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Medium-scale commercial agriculture and its role in structural transformation, wealth creation and enhanced livelihoods in an African context: Evidence from contemporary Zimbabwe

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ABSTRACT

Context and background

In recent years, there has been a notable resurgence of medium-scale commercial farms in Africa. However, scholarly focus on their capacity to drive structural transformation, promote inclusivity, empower communities, generate wealth, and enhance livelihoods has been limited. Specifically examining the Zimbabwean context, this article contends that medium-scale farms play pivotal roles in production, social reproduction, income generation, commercialisation, investment and capital accumulation. These contributions have been significant in facilitating structural transformation, wealth generation, and improved livelihoods.

Goal and Objectives:

The paper is primarily concerned with exploring the extent to which medium-scale commercial agriculture contributes to structural transformation, wealth creation and enhanced livelihoods in the Zimbabwean and wider African context.

Methodology:

The paper utilized a mixed methods research approach comprising of a survey and in-depth interviews which targeted 200 resettled households in two rural districts in Zimbabwe.

Results:

Medium-scale farms possess the ability to play a role in structural transformation, wealth generation, and improved livelihoods. Factors such as land access, a supportive macroeconomic and policy environment, robust and inclusive land governance, and efficient administrative institutions hold promise in addressing and mitigating the challenges related to poverty, disenfranchisement, marginalization, and inequalities in power and resource allocation.

Keywords:

Livelihoods, medium-scale farms, production, social reproduction, structural transformation, wealth creation, Zimbabwe

1. INTRODUCTION

In the past few years, agriculture has gradually regained popularity with an increasing consensus among scholars and policy makers that it is critical in the pursuit of the world development goals. Agricultural development and growth are now being considered as powerful tools in ending extreme poverty and ensuring shared prosperity. This is in a context where emerging evidence suggests that agriculture has the potential of feeding up to 9.7 billion people by 2050 and raising income among the poorest by between two to four times as compared to other sectors (World Bank, 2023). This comes in a background where it has been observed that the agricultural sector remains key for economic growth as it accounts for at least 4% of global GDP and in some developing countries it contributes more than 25% of GDP (World Bank, 2023). On the African continent, agriculture continues to be a critical sector which accounts for one third of the continents GDP, it provides a livelihood for 50% of the population with 70% of the workforce being directly involved in it (WEF, 2023). Globally, the agricultural sector is viewed as one of the key catalysts in achieving 12 of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDG's) set out in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. With agriculture being a pivotal sector, scholars and policy makers on the African continent, are now convinced that the sector has utility in triggering economic prosperity, contributing to infrastructural development, availing employment opportunities; eliminating extreme poverty, malnutrition and dependency; and contributing to food security. For them, the sector has immense, untapped potential to contribute to economic prosperity as it can revitalise rural Africa while curtailing dependency on food imports, but there are challenges.

Recently, the world has been confronted by an interlocking systemic and idiosyncratic crisis which has not spared the agricultural sector. It has placed agricultural driven growth, poverty reduction and food security at risk. The multiple crises have included disruptions caused by the Covid-19 pandemic, extreme weather conditions (due to climate change); ecological threats and biodiversity loss; the persist outbreaks of pests and diseases; conflicts (as exemplified by the invasion of Ukraine by Russia); increased neo-liberal orientation in agrarian systems and other challenges which have put livelihoods, human welfare and wellbeing at risk. The Russia and Ukraine conflict in particular and sanctions placed on Belarus stand out as contemporary examples of the global interlinkages that exists and how a crisis in one part of the system can have negative consequences on other parts. The conflict and sanctions have negatively impacted on agriculture in Africa and have resulted in disruptions in global energy supplies and food markets resulting in a surge in in the prices of energy, inputs and food (AGRA 2023; EU 2023). The global supply chain of agricultural inputs especially fertiliser was disrupted, negatively impacting on the agrarian sector. This has been in a context of unsustainable resource use, political crises, geopolitical tensions, elite capture of political processes and resources, and increasing power asymmetries which have eroded state legitimacy, worsening an already precarious situation as States embark on a lethargic macro-economic recovery in the face of multiple crises (UNRISD, 2023). These challenges have impeded on agricultural growth and stimulated higher food prices and growing hunger while concurrently increasing disparity, vulnerability and unsustainability. This has collectively impeded hope for the possibility of an equal, just and sustainable African future.

Due to these multiple challenges, a global food crisis has emerged, and it has escalated. Estimates were that in 2023, 205 million people across 45 countries did not have enough food and their lives were at risk (World Bank, 2023). The crises have come at a time when all in not well on the African continent which has 60% of the worlds uncultivated arable land but spends a staggering US\$78 billion of scarce foreign currency on food imports each year. A high percentage of its population, which stood at 20% in 2022 faced hunger compared to other regions in the world. This translated to approximately 257 million people who also bore the highest brunt of the burden of malnutrition (FAO, 2022; Dongyu, 2022). The challenges facing the continent paradoxically come in a context where the continents agricultural potential remains largely untapped, but poverty and food insecurity persist. Projections are that there will be an increase in undernourished people on the continent from 240 million in 2015 to 320 million in 2025. The challenges facing the continent are illuminated by net food imports which are projected to rise due to demographic factors like population growth and urbanisation from US\$35 billion in 2015 to over US\$110 billion in 2025 (AfDB, 2016). The United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA) indicates that Africa's annual food imports will increase significantly by a factor of seven from US\$15 billion in 2018 to US\$110 billion by 2025 and by a factor of three from the current US\$43 billion (AGRA, 2023). The continent faces another problem as it continues being heavily reliant on small-scale farmers who contribute 80% of the continents food supply while still practicing subsistence agriculture (Hodder & Migwalla 2023). This is in a context where several factors contribute to the failure and underperformance of the agricultural sector leading to its poor contribution to the economy and a dismal food security and nutrition outlook. The failure of Africa's agriculture to reach its fullest potential and continued food insecurity can be attributed to the persistent use of outdated farming practices in some contexts, the low adoption rates of improved agricultural technologies, the continued practicing of monoculture, lack of crop rotation, poor soil management, poor infrastructure (which includes roads, storage and processing facilities), lack of access to markets, post-harvest losses, limited finance and credit facilities and lack of investment in technology and inputs (AGRA, 2023).

While the challenges facing the agricultural sector on the continent have persisted and become more complex in recent times, the sector however continues to be considered as key for economic transformation and an enabler of wealth creation and enhanced livelihoods (AFDB, 2016). Current food imports, while unfavourable for the African economy represent an often overlooked dynamic and have immense potential for the continent. The volumes of food imports represent a diverse untapped market for agricultural commodities. The African Development Bank (2016) estimates that Africa has the potential of generating an annual income of US\$100 billion per annum if it can capture the market of food imports. This is envisaged as potentially ensuring food security and broad-based economic growth. As the focus is increasingly crystallised on how agriculture can transform the continents economic fortunes a key term which has become a buzzword when it comes to the nexus between agriculture and the economy at national and continental levels has been 'structural transformation'. This term which has a long history and has been subject to much contestation. According to Mortensen & Pissarides (1994) it refers to the process whereby an economy grows and

improves as a consequence of the accumulation and reallocation of resources and inputs (labour, physical and human capital) between activities or sectors from less to more productive activities and within sectors from the less to the more productive units of production. From government policy documents and strategies at national and continental level, the issue of structural transformation has gained renewed traction as there is the conviction that the agricultural sector has the potential of contributing to structural transformation. This is considered as central to stimulating an inclusive and sustainable growth pattern that enables more people to benefit from higher productivity levels in more advanced segments of the economy (GoZ 2020). With the issue of structural transformation gaining increased traction in agriculture at national and continental levels, questions are arising on whether engaging in agricultural production activities in contemporary Africa has the potential of contributing to transformation as well as enhanced livelihoods and wealth creation. This is an area which this paper engages with focusing on the role of medium-scale commercial farms in the agrarian context of rural Zimbabwe.

