

# Smallholder Horticulture

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**J.E. Jackson,  
A.D. Turner  
and  
M.L. Matanda**



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# SOME SOCIOLOGICAL AND GENDER ISSUES IN SMALLHOLDER HORTICULTURE: THE DIVISION OF LABOUR, AND HORTICULTURE IN RELATION TO HOUSEHOLD WELFARE AND NUTRITION

T. Shava

*Hortico Produce, P O Box HG 697, Highlands, Harare, Zimbabwe.*

## ABSTRACT

Understanding sociological and gender issues is the key in developing the scale of horticultural production among smallholders. This paper is based on practical experience in working with smallholders in Zimbabwe, available information sources and personal experience from a communal upbringing. To date horticulture remains a small operation for most smallholders in Zimbabwe. Even in areas with irrigation facilities and well developed infrastructure, the scale of operation remains well below its potential. To understand this there is need to realize that horticulture is viewed by the smallholder as only one of myriad of other operations that demand his attention. The time and effort therefore given and the scale at which the operation is done depend on the importance rating attached to each enterprise. Horticulture, although a high input enterprise in labour and investment, still has a subsistence rating among many smallholders. With the high quality demanded for export it is rather viewed in terms of the hassle involved. Women smallholders find this more so as they have to shoulder more family responsibilities and jobs than their male counterparts.

## INTRODUCTION

Over the past ten years horticulture in Zimbabwe has experienced tremendous growth with production rising from less than 13,146 tonnes earning less than ZW\$40m pre 1989 to the present estimated 30,154 tonnes expected to earn ZW\$224m in 1994 (HPC 1994). This makes horticulture the fastest growing industry in Zimbabwe with an annual growth rate in US\$ terms of around 40% and overall contribution to the national economy of 1%. While it appears to be such a booming industry most of this growth has been enjoyed in the large scale commercial sector. The smallholders on irrigation schemes, co-operatives, individuals and individual communal farmers have barely got off the ground, being held up in web of factors; economic, political, legislative and sociological. A careful examination and understanding of these factors are critical in order to formulate policy and develop a strategy to promote growth of, and boost production in, smallholder horticulture. Attempts to examine independently each factor is difficult since no single factor is causative with a lot of interaction between factors. Each factor needs to be appropriately weighted and placed in the

whole picture to be examined correctly. These factors form the basis of this discussion. Case studies drawn from situations encountered during real life field work are included to demonstrate certain points.

## THE NATURE OF SMALLHOLDERS

Smallholders are of a different nature to large scale commercial farmers and must be viewed differently. Differences in financial viability and size are obvious. The approach to agricultural production is also different, particularly in respect to response to time factors and labour demands.

### **a. Time factors**

Smallholders experience serious time constraints and activities are prioritised according to their importance. Importance is based on the contribution an activity makes to household welfare in terms of income and nutrition, the amount of "hassle" involved and the labour demand. Horticulture among communal farmers and many smallholders is largely for subsistence, catering for household nutrition. Whereas this should not be the case with smallholders on irrigation schemes because of the money invested in irrigation, horticultural production has remained subsistence in nature. Excess is disposed of on the local market for cash needs. Horticulture is seldom seen as a profit generating enterprise and because of its subsistence nature has remained very small. In Zimbabwe there has been little effort made to develop smallholder horticulture beyond the subsistence level with most effort being directed towards staple food production.

### **b. Labour supply**

For all production the smallholder prefers supplying his own labour. He will not hire extra labour until strained to breaking point and beyond. He tends to struggle on his own for a long time before deciding to hire extra labour. The smallholder as a result tends to look at farming activities in terms of the hassle involved. This hassle-factor becomes very important in his choice of which crops to grow. The smallholder prefers a situation where all his crop enterprises combined give him minimum labour hassles.

### **c. Labour productivity**

In the smallholder situation it is the family who provide the labour. Smallholder labour does not behave like hired labour. The smallholder is both the boss and the labourer. On one hand enjoying the luxuries of the boss and at the same time sharing the pains of a labourer. In terms of productivity hired labour is more productive than own smallholder labour (UNDP/FAO, 1989).

