach to collect data. Quantitative data was collected using a questionnaire on 200 households. A household survey was conducted in two districts namely, Zvimba and Goromonzi which are located in Mashonaland West and Mashonaland East provinces respectively. Qualitative data was collected through an extensive literature review from TIMB Annual Reports and SMAIAS Baseline Reports, while



key informants such as local Agritex officers, traditional leaders and other government officials also provided additional data. The data collected provided an insight into production patterns, land use patterns, food (in)security, livelihoods among contract and non-contract small-holder farmers.

### Demographic Profile of Farmers

In our research, males constituted the majority (87.5 percent) of the sample while females were less (12.5 %). Similarly, further analysis has shown that males remain the majority in the contract farming sample (90.6 percent) compared to 9.4 percent females. In general, it can be ascertained that male participation in contract farming is higher than that of females as is reported in Figure 1 below. The low participation of females in contract farming and agricultural production in general is an outcome of existing patriarchal relations in society which confine them to peripheral roles as labour suppliers within households, and in the broader agrarian sector (*Chambati 2017*). Such findings have also been observed elsewhere in Africa in countries such as Tanzania, Ghana and Mozambique (*Mbilinyi and Semakafu 1995; Torvikey et al. 2017; Chambati and Mazwi 2017*).

**Figure 1: The Profile of Contract and Non-Contract Farmers**



Source: SMAIAS Contract Farming (CF) Survey (2017)

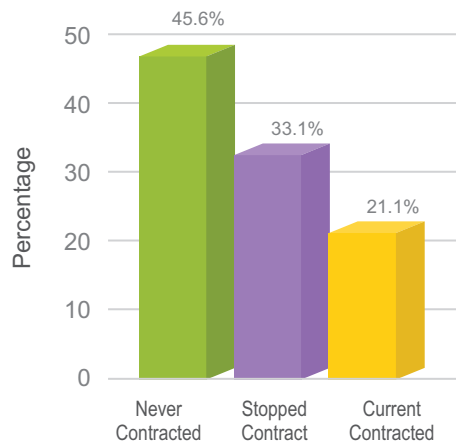
Due to the labour intensity nature of tobacco production, survey findings show that in terms

of age, the majority of both contract and non-contract farmers were in the 40-49 years age group, which is the most labour active age range. As has been argued by Hove (2014), age is a critical factor in motivating farmers to participate in contract production.

### Growth of Contract Farming in Zimbabwe

The majority entrants in contract farming (24.5 percent) did so in 2012 and the figure went down to 5.7 percent in the following season. The increase in the number of small holders participating in contract farming from the 2012 agricultural season as shown in various TIMB Annual Statistical Reports is attributable to higher output prices paid in 2011/12 (US\$3.52) by contracting firms which tended to generate a huge interest among farmers (*TIMB 2016*). High output prices for tobacco in Zimbabwe have historically been associated with a huge increase in grower participation in the following agricultural seasons, resulting in an oversupply of the commodity, thus ultimately leading to declines in production and output prices (*Mbanga, 1991; Clements and Harben, 1962*). Generally, there has been a steady increase in the number of farmers entering into contract farming since 2004, although the number started declining after 2014 due to low average prices per kilogram which have been going down ever since then (*TIMB 2016*).

**Figure 2: Participation In Contract Farming**



Source: SMAIAS Contract Farming Survey (2017)

Our survey also shows that contracted tobacco farmers have exited the partnership, citing low productivity, failure to meet production targets, higher input price (*due to interest charged on inputs*), low output price and loan repayment failure. These matters highlight the unfavourable nature of contract farming for small-scale farmers. As reported by farmers, higher input and low out prices could be a new way of farmer agribusiness exploitation through the extraction of surplus value, an issue raised by many agrarian researchers on the same subject.