For an African country like Zimbabwe, which in the past two decades has undergone an unparalleled and unprecedented land reform programme known as the fast-track land reform Programme (FTLRP), the issue of structural transformation and the role of agriculture in enhancing livelihoods and creating wealth has become of central focus. The FTLRP involved massive state led expropriation of agricultural land without compensation (for the land) making it become one of the biggest agrarian transformations in a single country in modern African history, triggering polemical and divisive debates which have persisted to date (Marewo 2019; Bhatasara & Hellicker 2018; Moyo and Chambati 2013). The FTLRP was a broad-based land reform initiative, undertaken to redress historical land imbalances which were a legacy of settler colonialism. Its primary objectives included redressing disparities in the land tenure regime and empowering the majority of the indigenous people who had been hitherto marginalised from owning, accessing and benefitting from the country's productive resources. It gave rise to a large cohort of indigenous medium-scale commercial farmers as it reconfigured the country's agrarian structure from a bi-modal to a tri-modal agrarian structure (Moyo, 2011). For this paper, it is this cohort of farmers which is of interest. The paper is crystallised around trying to better understand the role of these medium-scale commercial farms in the country's reconfigured tenure regime and the role of agriculture in spearheading emergent commercialisation trajectories, facilitating accumulation and as a catalytic agent for socio-economic transformation and development. The nature of these emergent medium-scale farms will be discussed in greater detail in sections below, but at this juncture it is sufficient to note that they are landholdings of five to over 100 hectares (Jayne, et al. 2016). While they have a long history as a product of the colonially led model of rural development in Africa, until recently they had been relegated to the sidelines with small-holder farming being prioritised and a preferred regime of choice. This is changing and recently that they have emerged as a preferable land tenure regime of choice (Jayne, et al. 2019). Emerging scholarly literature has shown the increasing dominance of medium-scale farms which are being presented as viable alternatives that can potentially transform local and national economies and as key enablers in wealth creation and enhanced livelihoods. This paper engages with these issues as it employs a political economy approach to explore the experiences of medium-scale farmers in two rural districts in Zimbabwe. The political economy

approach is a critical conceptual tool that allows for a systematic analysis of institutional structures, formal and informal rules governing the political positions of elites and the consequences of elite policymaking and decision-making for the poor (Poole, 2011). It was selected as it is useful in studying and understanding social relations particularly the power relations that mutually constitute the production as well as consumption of resources. It is the study of control as well as survival in social life (Mosco 1996:24). The approach is critical in understanding the interconnectedness between politics and the economy and how this implicates with the distribution of power and resources as well as the dynamics of tensions and outcomes of this distribution (Chipenda 2023).

The aim of the paper is thus multi-fold, but the primary objective is to understand the possibilities of medium-scale farmers in contributing to structural transformation, wealth creation and enhanced livelihoods. It does this in a wider context while also interrogating policy trajectories in contemporary Zimbabwe and how these are implicating on the livelihoods and wellbeing of rural farming households. To better understand these issues, the paper is focused on the current land tenure and land governance regime in the country with a special focus on land ownership access and control. It also looks at agricultural policies and the politics of inclusion and exclusion and how this has implicated on the productive and social reproduction capacities of medium-scale farmers, investment and re-investment dynamics, commercialisation dynamics, capital accumulation in the countryside and how all these aspects are linked to the State's vision of industrialisation, employment creation, opportunities for wealth creation, enhanced rural livelihoods and agricultural transformation. All these issues are looked at as the paper provides an integrated and analytical discussion that answers the question: To what extent can medium-scale commercial agriculture contribute to structural transformation, wealth creation and enhanced livelihoods in the Zimbabwean and wider African context? The next section briefly looks at the study area and research methods.

2. CORPUS OF DATA AND RESEARCH AREA

The study was informed by a survey undertaken in the rural districts of Goromonzi and Zvimba in rural Zimbabwe between July and November 2022. The data which is presented in this paper is the result of a wider survey undertaken in a research project by the DSI/NRF SARChI Chair at the University of South Africa aimed at better understanding the social policy dimensions of land and agrarian reform from a transformative social policy perspective. For this paper, the primary focus is at looking at how land and agrarian reforms impact on human welfare and wellbeing as well as their productive and reproductive capacities. The study was largely interpretive, and it employed a mixed methods research approach. A survey questionnaire was the main data gathering instrument which was administered to 200 respondents in the medium-scale farming sector popularly known as the A2 model and small-scale farming tenure model popularly known as A1 in the resettlement areas created by the FTLRP. The survey questionnaire had over 1500 variables, and it probed a wide range of issues which included farmer profiles, household demographics, agricultural production activities, asset accumulation, agricultural investments, social relations and institutions, social reproduction dynamics among other key thematic areas. The empirical data gathered through the survey questionnaire was considered sufficient in providing insight on the role of medium-scale farms in the

local and national economy as well as their potential contribution to structural transformation, wealth creation and the enhancement of livelihoods.

As indicated earlier, the research was undertaken in Goromonzi district which is located in the Mashonaland East Province and Zvimba District which is located in the Mashonaland West Province of Zimbabwe. These two districts which are similar in many respects are located in agro-ecological region II which is one of the best in the country with high annual average rainfalls of between 750-1000 mm and temperatures ranging from 15°C to 24°C. The two districts have different soil types, with rich soils predominating making them suitable for diversified agricultural production activities. They are suitable for both crop and livestock production and can be seen as being significant contributors to the country's food production levels and exports. In the next section a brief synopsis is provided on medium-scale commercial farms in the wider African and Zimbabwean context. This will provide a background for the subsequent discussion on their utility in structural transformation, livelihood enhancement and wealth creation.

3. MIDDLE-SCALE COMMERCIAL FARMS IN THE AFRICAN AND ZIMBABWE CONTEXT

As the paper is focused on middle-scale commercial farms it is prudent to briefly look at the concept of middle-scale farms in general in the African context and in Zimbabwe in particular. In Africa, middle-scale farms have a long history, going back to the colonial period. They arose at a time when the continent was undergoing a crisis of reproduction in its rural areas. This was particularly discernible in the regions of Eastern and Southern Africa where during the colonial period there arose an urgent need for social and economic stability in the native reserves. In these native reserves, which were a creation of the colonialists as they pursued an agenda of separate development and dispossession, there emerged a crisis of reproduction which was attributable to a toxic combination of rapid population growth (in marginal areas), land expropriation and the repressive colonial policies (Rutten, 2001). In response to the crisis, literature highlights that the colonial administrators undertook major structural reforms. There was witnessed an initiative to develop a class of rural producers, and these became the medium-scale farmers who were tasked with the responsibility of contributing to agricultural production, creating rural employment and spearheading transformation in the indigenous rural communities. This marked a rural development trajectory which however became problematic as it benefitted a few who became the rural elite, and this was in a context where there was much nepotism and cronyism. The implication of this was that it consequently consolidated and reinforced the landlessness of the majority of the indigenes whose only option became to sell labour and they inadvertently became a part of the settler capitalist economy, albeit under exploitative conditions. A consequence of these structural changes was the proliferation of poverty and inequality as the development trajectory failed to achieve the intended outcomes (Sorrenson 1967, 1968).

The colonial led rural development model with medium-scale farms at the center was thus not successful. It was only later after half a century that they have re-emerged, and they began gaining

prominence from around 2000. This is an interesting development as middle-scale farms have for decades been relegated to the sidelines by small-scale farms which have smaller land sizes and have constituted most farms in Africa where they have been widely accepted as a pathway for achieving economic transformation and reducing poverty (Jayne, et al. 2019). This is however changing as middle-scale farms are emerging with an increasing recognition of their utility and dominant scale of farming in many African countries (Jayne, et al. 2019; Muyanga, et al. 2019). In the contemporary context, it has been noted that current trends point out that middle-scale farms are likely to become the dominant in the African context (Jayne, et al. 2016). They are shown as having a heterogeneous nature which gives them distinct identities, occupations and entry pathways into commercial farming making them unique when compared with small-scale commercially oriented farms or highly capitalised farms and estates owned by multinationals (Jayne, et al. 2019; Shonhe, et al. 2020). The dominance of middle scale farms is exemplified by Ghana and Zambia where it is reported that they account for more land than small scale farms (Jayne, et al. 2016). In Kenya and Zambia, it is reported that medium-scale farmers own more land than the small- and large-scale farmers combined (Muyanga, et al. 2019; Jayne, et al. 2019). In Malawi, it is reported that between 2000 and 2015, the size of middle scale farms has almost doubled with an increase of 49.1% (Ansew, et al. 2016).

