

**Economic Policy Reforms and  
Meso-Scale Rural Market  
Changes in Zimbabwe  
The Case of Shamva District**



**Edited by  
LOUIS MASUKO**

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**Chapter 7**  
Institutional Support Services and Economic Policy Environment for  
Rural Micro and Small-scale Enterprises: The Case of Shamva ..... 293  
*N. Matshalaga*

**Chapter 8**  
The Institutional and Economic Interface Between Small Towns and  
Rural Economy ..... 313  
*L. Masuko*

**THEME 4**

*Farmer Organisations within a Changing Economic Environment*

**Chapter 9**  
Coping with Economic Structural Adjustment: Farmer Groups in  
Shamva District ..... 351  
*Maria E.O. Arnaiz*

**Chapter 10**  
Structural Adjustment, Agriculture and the Role of Farmers'  
Organisations in Zimbabwe: A Meso-Scale Study of the  
Shamva District ..... 373  
*A. Sibanda*

## **Chapter 9**

# **COPING WITH ECONOMIC STRUCTURAL ADJUSTMENT: FARMER GROUPS IN SHAMVA DISTRICT**

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### **I. INTRODUCTION**

Smallholder agriculture in Zimbabwe stands out as one of the few success stories in sub-Saharan Africa. In the first five years after Independence, Zimbabwe's smallholder farmers increased their production of maize, the country's staple crop, from 8% to over 60% of national production (Rhorbach, 1988). Similarly, smallholder production of cotton, the country's second leading agricultural export behind tobacco, rose from less than 3% to over 50% of national production (Mariga, 1994).

The success of Zimbabwe's smallholder producers was partly due to state policies aggressively promoting smallholder agricultural development during the 1980s (Rukuni, 1994; Eicher, 1990). The parastatal marketing boards and ministries charged with developing smallholder agriculture, however, were constrained by limited manpower and financial resources from reaching many farmers. Farmer groups provided an efficient structure through which these state organisations could reach farmers. Farmer groups also provided services such as short-term credit and bulk marketing and transport which allowed their members to take advantage of the price and marketing incentives put forth by the Government of Zimbabwe (GoZ) (Muir, 1994). At the national level, smallholder farmers' unions successfully lobbied for favourable producer prices, greater access to credit and more marketing infrastructure in the communal areas (Herbst, 1990). The Zimbabwe experience illustrates how collective action by farmers is a necessary complement to the success of state-based development strategies (Bratton, 1986).

In 1991, the GoZ implemented its first Economic Structural Adjustment Programme (ESAP) in an effort to stimulate both economic and agricultural growth. Pursuant to ESAP, the GoZ introduced the following changes to the institutional framework that had previously provided the incentives for the smallholder production gains of the 1980s:

- the elimination of subsidies to government parastatals;
- the transformation of these parastatals into commercial companies;
- removal of restrictions on domestic and foreign marketing of agricultural commodities with the exception of white maize;
- removal of import restrictions on agricultural inputs; and

- de-controlling prices for domestically produced fertilisers (Chidzero, 1994; GoZ, 1990).

While ESAP may benefit smallholder farmers by allowing them to realise the actual market price of their production, dismantling the marketing board system promises to shift much of the cost of linking a broadly dispersed smallholder sector with a highly centralised manufacturing and processing sector to the farmer.<sup>1</sup> Increased information, bargaining and transportation costs as well as losses in economies-of-scale can negate much of the profit farmers may realise from higher producer prices (ZFU, 1994).

In Zimbabwe, smallholder agriculture accounts for more than 70% of total maize production and about 40% of total cotton production (MLAWD, 1995). Maintaining the productivity of that sector is important not only for national food security but also for economic growth (Moyo, 1995; GoZ, 1995). Recognising the important role played by farmer groups during the smallholder cotton and maize booms of the 1980s, both donors and the GoZ are again looking to farmer groups at the grassroots to mitigate some of the potentially negative impacts of ESAP on smallholder productivity (ZFU, 1994). However, a question remains as to whether these groups can successfully assist their members in maintaining or increasing production in a market-driven economy. This study therefore focuses on farmer groups, the services they provide, and the use of those services by members to maintain or enhance production.