### Farmer - Agri - Business Power Relations

Since 2005, there has been an increase in merchant companies operating within the tobacco sector in Zimbabwe, from 3 to the current 17 (*TIMB 2016*). While such expansion has led to a recovery in tobacco production, questions have been raised on the power relations which are created between agribusiness firms and the small-scale farmers, with some arguing that it creates asymmetrical power relations which largely favour merchant companies (*Moyo and Nyoni 2013*).

Case studies of contract arrangements in other countries, particularly Mozambique, have shown how contracting firms utilise monopsony to lower output prices while increasing input costs, thus significantly reducing small-scale farmers' incomes (*Perez Nino 2016; Goger et al 2014*). Other examples also show contracting firms as engaging farmers only when they need to raise their production requirements and pulling out from such arrangements once they have met their production requirements, leaving small-scale farmers exposed to poverty (*Martiniello 2016; Karovkin 1992*). However, for small-scale farmers, the contracts are unfavourable as they do not allow them to pull-out from such arrangements, thus indicating unequal power relations.

According to survey findings, 100 percent of contract farming documents were drafted in English, thereby raising concerns that small-

scale farmers may enter into arrangements which they do not fully understand. To further compound the challenges, small-scale farmers indicated that they are not provided with a platform to feed their inputs into the final contract document, thus highlighting the asymmetrical power relations in the arrangements. The lack of platform for small-scale farmers in the negotiation of contracts contradicts notions raised by the WB, FAO and New Institutional Economists (NIE), who view contract farming as an "arrangement entered between equal parties". A case in Goromonzi District where a merchant company pulled out citing the "unfavourable soils for tobacco production in the district" left many farmers in the district without any source of inputs. Such asymmetrical power relations are also shown by Martiniello (2016) in Kilombero, Tanzania, where the sugar milling estate stopped purchasing crop output from farmers in years when the estate was able to fulfil its production requirements.

This study shows that 33.1 percent of farmers have pulled out of contract farming in Goromonzi and Zvimba districts, thus challenging arguments put forward by NIE who see contract farming as a win-win arrangement. The proportion of farmers who have pulled out also casts into doubt the notions presented by some analysts who see contract farming as leading to "loss of autonomy" (*see Watts 1989, for example*). The ability to pull out of contracts reflects a degree of autonomy and power on the part of small-scale farmers and should be seen as a challenge to unfair contract arrangements.

### Land Use Patterns Among Tobacco Growers

Land use trends are critical in contract farming debates, with scholars such as Shivji (1992); Moyo (2000;2011a); Patnaik (2011) arguing that the involvement of small-scale farmers in cash crop production alters land use and production patterns towards extroverted production, while in the process undermining food self-sufficiency and the nutritional diets of small-scale producers. An enquiry on the actual amount of land utilised for crop production by

both contract and non-contract farming reveals that contract farmers till more land when compared to non-contract farmers. For example, in the 2015/16 season, contract farmers utilised 4.4 hectares to grow different crops, while non-contracted farmers utilised 3.8 hectares, which is far much less than that of contract farmers. In the 2014/15 season, contract farmers committed 47.1 percent of their arable land to tobacco production, while non-contract farmers had 36.5 percent share of arable land placed under tobacco cultivation. A similar pattern was witnessed in the 2015/16 season when contract farmers cultivated an average of 45.5 percent of arable land under tobacco, way above non-contract farmers who grew tobacco on an average 30.9 percent land. In both seasons, non-contract farmers allocated more land for the production of other crops than tobacco. On the other hand, contract farmers allocated more land for tobacco production than other crops.

The findings thus validate the thesis that participation in cash crop production shifts land use patterns towards export-oriented production, while also undermining food self-sufficiency among contracted growers. The inputs advanced to small-scale farmers by contracting firms could be the reason why contracted growers are able to allocate more land to tobacco production, when compared to non-contract farmers.