When we look at the African continent, it is worth noting that the emergence of middle-scale farms has differed. In Zimbabwe and Kenya for example they emerged through the development of resettlement schemes. In Ghana and Nigeria, they have been a result of rural land consolidation as successful smallholder farmers buy out other smallholder farmers who would be struggling. In Zambia and Tanzania, there was witnessed the purchase of blocks of land from outside (Jayne, et al. 2019; Muyanga, et al. 2019; Shonhe, et al. 2021). This is an important highlight of the dynamics of land concentration as there have been witnessed new land ownership and land tenure regimes which are a consequence of the accumulation of land by those with smaller plots through local land markets or acquisition of land by outsiders through political and other connections (Shonhe, et al. 2021). When we look at the development of middle-scale farms, the 1980's and 1990's stand out as a period where there was witnessed structural policy reforms which saw the removal of barriers to private land ownership. The rise of global food prices, the rise of land markets, an increase in local and international investments, the rapid increase and growth in African cities, the increase in opportunities in agro-food systems and value chains, the increase in rural opportunities and the privatisation of customary lands have all cumulatively contributed in different ways to the emergence of middle-scale farms and given the character which they have today. It is worth noting that the increase and rise of middle-scale farms is an issue that has been a subject of scholarly interest as scholars have sought to make sense of their emergence. As indicated above, different explanations have been proffered as contributing to their emergence. Poultin (2017) contends that as structural and economic change precede market forces, it means large and medium-scale enterprises will increasingly replace smallholder production. In some instances, these processes may be quickened by those with capital or connections who use them to gain access to land. This can potentially have negative distributional consequences and decision making on agricultural production activities, the acquisition of inputs and marketing and all of these tend to be guided by an underlying logic of profit

maximisation. Agricultural commercialisation dynamics are also singled out as contributing to the transition of small to medium-scale farms. Smallholders shift from semi-subsistence to semi-commercial and full commercial farming as the system gears towards profit maximisation. Through commercialisation, smallholders can be seen being complemented or partially replaced by medium or large-scale enterprises that are commercially oriented in nature (Poulton, 2017).

In the case of Zimbabwe, medium-scale farms in the contemporary context need to be understood in the context of the FTLRP. The FTLRP was undertaken from 2000 and it was a broad-based land and agrarian reform programme which was pursued by the State to redress historical land imbalances that were a legacy of settler colonialism. Colonial land injustices had sidelined the indigenes from governance and development process and consequently this had cut them off from the land which was an important source of livelihoods and prosperity (Tom & Banda 2023). Through the FTLRP there was witnessed the transfer of land from the largely white owned large scale commercial farming sector (LSCF) to mainly blacks in the newly created A1 and A2 sectors. This effectively reconfigured patterns of landownership, implicating in different ways on social differentiation, accumulation and class formation (Moyo, 2011). In just over a decade, the FTLRP had seen 5.8 million hectares of land which was owned by 4500 white farmers being compulsorily acquired and allocated to 145 775 A1 farmers. Another 3.5 million hectares of land was acquired and allocated to 22 896 A2 farmers (Moyo 2011:498). This meant that the country's land tenure regime was changed from a bi-modal to a tri-modal agrarian structure. It now comprises of A1 and communal area farmers in the former native reserves who occupy 25.8 million hectares of land; medium scale farmers comprising of the A2 farmers and farmers from the old native purchase areas who occupy 4.4 million hectares of land and the remaining few LSCF and estates which are on 2.6 million hectares of land (Moyo 2011:512). The radical transformation of the agrarian structure has had implications on landholding patterns, land-use practices, markets, social organisation, agrarian relations, land utilisation, social reproduction in rural Zimbabwe among other dimensions (Chipenda 2022a, 2022b). Understanding the emergent agrarian structure has been of scholarly importance as it provides insight on rural political dynamics and the linkage currently existing between the different agrarian classes and farm sizes (Moyo 2011, Scoones 2010).

In Zimbabwe the emergence of A2 farms can be traced to the land policy of 1998 where the model was proposed as an alternative model that would ensure the continuation of commercial agriculture outside the remaining LSCF's. The scheme represented land allocations in which there was a political class compromise that sought to address the needs of the middle class. This included civil servants, the security sector, businesspersons, ruling class officials among others. The A2 model thus benefitted diverse demographics, and this is an issue which over the past few years has been subject to much debate and contestation. The argument was that the A2 sector represents elite capture of the FTLRP by cronies of the ruling party and there was a lot of patronage and nepotism that was at play which determined who benefitted through the scheme. This narrative has been disputed as some research findings suggest that although the sector benefitted the elite, it also benefitted diverse groupings and it was not only political considerations and connections which allowed one to benefit

(Moyo, et al 2009; Scoones, et al. 2010). In assessing the whole FTLRP, there is also the argument for the need to look at it as a wholesome process that ensured beneficiation according to ones means and capacity. This meant that those who did not meet the requirements to benefit under the A2 model did so under the A1 model which largely benefitted the landless, poor peasants, and the unemployed in the communal and urban areas (Moyo, et al. 2009; Matondi 2012; Scoones, et al. 2010). For individuals to be allocated A2 farms, they had to demonstrate they had the requisite experience and capital. They were required to present a business plan in a technocratic allocation process overseen by officials at higher levels of government, making it distinctly different from those overseeing allocations in the A1 scheme. In the Zimbabwean agrarian context, these A2 farmers have over the past few years begun playing important roles in agricultural production activities that have become critical in the emergent tri-modal agrarian structure. They are in many ways distinct from the subsistence-oriented peasant farms, the remaining LSCF and estates as they have created a niche for themselves and become critical actors in the country's agrarian sector. This is a dynamic sector which in the past few years has undergone changes in response to socio-economic and political trajectories. Their role has increasingly come under the spotlight as emphasis is being placed on the country's pro-poor economic growth trajectory which has firmly put agriculture at the center of transformation and achieving sustainable socio-economic growth and development.

4. THE PERCEIVED CONTEMPORARY ROLE OF AGRICULTURE IN ZIMBABWE AND THE IDEA OF STRUCTURAL TRANSFORMATION

Before looking at the role which medium-scale commercial farms are playing in structural transformation, wealth creation and enhanced livelihoods, it is imperative to lay a foundation on the Zimbabwe's policy context and the role of agriculture in contemporary times. In recent years, it can be noted that the country's fiscal and other developmental policy trajectories have put a lot of emphasis on the nexus between agriculture and structural transformation. The idea of structural transformation needs to be understood in a context where agricultural systems are seen as becoming more capital intensive, more productive and better integrated within other sectors of the economy through markets with the boundaries between agriculture and manufacturing becoming less distinct (Kangasniemi, et al 2020). Structural transformation is said to occur in a context where there is a discernible shift in resources from the less productive sectors either through upgrading within the sector or across sectors (McMillan, et al. 2017). In the agricultural sector there is witnessed a requirement of agricultural production growth which becomes dependent on the use of improved technologies and the greater use of improved inputs. These in turn improve productivity of land and labour. Critical in this trajectory is remedying labour, land and financial market facilities which impede not only on the adoption of technologies, but also the efficient allocation and use of resources. In this sense agriculture in low-income societies absorbs most of the labour, generates most economic output in contrast to high income societies characterised by a relatively smaller but more productive agricultural sector (Barret, et al. 2017). Structural transformation is thus witnessed when there are transitions aimed at ensuring efficiency and maximum utilisation of resources. Binswanger-Mkhize, et al (2010:122) point out that successful structural transformation is important for

economic growth, poverty reduction and rural development. They put the idea of structural transformation into perspective by indicating that:

...by moving workers from lower to higher productivity activities, accelerates economic growth. During the transformation, productivity in agriculture will slowly increase as labour leaves the sector, while food prices and hence agricultural profitability increase, stimulating technological change and investment. Ultimately, at the stage of advanced economies, the shares of agriculture in output and employment will approximate each other, as will incomes across the sectors. Agriculture will have become just like any other sector of the economy.