Given the importance of smallholder maize and cotton production to Zimbabwe's economy, this study specifically looks at the role of farmer groups in maize and cotton production. The district is used as the spatial unit of analysis. Since the implementation of ESAP, the key levels of decision-making influencing the relative profitability of different small-scale production enterprises has moved from the national to the district. The district or meso-level now presents an ideal arena for investigating micro-level responses and outcomes to macroeconomic policies.

The study considers two interrelated hypotheses:

1. Local level or grassroots farmer groups will be more likely to, and effective at, organising bulking activities and consolidating members' demands. These activities require little financial investment but high levels of member cooperation.
2. National level organisations and their constituent units will be more likely to, and effective at, providing members' services that are not provided by other organisations. To provide a service such as the provision of market and price information to members requires high levels of financial investment but low levels of member cooperation.

A farmer group's effectiveness at organising an activity or service is evaluated in terms of members' use of the service or activity.

## II. ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK

In Zimbabwe, as in most other African countries, smallholder farmers reside in difficult environments characterised by the lack of transportation, communication and marketing infrastructure. Also, smallholder farmers mostly rely upon dryland agriculture making their production highly variable and risky. Consequently, their effective demand for goods and services can be both fragmented and erratic. These conditions conspire to discourage private sector actors from establishing businesses in smallholder farming areas (Amin, 1992).

The lack of commercial businesses in the rural areas depresses smallholder agricultural production in a number of ways. Farmers apply less than optimal rates of fertilisers and chemicals partly because the added costs of transport takes away from money set aside for inputs. Also, farmers face difficulties in getting fertilisers and chemicals in a timely manner since the scarcity of retail outlets means that demand often exceeds supply during critical periods of the growing season. In drought-prone areas, the timely application of fertilisers can significantly contribute to higher maize yields (Jayne *et al.*, 1993; Piha, 1992; FSR Unit, 1993). Finally, the monopsonistic conditions in the rural areas where a relatively small commercial sector services a large farming sub-sector gives retailers and buyers the power to set prices and leaves farmers as "price takers" (Ellis, 1989).

The empirical literature on farmer groups suggests that farmer groups can address the production constraints described above in three ways. First, by identifying and consolidating members' demands for goods and services, farmer groups lower the pecuniary and non-pecuniary costs to commercial actors of doing business with smallholder farmers thereby facilitating their engagement in smallholder areas (Bratton, 1986; Farrington and Bebbington, 1994). Second, farmer groups can directly reduce their members' production costs by organising bulking activities such as group transport and group purchase of inputs. These activities allow members to realise economies-of-scale they could not otherwise as individuals (Chanvunduka *et al.*, 1985; Zinyama, 1993). Also, by aggregating members' production through group marketing arrangements, farmer groups can increase members' bargaining power *vis-à-vis* buyers. Third, farmer groups can provide goods that are not provided by either private or public sector actors often because these goods possess some traits of a public good; these goods may be non-excludable and/or non-divisible (Uphoff, 1993). An important good that is not provided by the private sector because of its non-excludability but which is an important input to farm management decision-making is information on prices and markets (Bonnen, 1991). In the shift from a state-controlled to a market-controlled agricultural sector, this type of information can help farmers cope with a more complex and diversified production and marketing environment.

The three types of group activities described above require varying levels of organisational resources, and different types of groups may have a comparative advantage in organising different activities. Table 1 identifies the level of tangible and non-tangible organisational resources needed to (1) identify and consolidate members' demands, (2) organise bulking activities, and (3) provide information on markets and prices. Tangible organisational resources include financial, staff and other resources typically considered in classic organisational development theory (Robertson and Tang, 1995). Rational choice theory identifies non-tangible resources such as trust and shared values and norms as important for regulating member and leader behaviour to minimise cheating or shirking when co-operation is critical. The importance of non-tangible resources increases as the requisite level of inter-dependence rises in the provision of a good (Ostrom, 1994; Ostrom *et al.*, 1993; Schmid, 1987).