### **d. Division of labour**

After dividing his time between work and a lot of other non-field and personal activities the smallholder remains quite strained between activities. As a result the total number of agricultural hours he has is much shorter than for hired labour. Normally after other necessary activities only five to six hours per day remain for farming. For women who shoulder many more responsibilities the number of farming hours may be even shorter, as a result of the time spent in collecting fuel and firewood, feeding the family

of farming and have a lot more time available to them. Paradoxically the women are nevertheless expected to carry out more of the farming operations than men. In most cases the men do the land preparation, planting and spraying leaving the women to do the planting, weeding, irrigation and harvesting. The men choose the "once off" duties allowing more leisure. The women remain with the more mundane, time consuming tasks. The horticultural garden as a result of these time constraints has not been developed to any size more than supplying the nutritional requirements of the family. Consequently in many places even where effort has been made to develop horticulture, and irrigation and good infrastructure exists, the scale of operation has remained lower than could potentially be achieved. A case encountered during field work helps to bring out how gender issues in terms of division of labour can cause serious production constraints.

Mundotwe Irrigation scheme located in Musiiwa communal lands in the Bindura district of Zimbabwe has two sections, the arable crops section and the horticulture section. The horticulture section is divided by a road into two almost equal sections. This effectively divides the growers into men on one side and women on the other. The interesting observations are the male side is very positive about work, they always personally call for duties, they have few complaints. On the other hand the female side seems less able to cope, sending in children in their stead. The women complain frequently. A simple deduction from this case is that men have fewer other jobs to do so have more time to put a bit extra into farming hence are more positive and are more content. The women are overloaded with extra responsibilities and so can not always personally attend to duties in the field and so send in children. They find it a hassle to do anything extra and are more discontented. Field crops with less hassles are a more popular choice than horticulture despite the higher potential from horticulture.

## THE STATUS OF HORTICULTURE IN SMALLHOLDER PRODUCTION

Cash crop horticulture has remained a low priority activity among smallholders mainly because it has not been seriously considered for its cash potential but only in terms of its nutritional contribution to the household. Consequently it has remained a very small scale operation, although a very important enterprise to the household, with minimal time and attention devoted to it. A look at a case in Mutoko demonstrates this.

In the 1992/3 drought which affected most of Zimbabwe, Hortico Produce were running a flower seed production project alongside an Agricultural Development Authority (ADA) - European Community (EC) sponsored fruit and vegetable project. When the drought hit, the farmers largely abandoned the flower seed project putting more effort on the vegetables with a food value. The flower project prospered despite this neglect and the farmers had a cash bonus at the end of the season from selling the seed. For horticulture to develop it has to change from its subsistence status to be viewed as a cash earner. As a general observation most of the places where the scale of horticulture has developed to any extent are either where conscious effort has been made by government or organisations and groups to develop horticulture or where droughts/overpopulation have forced farmers to use limited water and land as effectively as possible, forcing them into cash horticultural crops.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Export horticulture with its high input requirement needs a lot of support to develop. A holistic approach to improving the situation of the smallholder is one way to do it. There are three basic needs that should be satisfied to develop the smallholder in this way: time, money and technical support.

### **a. Time**

The following could give the smallholder more time to concentrate on the more important aspects of production.

- i) Mechanisation — means less time is spent on the land
- ii) Transport — a good system of transport means less time spent in movements to market produce.
- iii) Organised markets — linking up with well established companies may provide a ready and easy marketing system so less time is spent in seeking markets for produce. A good example is the ARDA/Mutoko set up, where growers simply deliver to their local ARDA packhouse.

### **b. Money**

The smallholder does not employ workers because he is trying to use a minimum input strategy. He is short of cash. Employing creates serious cash flow problems. Money is needed for other things - school fees, family welfare, hospital fees and leisure. Good cash returns from crops are a good incentive to encourage smallholders to employ labour. The farmer who is trying to minimize cash outflow by doing everything himself will not cope. Quality declines making the produce unsuitable for export. A "pay as you earn" loan system could also be used to encourage smallholders to produce and to employ, where inputs are loaned out to the growers at no initial cost and then later when crops start producing, loans are recovered from payments made up front to the growers.

### **c. Support**

Support can be given by working out systems to encourage production and export horticulture.

Training can be done for the smallholder but a thorough extension input is needed for the smallholder to achieve export quality. A vertical linkage with established companies like Hortico should also provide the strong technical support and training input that the smallholder needs to develop.

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