In the Zimbabwe context, over the past few years the idea of structural transformation has gained momentum and is quite commonplace in government policy documents and strategic plans. In understanding structural transformation trajectories currently being pursued by the Zimbabwe government, it is worth reflecting on the country's political transition which occurred in 2017, which has in different ways influenced current policy trajectories, and the thrust towards structural transformation. In 2017, the country's long serving leader Robert Mugabe was ousted and replaced by his deputy Emmerson Mnangagwa in what many viewed as a military coup which was cleverly disguised as a party leadership renewal initiative which was endorsed by Parliament. Upon assuming the Presidency, Mnangagwa immediately embarked upon a seemingly different policy trajectory from his predecessor which was anchored upon promises of economic revival, poverty reduction, and dealing with the scourge of corruption which had been identified as crippling the State and contributing to poverty. The Mnangagwa administration from the onset portrayed itself as reconciliatory and committed to a local and international re-engagement agenda as it embarked on a policy agenda which was neo-liberal in orientation (Chipenda, 2022a). This neo-liberal policy agenda which was initially spearheaded through policy interventions through the Transitional Stabilisation Programme – 2018-2020 (TSP) aimed at addressing economic challenges and distortions in the financial systems while reigning in inflation (GoZ, 2020). The TSP has since been replaced by the long-term National Development Strategy NDS 1 – 2021-2025, which is a five-year medium-term strategy aimed at realising the country's vision 2030. The aim of the strategy has been primarily to entrench macro-economic stability which is necessary for economic recovery and growth conferring opportunities for wealth creation and growth (GoZ, 2020). The strategy, heavily influenced by country's western trained Finance Minister, a maverick intellectual brought in by the Mnangagwa administration to promote the government's new neo-liberal agenda and to realign the country's macro-economic priorities to the needs of global capital (Mkodzongi, 2022:3). It recognises structural transformation as a key priority. This is portrayed as important, especially in a context where the country aspires to make progress in the attainment of the Sustainable Development Goals especially SDG 8 and the country's Agenda 2030 vision. The policy trajectory of the country factors in several strategies considered key in attaining the set goals and priority is placed on promoting inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment, decent work for all and achieving higher levels of productivity through diversification, technological upgrading and innovation with a focus on high value added and labour-intensive sectors (GoZ 2020, 2022).

As the agricultural sector is considered as being a key sector of the economy hence it has also been targeted. The TSP, NDS1 and successive budgets since 2017 show the Zimbabwe government singling out agriculture as one of the key sectors in sustaining pro-poor growth and development and it is touted as having the potential to contribute to structural transformation through value addition and beneficiation (GoZ 2020, 2022). In government documents, there can be seen a focus and commitment towards developing and strengthening existing value chains, creating linkages with large corporates, and identifying quick win value chains. Emphasis is placed on transforming the agricultural sector using strategies anchored in innovative technologies and 'good agronomics' aimed at rebuilding capacity, meeting national requirements, supporting economic growth and increasing the incomes of households. In the 2023 national budget, the government is very clear that through agriculture it seeks to promote production and productivity, transform agricultural activities into viable business enterprises and to reduce the import bill which is dominated by agricultural products (GoZ, 2022). For the government the agricultural sector is presented as a vehicle for achieving structural transformation as it endeavours to transition from a commodity driven economy to a diversified resilient economy which is underpinned by numerous interventions aimed at promoting value addition to primary commodities (GoZ, 2022). To put this vision into context, when we look at Zimbabwe's agricultural sector, there can be seen to be a number of contemporary initiatives that have been put place with an underlying objective of structural transformation and by extension the generation of wealth and enhanced livelihoods. The prominent initiatives have included the Zimbabwe Horticulture Recovery and Growth Plan (HRGP), the National Enhanced Agriculture Productivity Scheme (NEAPS), the Presidential Rural Horticulture Development Programme, the Tobacco Transformation Plan, the Presidential Community Fisheries Scheme, the Presidential Youth Heifer Programme, the Climate Proofed Presidential Inputs Scheme (*Pfumvudza/ Intwasa*), the Presidential Goat Scheme, Agricultural Mechanisation Scheme among others (GoZ, 2022). These different initiatives are aimed at transforming the agricultural sector and ensuring that it contributes to economic growth, poverty reduction and rural development.

Contemporary policy trajectories which are underpinned by a neo-liberal in orientation and places structural transformation at the centre were highlighted as critical by the country's Finance Minister who put the vision of the policy thrust into perspective by indicating that:

The desired structural transformation from a commodity driven economy, into a diversified resilient economy is being achieved through interventions which promote value addition of primary commodities, diversify the local product range and exports as well as the adoption of innovative technologies (M. Ncube quoted by Tome, 2022)

It is in light of these contemporary policy trajectories and the vision of the government that we explore the role of medium-scale commercial farmers and ascertain the extent to which they are critical players in structural transformation, wealth generation and enhanced livelihoods. Results from the study are outlined and discussed below.

5. THE NATURE OF MEDIUM-SCALE COMMERCIAL FARMS AND HOUSEHOLD DEMOGRAPHICS IN RURAL ZIMBABWE

To investigate and better understand the potential of middle-scale farmers to contribute to structural transformation, wealth creation and enhanced livelihoods, it was considered critical to look at the nature and realities of the middle-scale farmers in the study sample. This included looking at a range of interrelated issues which were inclusive of year of land allocation, origins of land beneficiaries, land tenure documentation, household demographics, levels of education and professional agricultural training among other issues. Having this background knowledge was considered from a political economy perspective as critical in laying a foundation of gaining insight on the redistributive nature of the FTLRP and the very basis upon which productive and social reproductive activities are being undertaken which have income generation and enhanced livelihood outcomes.

Half of the study sample comprised of 100 middle-scale commercial farmers of which 85 were males while 15 were females and they were allocated land in Goromonzi and Zvimba Districts. The first issue which the study looked at was to ascertain the year in which they had been resettled. Looking at this issue was considered a critical aspect in highlighting the redistributive nature of the FTLRP and to some extent tenure security dynamics. This touches on a thorny issue when it comes to the FTLRP. There has always been a debate on issues of tenure insecurity under the FTLRP with a fear that resettled farmers would be evicted just like their predecessors as the whole programme was highly politicised, unregularised and plagued by cronyism, capture, patronage, nepotism and corruption (Chipenda 2019). From the study it was observed that most of the middle scale commercial farmers at 33% had been resettled in the year in 2003 and in 2022 they still occupied the land. This was followed by the year 2002 with 31%, 2004 with 18% and 2001 with 6%. The other years where farmers reported being resettled were 2005, 2006, 2008, 2009, 2012, 2013 and 2018 where between 1-3 farmers were resettled each year. The findings provide us with a picture on the year when the medium-scale farmers were resettled and the period when they started engaging in agricultural production activities. The findings suggest that medium-scale farmers have been on the land for over two decades. This provides insight on the dynamics of tenure security and experience in farming activities. It also shows that between 2001 and 2018 land resettlement has been an ongoing process in the country, with the last farmer who was resettled reportedly being allocated land in 2018. In terms of land tenure documentation, all of the farmers reported having government issued tenure documents recognising them as the principal land beneficiaries with usufruct rights. They were possession of 99-year leases issued by the government, and these had been signed by the Minister responsible for lands and agriculture.