### Input Access and Utilisation

Survey evidence from the two districts shows that contract farmers utilised more inputs in comparison to non-contract farmers. Contract farmers utilised more seeds, fertilisers, and pesticides. For example, contract farmers applied an average of 221.3kgs of top dressing fertiliser on 2ha, which was significantly higher when compared to non-contracted farmers (208kgs). A similar trend was also observed in basal fertiliser application, where contracted growers applied an average of 701kg for 2 ha in comparison to an average of 601.2 kg for the same hectareage used by non-contracted tobacco growers. The difference in the utilisation of inputs was highly significant in the use of pesticides where contract farmers

applied 2.1kg while non-contract farmers applied only 1.4kgs.

The findings present compelling facts that contract farming is useful in the provision of agricultural inputs and credit. The higher utilisation of inputs per-hectare by contract farmers is as a result of the provision of input credit facilities by merchant companies. Survey findings also highlight that for all inputs utilised by tobacco growers, the input prices were much higher for contracted growers when compared with those for non-contracted farmers. However, it is also important to highlight that the high input costs charged by merchant companies on farmers reflect unfair practices on vulnerable farmers, and have a negative impact of reducing farmer incomes as they tend to reduce farm gate prices.

### Tobacco and Food Production Patterns

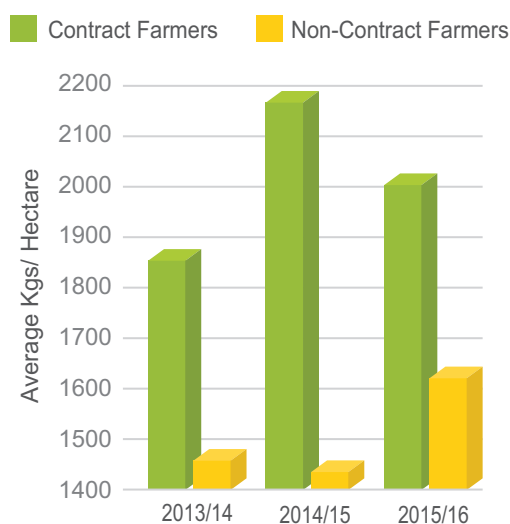
Tobacco production data for the three-consecutive agricultural seasons shows that a contract farmer produces more tobacco per hectare (2036.36kg) than a non-contract farmer (1513 kg) as is clearly shown in Figure 3. Production is higher among contract growers due to their access to inputs as well as their access to private extension services from contracting firms which is shown to be improving yields. As well, extension services offered to contract farmers by contracting firms could have improved farmer agronomic practices, leading to better yields when compared to non-contract farmers.

However, with regards to food production, non-contract farmers allocated more arable land averaging 4 to 4.2ha while contract farmers allocated less (3.6 to 3.8ha). This places non-contracted growers at an advantageous position where they have to rely on own-food production as a result of the amount of land they commit to food production when compared to contract growers. Fieldwork evidence also shows that both contract and non-contract growers place more land under maize production when compared to other food crops



such as groundnuts, sweet potatoes, sugar beans and roundnuts. Non-contract farmers, for example, grew maize on 1.9ha which is higher when compared to contract farmers (1.6ha), while groundnuts were grown on 0.4ha and 0.3ha respectively in the same year.

**Figure 3: Contract and Non-Contract Farmers' Tobacco Output Per Hectare**



Source: SMAIAS Contract Farming (CF) Survey (2017)

### Contract Farming Differential Livelihood Impacts

Although critics of contract farming raise concerns of loss of farmer autonomy, immiserisation of small-scale farmers and indebtedness on the part of small-scale growers, our survey assessed contract farming livelihoods in terms of income returns, food consumption patterns, farmer indebtedness as well as asset accumulation. As reported in Table 1, contract farmers derive better average net incomes (US\$7065) when compared to non-contract farmers (US\$3202). Although there are such income differentials, we must also point out that the average input costs are higher among contract growers (US\$1317) when compared to non-contract farmers (US\$1021). However, if a comparison of average net income is to be considered, contract farmers retain better incomes from tobacco production. Additionally, gross margin for contract farmers is higher than non-contract farmers.