Having established the year of allocation and the tenure documents which medium-scale farmers have; it was also considered prudent to have insight on the area of origin of beneficiaries. This is another critical aspect from a political economy perspective which is useful not only for understanding the redistributive aspects of the FTLRP, but also class dynamics in relation to land beneficiation and as shedding light on the farmers backgrounds. It was observed that in terms of origin, most of the medium-scale farmers (77%) had originated from urban areas. This was followed by communal areas (11%), the old resettlement areas (9%) and lastly the old LSCF (3%). The

overwhelming number of urbanites who dominate this tenure regime is attributable to the selection and allocation processes outlined in preceding sections where emphasis was on a technocratic approach which prioritised one's capacity and experience. Findings suggest that while allocation was biased towards the urban elite, there was also a measure of diversity as persons from the overcrowded communal areas, the old medium-scale farmers from the former native purchase areas and farm workers from the LSCF also benefitted. This created a cohort of a medium-scale farming class comprising of persons from diverse backgrounds which created socially differentiated communities which scholars have sought to better understand over the past few years. It is these persons from diverse backgrounds who can be seen undertaking agricultural production activities as a new cohort of medium-scale farmers in rural Zimbabwe.

A more detailed summary of the characteristics of the medium scale farmers in the study sample is presented in the Table 1 below.

Categories	Age	Number	Percentage
Age Categories	36-49 years	18	18
	50-60 years	59	59
	Above 61 years	23	23
Level of Education	No formal education	0	0
	Some primary education	0	0
	Completed primary education	4	4
	Some secondary education	12	12
	Completed secondary education	20	20
	Completed advanced level education	7	7
	College education	28	28
	University degree	29	29
Employment Status	Private sector	24	24
	Civil sector	19	19
	Uniformed forces	17	17
	Self employed	1	1
	Not formally employed	39	39
	No formal training	74	74
	Certificate in agriculture	2	2

Formal training in agriculture	Master farmer certificate	5	5
	Advanced master farmer certificate	3	3
	Diploma	13	13
	Degree	3	3
Other household members with agriculture qualifications	Yes	40	40
	No	60	60
Family size categories	5 and below	82	82
	6-7 members	12	12
	Above 7 members	6	6

Table 1. A summary of the characteristics of medium scale farmers

Source: Author fieldwork (2022)

Table 1 above presents some important information which is useful in providing insight on the nature of medium-scale commercial farming households that participated in the study. It shows us that the majority of farmers are aged above 50 years, with the 50–60-year-old category being dominant with 59% of respondents. This raises significant issues in relation to generational questions in Zimbabwe’s resettlement areas, an issue explored by Chipenda and Tom (2020) as the beneficiaries of the FTLRP are gradually become aged and some of them deceased. In such a scenario, questions on succession and inheritance are increasingly becoming an integral part of the country’s ‘land question’. The table also highlights the levels of education which the respondents have managed to reach with a significant number having attained tertiary education (29%) and college education (28%). Some of the beneficiaries reported managing to complete secondary education (20%). This provides important information that challenges narratives that land reform beneficiaries are largely uneducated, illiterate and therefore lack the capacity to gain knowledge or be trained in agriculture. This has fuelled the perception that they are therefore incapacitated to produce. Linked to this is the observation that due to high levels of education, the cohort of medium-scale farmers in the study are employable and some were allocated land while they had gainful employment elsewhere, and some never relinquished their position for various reasons. In the study it was thus observed that some of the farmers are employed with a large number holding senior managerial positions in the private sector and civil service. Since being allocated land, some of the farmers have continued to be employed as they are still under pensionable age and cannot risk losing benefits by retiring prematurely. The fact that some of the farmers juggle multiple roles raises questions relating to competency, commitment, and ability to balance diverse roles. This has been a decades long issue and critique of the FTLRP where beneficiaries were accused of being ‘mobile phone’ farmers who undertook farming activities while confined to their urban residencies, places of employment or elsewhere. This was construed as indicating lack of commitment to undertake agricultural

production activities and their lack of confidence in tenure security and a land reform programme which was uncertain and highly politicised.

Professional training in agriculture by land reform beneficiaries is also shown in the Table where it can be observed that most of the farmers and household members do not have any professional training in agriculture. A minority however are in possession of the master and advanced master farmer certificates as well as diplomas in agriculture. This highlights an often-overlooked dimension of training which implicates in different ways on knowledge, competence and ability to meaningfully engage in agricultural activities. The findings suggest that there exists a gap in relation to training. The table also summarises household sizes and this gives an overview of persons currently benefitting from the land and agricultural production activities. It reminds us of the redistributive nature of the FTLRP and how it benefits not only beneficiaries but households as well. For the study, Table 1 is thus useful in providing background information on some often-overlooked demographic, household and characteristics of the middle-scale commercial farms which is important in understanding factors influencing agricultural production activities and by extension wealth creation, accumulation and the enhancement of livelihoods. It provides a strong background for the next section that interrogates agricultural production by the medium-scale farmers.

6. LAND SIZE CATEGORIES, AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTION AND INCOME GENERATION

The preceding section has given insight on some aspects of the medium-scale farms including year of settlement, land tenure documents, origins of land beneficiaries among other issues. To understand the utility of medium-scale farms to structural transformation, wealth creation and enhanced livelihoods it is important to look at agricultural production dynamics. Agricultural production is undoubtedly at the center of livelihoods and wealth creation and an active catalyst for structural transformation. Bearing this in mind, the study looked at agricultural production activities being undertaken by the farmers and income generation dynamics from a political economy perspective. Such an approach was considered useful to better understand power relations that mutually constitute the production and consumption of resources. The starting point was to look at land sizes (which are important for classification) and the type of agricultural production activities which the farmers are undertaking. In the study it was noted that in the middle farming sector, land sizes range from 10 hectares to 297.8 for an individual. This was significantly large when compared to the small-scale sector where it was observed that land sizes were ranging from 6 to 19.5 hectares. The total land size for the 100 farmers was 8 006 hectares with a mean of 80 hectares. When it came to class land sizes, 95% reported having land sizes of above 25 hectares with 4% in the 16–20-hectare category while 1% were in the 6–10-hectare category. For the study, having access to land was considered as being a redistributive outcome of the FTLRP with a potential of enhancing the productive capacities and livelihoods of beneficiaries. In pursuit of this line of thought, the study was interested in unearthing land sizes in relation to total cropped area. From the onset it was observed that the total cropped area when juxtaposed against the total land size was low even if one took into consideration that some of the land was reserved for grazing, the homestead and areas reserved for

other activities. The challenge of low cropped areas has persistently dogged the FTLRP. Against a total land area of 8 006 hectares, it was observed that the total cropped area was 1 202 in 2019, rising to 1 434 in 2020, 1 508 in 2021 and 1 710 in 2022. This represents an increase of 42% between 2019 and 2022 which was reasonable but overall very low. Having understood the land size categorisation and utilisation which is an important foundation we now focus on agricultural production dynamics.

The FTLRP as has been shown in the preceding section was redistributive and it benefitted a cohort of individuals from diverse backgrounds across the different tenure regimes. Having noted this, the focus on the study was on answering the research questions which focused on the extent to which middle-scale farms have the potential to contribute to structural transformation, wealth creation and enhanced livelihoods. Looking at agricultural production dynamics was considered insightful in answering the question. The issue of agricultural production has been one of the contentious issues that has dominated the debate on the FTLRP (Moyo, et al. 2009; Scoones 2010) and it has been used as a yardstick to ascertain the success of the programme as comparisons have been made between the old LSCF and the resettled farmers. For this study, understanding production and income generation trends from agriculture was considered critical in ascertaining the extent to which the farms and engaging in productive activities have enhanced the productive and reproductive capacities of beneficiaries and allowed them to meet their subsistence and commercial need while serving the local and national economy. In this context, production and social reproduction trajectories are essential pre-requisites for developmental transformation.

To get insight on agricultural production dynamics the study looked at 13 major crops, but for this article focus is on maize and tobacco. In the Zimbabwe context, these two crops are very important for subsistence and commercial purposes and analysing their production trends is useful for insight on agrarian realities particularly in relation to income generation and food security. Table 2 below provides a summary of agricultural trajectories of maize and tobacco from the 100 medium scale farmers from Goromonzi and Zvimba. It shows the total cropped area from 2019 to 2022, output from 2021 to 2022 and income realised from selling some of the agricultural produce.

Categories		Cropped Area (Ha)			Output (kgs)		Amount Realised (US\$)
	District	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2019-20	2020-21	2019-20
Maize	Goromonzi	612	718	814	3 870 600	4 512 500	611 550
	Zvimba	549	644	746	1 382 700	1 688 500	317 610
Total		1 161	1 362	830	5 253 300	6 201 000	929 160
Tobacco	Goromonzi	115	123	112	196 625	243 360	313 471
	Zvimba	37	33	27.5	46 000	45 300	148 880
Total		152	156	139.5	242 625	288 660	462 351

Table 2. Agricultural output and sales

Source: Author fieldwork (2022)

The Table 2 above highlights some important information which is useful in helping us not only to understand the productive activities being undertaken by the farmers and their outputs, but by extension it shows us the contribution of agriculture to income generation and enhanced livelihoods. The farmers are shown as producing millions of kilogrammes of maize, which is generating income which is cumulatively worth over a million dollars each season. In addition to the income generation objective, maize is an important cereal that is used for subsistence purposes. In the study, maize was reportedly being used for multiple purposes inclusive of household consumption; commercial purposes; as a safety net to support relatives, friends and those in need in the local communities; and as a mode of payment in lieu of cash for work undertaken on the farms. It could be seen serving multiple functions with the most important being food security and income generation, thus contributing to enhanced livelihoods and promoting the wellbeing of land beneficiary households. Thus, despite the relatively low levels of cultivated land which was indicated as a major challenge in the preceding section, the farmers could be seen engaging in the production of maize and realising a reasonable yield. In addition to maize production, it was also observed that there is an increase in engagement in the production of tobacco, a lucrative cash crop which in the Zimbabwe context has for years been dominated by the smallholder sector. The increased participation in tobacco production by the medium-scale farmers is a welcome development given its high returns and its contribution to local and national economy especially in a context where it is one agricultural commodity that generates significant foreign currency for the country as an export crop and a raw material for the manufacturing sector. 47 farmers reported producing tobacco and the income generated was US\$422 351 in the 2019-20 season, US\$598 839 in the 2020-21 season and US\$406 860 in the 2021-22 season. This illustrates the contribution of agricultural production to income generation by the medium scale farmers.

In addition to crop production, it is worth highlighting that farmers also engage in livestock production for both subsistence and commercial purposes. Medium-scale farmers in the study reported keeping three main livestock which are cattle, goats and chickens. Cattle were singled out as being important given their utility as a recognised store of wealth and a means of social protection especially in times of crisis. They were said to be important for production and social reproduction as farmers use them for draught power, income generation and as a source of food and nutrition. This is in addition to their traditional and cultural significance which make them very important in indigenous African societies (Chipenda 2019, 2022b). In the study, 80% of the respondents reported that they were cattle owners. In 2019-2020 they had 1 784 cattle which increased to 2 037 in 2020-2021 and 2 222 in 2021-2022. The number of cattle owned by middle class farmers is significantly higher when compared to small scale farmers where 59% reported owning cattle and they had 447 in 2019-2020, 547 in 2020-2021 and 617 in 2021-2022. In the study livestock ownership especially, cattle were taken to be an important but often overlooked dimension of how medium-scale commercial farmers utilise land by keeping livestock which are important as a source of wealth and livelihoods and contribute in different ways to enhance their wellbeing.

The preceding discussion highlights some critical aspects worth highlighting which contribute to answering the research questions under interrogation. Engagement in agricultural production

activities by medium-scale farmers with an increasing commercial orientation has contributed to income generation and more importantly it shows a gradual transition from subsistence to commercially oriented activities. This has positively contributed to household welfare and wellbeing. The production trajectories also indicate a resonance with the prevailing increasingly neo-liberal oriented national policy trajectory which emphasises production for both subsistence and commercial purposes. The contribution of medium-scale farmers to the agricultural value chain is becoming more and more evident, and this is a critical dimension in a context where there is the push for the agricultural sector to contribute to structural transformation. The gradual transition from subsistence to commercially oriented farming can be seen as having financial benefits which are not only important for the local and national economy but also for the household where significant contributions are made which have utility in overcoming multi-dimensional poverty. While in this section issues of income generation from agricultural activities have been highlighted, the next section provides a more detailed insight.

6.1 Income Generation

From the agricultural production activities being undertaken by the medium-scale farmers in the study, it was noted that they are generating income which is reasonable in a Zimbabwean context ravaged by economic uncertainties and hyperinflation which ranks amongst the highest in the world. This income can be seen allowing them to contribute to the household as well as local and national economy. For the study, the generation of income from agricultural production activities was considered important in relation to its implications on structural transformation, wealth creation and enhanced livelihoods. It was with the idea of trying to better understand income generation dynamics that the study explored income generation exclusively from agricultural production activities. These outcomes from a political economy approach are useful in highlighting the nexus between engagement in agricultural production activities, income generation, wealth creation and enhanced livelihoods. These are issues of critical importance especially when investigating the outcomes of land and agrarian reforms (Tom and Banda 2023). In the study it was noted that gross income generated from all agricultural activities by the 100 medium scale commercial farmers in the 2019-2020 season was significant at US\$2 132 914 with a net income of US\$1 374 812 and household per capita net income with a mean of US\$3 207 in the 2019-20 season and US\$3 962 in the 2020-21 season. During the same period the sum of the household per capita net income was US\$320 726 and US\$396 293 respectively. Most of the medium-scale farmers (56%) were in the US\$1001-5000 household per capita net income category and this was followed by 17% in the US\$5 001-10 000 category, 16% in the US\$101-500 category and lastly 2% in the highest category of more than US\$10 000. In the 2020-2021 season, the gross income from farming had increased and was reported to be US\$2 495 105, the net income was US\$1 660 595, and household per capita net income was US\$396 293. As in the previous season the highest household per capita income category was the US\$1001-5000 with 45% farmers, the US\$5 001-10 000 category had increased significantly and had 45% of the respondents. The US\$101-500 had 14% while the US\$501-1000 had 10% of the farmers. The category of those with a household per capita income above US\$10 000 had increased to 5%. This indicated that substantial gains that had been made if the two seasons are looked at comparatively.

Income generation and market participation by the middle scale class farmers shows that they are contributing to the local and national economy. This is contributing towards the drive for transformation as advocated for by policy with medium-scale commercial farming having a discernible contribution to wealth generation and enhanced livelihoods. From the study it was observed that these farmers are not only utilising income generated to meet household expenses but some of the income is being reinvested in agricultural production activities in a cyclic manner as is shown in sections below.