**Table 1: Incomes By Contract Farmers**

Farmers	Average Gross Income	Average Total Cost	Average Net Income	Gross Margin %
Contract	8382	1317	7065	84.3
Non-Contract	4223	1021	3202	75.8

Source: SMAIAS Contract Farming (CF) Survey (2017)

True to the assertion that contract farming households are most likely to be food insecure, the two-districts study found that there have been more of contracted households facing food shortages when compared to non-contract households. During the 2013/14 agricultural season, 13.2 percent contract farming households reported facing food shortages, a proportion higher than that for non-contract farming households (7.7 percent). The number of contracted households facing food shortages remained significantly higher (11.3 percent) in the 2015/16 agricultural season than non-contract growers (9.3 percent).

With regards to food sources, the study shows that both contract and non-contract farmers meet most of their food requirements through own food production. Contract farmers (100 percent) and non-contract growers (99 percent) ranked own food production as a major source of food.

### Farmer Indebtedness

Credit availability under contract farming arrangements has been a main motivating factor in attracting small-scale farmers to engage in contract farming. However, despite this, contract farming also brings with it challenges of farmer indebtedness, which, according to CF critics, is likely to further pauperise farmers (*see Clapp 1989*). It is further argued that indebtedness exposes small-scale farmers to exploitation because of their inability to disentangle themselves from the partnership. However, survey evidence shows that the majority of contract farmers (92.3 percent) were able to service their loans, whereas a smaller percentage (7.7 percent) were unable to pay their debt. From the farmers who were unable to repay the debts, 50 percent

of the cases were resolved through the court system, while 25 percent of the cases were resolved through arbitration and traditional leaders respectively. However, apart from the interventions of various institutions stated above to resolve conflicts, an official with one of the tobacco merchant companies stated that “usually we give the farmers who will have failed to pay loans another year to repay the loans instead of taking them to courts” Interview with Key Informant, 22 March 2017). It is, however, crucial to categorise the farmers who failed to repay debts and those who persistently face food shortages as being adversely incorporated into the markets through the contract farming system.

### Asset Accumulation

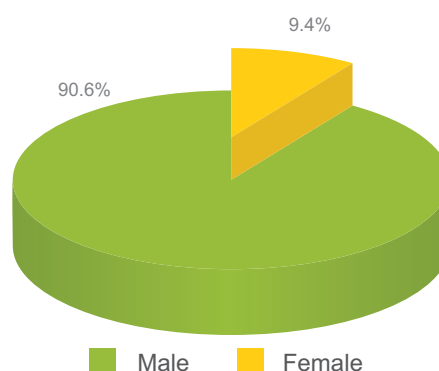
The survey also examined the impact of contract farming on asset accumulation patterns among small-scale farmers. Evidence indicates that asset accumulation was higher among contract farmers in comparison to non-contract farmers. The difference in investment patterns was noticeable on vehicles, where 60.4 percent contract farmers owned them as opposed to 25.6 percent non-contract tobacco growers. Tractors and irrigation equipment which are critical in agriculture were purchased more by contract farmers, 26.4 percent and 30.2 percent respectively. Amongst non-contract farmers, only 8.2 percent households owned tractors while 19.5 percent invested in irrigation infrastructure. The above findings highlight that, although contract farming can be exploitative, it can also be used as a tool for accelerating asset accumulation by small-scale farmers.

### Contract Farming and Gender Dynamics

Looking at gender and contract farming, survey findings show that female participation in contract farming arrangements is still very low when compared to males. Only 9.4 percent of women were engaged in contract farming and this could be a result of issues to do with access

to land, because historically, and even to the present day, land has been more accessible to men than women (Chingarande 2004). Our study in Mozambique on sugar out grower schemes also reflected a low participation of females in contract farming arrangements (Chambati and Mazwi 2017). The low participation of women in contract schemes was reinforced by the recent gender blind fast track land reform programme, whose agenda was only focused on redressing the skewed land imbalances between blacks and whites. As a result, males were the major beneficiaries of the land expropriation. The limited access to land as the means of production hinders women's participation in any agriculture economic activity to this day. This largely explains why females are under represented in contract farming.