7. ACCUMULATION AND ENHANCED LIVELIHOODS: A SOCIAL REPRODUCTION DIMENSION

In exploring the potential of medium scale farmers in contributing to structural transformation, wealth creation and enhanced livelihoods, it is critical to look at social reproduction dimensions. When we look at the realities of medium-scale commercial farmers, in particular their agricultural production activities, it can be noted that there are discernible social reproduction outcomes. The concept of social reproduction is broad and includes the different ways in which a society improves and sustains itself. While biological reproduction is often overemphasised, there are also some dimensions which include capital formation, accumulation, income, and in an agrarian context there can be found the labour dimension, improvements in agrarian practises and production (Tom and Banda 2023:90). For this paper all of these issues are of importance and assist in different ways in understanding the contribution of medium-scale farmers to transformation, livelihoods and income generation. In this section, emphasis is placed on capital formation and accumulation and their role in facilitating transformation and enhanced livelihoods. Chipenda (2022b, 2023) has observed that in Zimbabwe's agrarian context, capital formation has been discernible in the FTLRP context, finding character in the accumulation of productive assets which have become key in outlining the investment and production characteristics that are now evident on the resettlement farms. This has occurred in what can be best described as a cyclical manner which has allowed resettled farmers to acquire the requisite resources that have capacitated them and allowed them to engage in agricultural production activities and to generate income. Part of this part income can be seen being reinvested in agricultural production activities. This has in different ways contributed to the enhancement of their productive capacities. For respondents in the study, it was observed that accumulation of assets has not only broadened their income generation capacities, but it has also enhanced their productive activities and by extension their social reproduction. This has resulted in the improvement of livelihoods while contributing to transformation and wealth creation. To better understand these dynamics and to search for empirical evidence, the study focused on asset accumulation and the foundation of this exploration was on income being generated from agricultural production activities. This is an issue which was discussed in the preceding sections and one which respondents indicated as being the basis upon which they now have the capacity to acquire assets and to hire labour.

In the study it was observed that medium-scale farmers have managed to accumulate both productive and non-productive assets with proceeds from their agricultural production activities. As highlighted above, accumulation of these assets especially the productive assets was seen contributing to the capacity of the farmers as they are able to acquire the requisite resources in order

to undertake their activities. Figure 1 and Figure 2 below provide a summary of handheld tools as well as power driven tools and infrastructure which were acquired by the farmers from income exclusively generated from agriculture. All of these assets are used for different agricultural activities and are essential instruments required for production. In a context where emphasis by the State is being placed on the urgency of farm mechanisation, it was observed that there is investment in power driven instruments. The investment in mechanisation is still quite low although it is significant if compared with that of smallholder farmers. A summary of productive assets and infrastructure acquired by the medium-scale farmers is summarised in Figures 1 and 2 below.

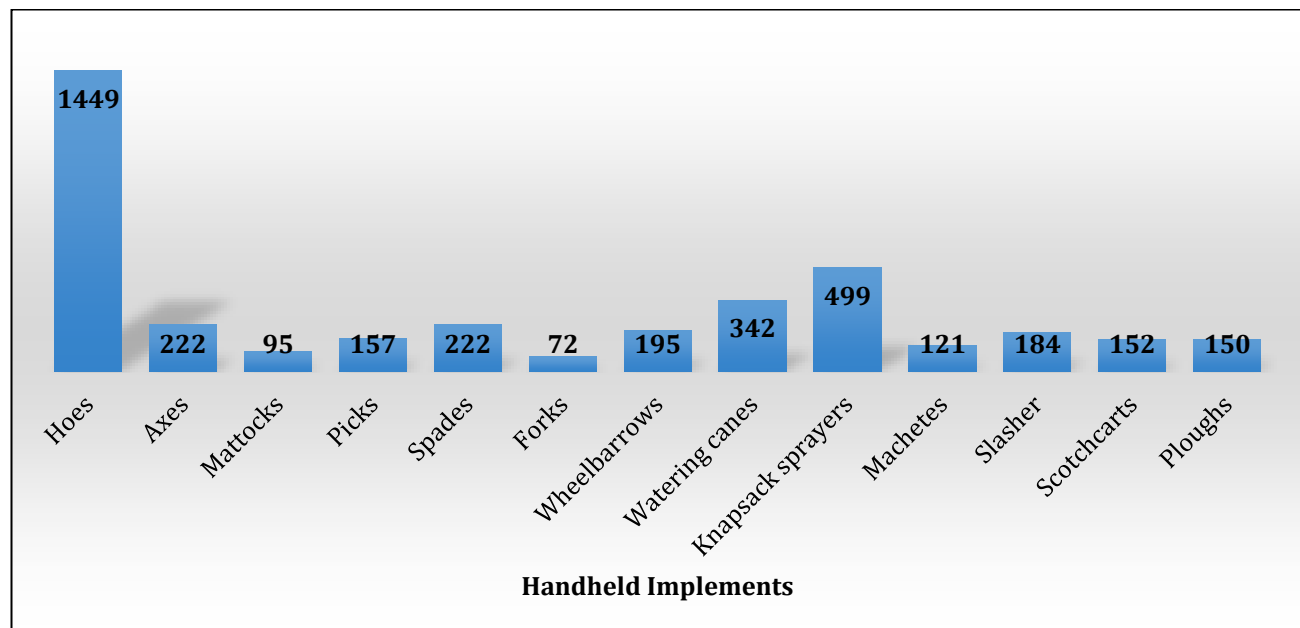


Fig. 1. Hand-held assets accumulated (N=100)

Source: Author fieldwork (2022)

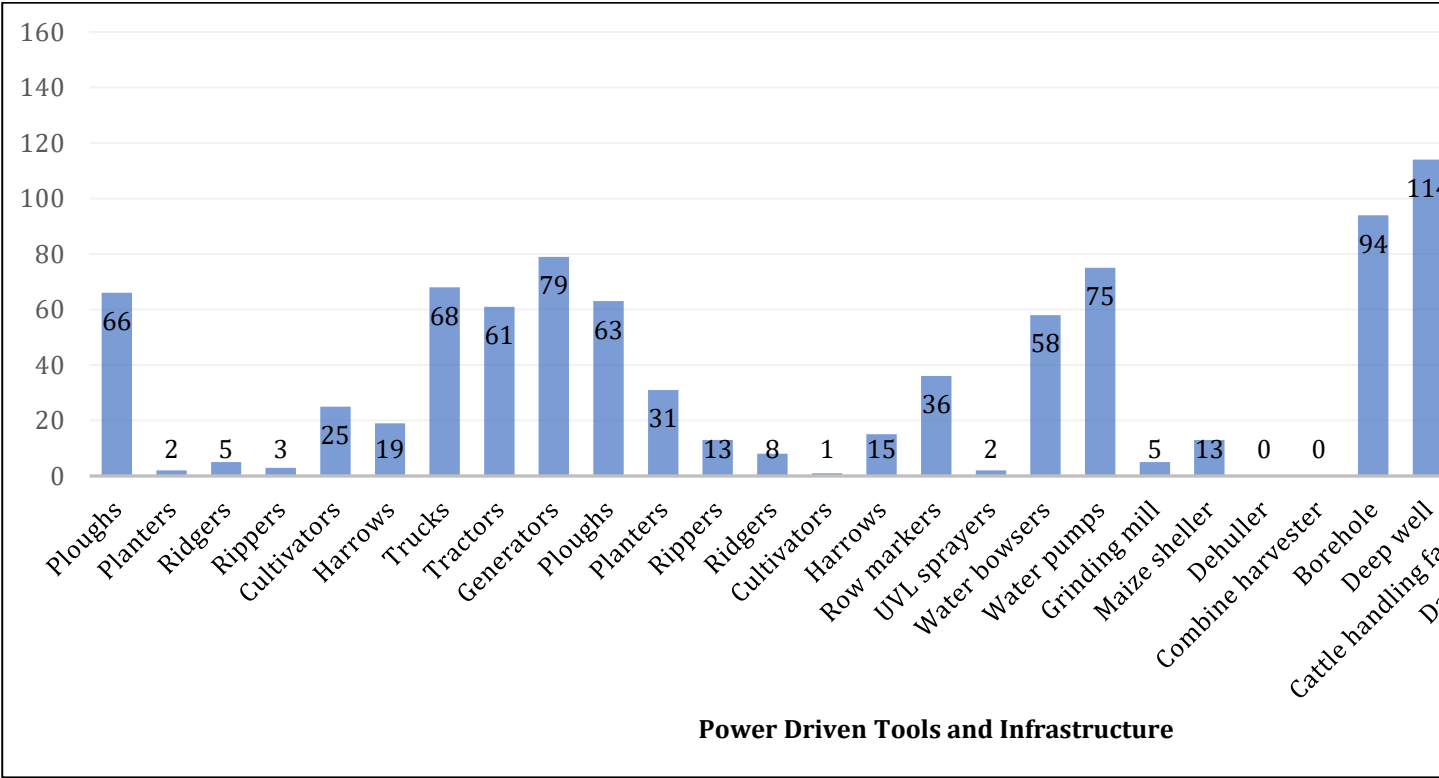


Fig. 2. Power driven assets and infrastructure accumulated (N=100)
Source: Author fieldwork (2022)