Figure 4: Male-Female Contract Farming Participation



Source: SMAIAS Contract Farming (CF) Survey (2017)

Further analysis of male-female contract farming income differences indicates that males earn more income than females. However, in comparison, female contract farmers earn higher incomes than female non-contract farmers. Similarly, male contract farmers earn more income than male non-contract farmers.

### Conclusion

Changes in the agrarian structure reconfigured agrarian finance, resulting in tobacco production being largely driven by the contract-

based production. Motivating small-scale farmers to enter into contracts is the lack of alternative finance, although our study also shows that a significant proportion of households are pulling out of contracts due to their unfavourable terms.

Our survey shows that farmers enter into contract farming arrangements to enable them have access to inputs, extension services and better output prices. The majority who have pulled out of contract farming cite a variety of reasons such as failure to meet production requirements, higher input costs and low output prices. While the study shows significant investments made by contracted farmers, the scale of farmers pulling out of contract farming arrangements, as well as the food insecurity, were observed in a number of households, suggesting that contracted farmers are adversely incorporated into global markets. Contract farmers place more land under tobacco production than food, which raises serious concerns that it could threaten food security among the poor farmers. The study also notes that households under contract farming deploy more family labour and work extended hours when compared to non-contract farmers, to perform various tobacco production tasks, giving rise to farmer self-exploitation.

However, despite problems brought by contract farming, contract farmers obtain better incomes compared to non-contract farmers. Similarly, with such better incomes, contract farmers were found to accumulate more assets than non-contract farmers. This indicates that the contract farming production model could be key in asset accumulation among small-scale farmers.

## Implications and Recommendations

### Input Markets

While the emergence of contract farming has clearly contributed to the resurgence of the tobacco sector, it should also be similarly

pointed out that a fairer input supply system where farmers rely on mobilising their own resources can be developed. An example of such a model is the Kenya Tea Development Corporation (KTDC) where farmers have come together to mobilise their own resources for the purchase of their own inputs and selling of outputs. The self-reliance on inputs will positively impact on small-scale farmers' farmgate prices.

### Drafting of Contracts & Producer Associations

The non-involvement of small-scale tobacco growers in the drafting of contract documents results in iniquitous power relations skewed in favour of contracting firms. The use of contracts drafted in English can lead farmers to entering into a contractual agreement which they have little understanding of.

The exit of contract farmers in tobacco contract farming arrangements witnessed in 2013 should therefore be seen as a result of farmers' lack of knowledge about details of contract farming agreements and the risks involved. Furthermore, the fact that a certain class of poor farmers fails to service their loans extended to them by buyer firms, implies that there is a greater possibility of smallholder farmers being stuck in a debt cycle. This warrants the establishment of strong producer associations within the sector which represent the interests of small-scale growers. The Producer Associations will also be required to put in place market information systems and public campaigns on contract farming information to teach the tobacco smallholder farmers about different forms of contract arrangements.

Charging high input costs and low output prices in tobacco contract farming leaves farmers worse off. The company-driven deductions can downgrade farmers to wage earning agricultural labourers. Hence, a suitable contract farming legislation is required so that the rights of farmers are enforced in the event of disputes between the smallholder farmers and the buyer firms.



This also calls for the creation of an information database about the performance of parties involved in contract farming. This could help farmers and contracting firms to evaluate risks of entering into such arrangements with a potential partner. This can serve the interests of both parties.

## Gender and Contract Farming

The field surveys revealed low levels of female

participation in contract farming arrangements due to limited access to land. There is the need for government intervention to address issues of land access for women as a way of enabling greater female participation in the broader economic sector. Currently, the role of women in agriculture is restricted to labour provision which pays far less when compared to agricultural participation as owners of means of production.

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