The two figures above show that middle class farmers are investing heavily in both handheld and power-driven instruments with farm infrastructure also being dominant. The Figures give us insight that proceeds from agricultural production activities are not just for consumption but are being reinvested on the farms to facilitate further engagement in agricultural production. What is particularly encouraging is a commitment to purchase power driven instruments which are critical for agricultural production as farmers transition from subsistence to more commercially oriented activities and seek to upscale their levels of production as well as product quality. This is in a context where the government has put in place policies which prioritise and emphasise the urgency of farm mechanisation. For this study, investment in assets and accumulation of assets highlights the commitment which medium-scale farmers are making as they endeavour to become high agricultural producers and their progress in capacitating themselves to have the requisite resources to undertake productive activities in a professional and business-oriented manner. The acquisition of assets and the building of infrastructure is thus important in highlighting investment that is being done on the resettlement farms as well as mechanisation trajectories. These contribute in different ways to transformation, wealth creation and livelihood enhancement if taken in a context where they contribute to production, value chains and market participation.

Closely linked to the acquisition of these assets is the capacity of the medium scale commercial farmers to hire permanent and casual workers. These workers are both skilled and unskilled and utilise the assets and infrastructure highlighted above as they work on the farms. In the study, it was observed that as the medium-scale farmers transition from subsistence to commercially oriented agriculture, they have concurrently reconfigured and expanded their labour force and are increasingly utilising hired labour. This has resulted in most activities having a commercial orientation as they have had to ensure they generate enough income to compensate hired labour. In the study, 63 reported hiring permanent workers while 37 had not, this was interestingly less than the smallholder farmers of whom 72 reported having permanent workers while 28 did not. When it came to temporary employees, all the 100 medium-scale farmers had them while 95 small-scale reported engaging them and five had not. It was noted that despite fewer medium-scale farmers having engaged permanent workers, the numbers of their employees were significantly higher. In 2020 it was 271, in 2021 it was 274 and in 2022 it was 278. Of these permanent workers in 2022, it was reported that 187 were males while 91 were females. The number of permanent workers in the medium-scale sector is high when compared to the smallholder farmers who during the same period reported having 135; 134 and 140 workers respectively and in 2022 there were 104 males and 36 females.

The medium-scale farmers could be seen as being heavily reliant on casual workers who are temporary employees who are hired for specific tasks which are usually paid on completion. The dominant tasks given to these workers include land clearing, digging, planting, weeding, application of fertilisers and pesticides, harvesting among other tasks. The monetary compensation for these tasks at the time of fieldwork ranged from US\$3 to US\$5. The medium-scale farming sector in the study reported engaging 2 371 casual workers in 2020; 2 480 in 2021 and 2 644 in 2022. This was high when compared with the smallholder sector which had 1 344; 1 447; and 1 526 casual

employees in the same period respectively. Having a high number of hired labour has meant less reliance on family labour in the medium-scale sector. The reconfigured labour regime that is emerging on the medium-scale farms has thus also become a critical dynamic which influences trajectories towards transformation, wealth creation and enhanced livelihoods. It does this in conjunction with other factors.

8. REFLECTIONS AND CONCLUSION

The research results presented in the preceding section are just a small proportion of the research findings from the overall research project, but they provide important insight on the current realities and the role which medium-scale farmers are playing in Zimbabwe's contemporary agrarian context. As was highlighted earlier, the country's increasingly neo-liberal agrarian policy trajectories which are premised on NDS1, prioritising transformation; commercialisation and market participation; transition from subsistence agriculture among other priorities can be seen as having put the medium-scale farming sector at the centre and made them key vehicles for agricultural production, economic growth, efficient and effective use of technologies, labour and resource utilisation. Support has thus been provided to the sector with more emphasis being placed on its commercial orientation, while for smallholder farmers the support which is provided has been largely agrarian welfare in orientation. Findings from the study suggest that the medium-scale farms have over the years gradually transitioned in response to these new imperatives and this has made them to be focal in the government's policy trajectories as they are positioned to contribute more to the national economy. In this context, it can be argued that the medium-scale farms have become one of the vehicles of structural transformation in a context where the agrarian sector has been singled out as key in the governments objective of transitioning to a middle-income economy by 2030. Medium-scale commercial farms in the study are shown as being important not only for the local but the national economy as they contribute to agricultural production for both subsistence and commercial purposes. They can be seen generating substantial income from their agricultural production activities, which is contributing to household welfare and improved livelihoods. When compared with smallholder farmers, the income which is being generated by medium scale farmers is significant and their household income categories are much higher when compared with smallholder farmers. Engagement in production and income generation is contributing to the accumulation of productive assets and in the study. These are in turn shown to be contributing to the vision of mechanisation and contributing to the enhancement of the ownership of resources which in turn contributes to the productive capacities of the farmers. This also illustrates, the importance and contribution of the medium-scale farms to transformation, wealth creation and livelihoods.

The study has shown that from the Zimbabwe experience, there are important lessons to be learnt. It reveals that the shifting economic and agrarian landscape has created new economic and livelihood opportunities for medium-scale commercial farmers and surrounding communities. It highlights that in rural Zimbabwe, there are discernible and diverse patterns of accumulation and agricultural commercialisation pathways premised on medium-scale farms and these are impacting in positive ways on livelihoods, asset ownership, agrarian labour relations and agricultural finance. They are implicating positively on the welfare and wellbeing of farming households and local communities.

Having access to land, a supportive macro-economic and policy landscape, robust and inclusive land governance, and administrative institutions are seen as having the potential for creating a land-based context which is transformative, inclusive, egalitarian, and empowering for citizens. Lessons from Zimbabwe demonstrate that despite numerous challenges, medium-scale farms have the potential to contribute to responding to the challenges of poverty, disenfranchisement, marginalisation, inequalities and inequities in power and resource allocation. These have proved to be a constant challenge in the post-colonial African context and evidence suggests that with the requisite support, medium-scale farms possess qualities necessary for spearheading agricultural transformation.

Specific aspects worth highlighting are the importance which medium-scale farmers are playing in enhancing social reproduction not only for their households, but to extended families and local communities. Their utility as vehicles for providing employment opportunities is another important example. This is shown by the empirical evidence where they are supporting many workers and their households to generate income and meet their social reproduction needs. Thus, from the study, there are discernible outcomes which from a political economy perspective suggest that medium scale farms have become central in the Zimbabwean context and have shown that with the requisite support they possess immense potential to contribute to structural transformation, wealth creation and enhanced livelihoods. The country's policy position and vision is very clear, and the role of the agricultural sector has been spelt out. Numerous interventions are currently in place aimed at enhancing the sector and as highlighted in this paper, medium-scale farms possess the potential to make important contributions. It thus remains to be seen going forward how the Zimbabwe government will continue to harness the potential of these medium-scale farms and ensure they live up to expectations in contributing to transformation, wealth creation and enhanced livelihoods objectives which are in tandem with current policy priorities.

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12. KEY TERMS AND DEFINITIONS

Livelihoods: Denotes the means or activities by which individuals, families and communities make a living to satisfy their daily needs and to survive.

Medium-scale farms: These are farms that occupy the intermediate position between the small-scale subsistence-oriented peasant farms and the large scale highly capitalized farms and estates.

Social reproduction: A concept, initially proposed by Karl Marx which refers to the reproduction of social structures and systems. Society is seen as being a connected whole with social processes being interlinked as production is at the same time a process of reproduction.