The value of this type of classification to the study of farmer groups and agricultural production is that it recognises the comparative advantage different types of farmer groups have in undertaking a given activity. Local or grassroots farmer groups should have a comparative advantage in carrying out activities requiring higher levels of member co-operation for two reasons. First, members tend to come either from the same village or neighbouring villages. Consequently, they often have a common history and share a set of values, norms and expectations which engenders trust between them. Second, members can employ rules and sanctions outside of the group to ensure that members and leaders co-operate to provide a good (Ostrom, 1990; Taylor, 1987). Higher level groups such as farmers' unions rely mostly upon formal rules and processes to structure relationships between members and between members and leaders. Consequently, the level of mutual trust in the group may not be very high. These groups, however, can marshal greater monetary resources than local-level groups giving them an advantage in organising activities that require high levels of financial and staff investments but low levels of member co-operation (Esman and Uphoff, 1984).

**Table 1: Group Activities and the Resources Needed to Carry Them Out**

	Tangible Resources	Non-tangible Resources
To consolidate fragmented demand	low	low
To organise bulking activities	low	high
To provide information on markets and prices	high	low

The above discussion suggests two inter-related hypotheses. First, local-level or grassroots groups will be more effective at organising bulking activities and consolidating members' demand; activities that require little financial investment



but require somewhat high levels of member co-operation. Second, higher-level groups and their constituent units will be more effective at organising activities that require considerable financial and staff resources but require little or no member co-operation such as the provision of market and price information to members. Effectiveness will be measured in terms of members' use of group services and the contribution of those services to maintaining or enhancing members' maize and cotton production.

### **III. RESEARCH SITE**

Shamva District is located in Mashonaland Central, approximately 100 km north-east of Harare. It is a high potential area for agriculture encompassing natural regions IIa, IIb and III. Soils in the district vary from shallow coarse-grained sand to sandy loams over sandy clay loams.

### **AGRICULTURAL ECONOMY**

Shamva's agricultural economy is a microcosm of the broader agricultural economy in Zimbabwe. Its agricultural sector comprises large-scale commercial farms as well as resettlement and communal area farms. Large-scale commercial farms occupy approximately 33.2% of all arable land with most located in the southern half of the district which is considered NR IIa. There are two communal areas which occupy about 33.6% of the district's arable land. Madziwa CA is located in the north whereas Bushu CA borders the commercial farming areas in the south-central. While Madziwa CA and Bushu CA are in relatively high potential areas (NR IIa and IIb), both suffer from significant land degradation due to high population densities (see Wekwete, this volume). Over 60% of the district's population resides in either Bushu CA or Madziwa CA compared to less than 15% in the commercial areas. There are three resettlement areas: Mupfurudzi I, Mupfurudzi II and Sanye, all located centrally in areas classified as NR IIb and III. Model A farms cover over 90% of the resettlement lands (Akwabi-Ameyaw, 1990). On the remainder, there are seven Model B resettlement schemes and an irrigation scheme.

The dominant smallholder production system is a mixed livestock-cropping system with maize and cotton as the primary crops.<sup>2</sup> Emergent smallholder crops include red sorghum,<sup>3</sup> sunflowers and tobacco (burley and virginia). Although vegetables and other horticultural crops are being actively promoted by AGRITEX and non-governmental organisations, it remains a minor crop grown in home gardens and used mostly for home consumption and supplementary income for household expenses. The lack of a reliable and sufficient water source poses the largest constraint to increased smallholder vegetable production.

Most of the large-scale commercial farms practise irrigated agriculture with production oriented towards export crops such as cotton, tobacco, horticulture,

soyabeans and wheat. The commercial farm sector also provides seasonal work to smallholder farmers in neighbouring communal and resettlement areas. To cope with labour bottlenecks during the harvesting period, a few LSC farmers have arranged with smallholder farmers to provide them with fertiliser on credit in exchange for their labour in picking cotton and soyabeans.

### **TYPES OF FARMER GROUPS IN SHAMVA DISTRICT**

Zimbabwe's three farmers' unions are active in Shamva district. The Commercial Farmers' Union (CFU) is represented through its producers' associations and commodity associations. The Zimbabwe Farmers' Union (ZFU) is represented by its grassroots units — district council, area/ward associations and village-level clubs. The Indigenous Commercial Farmers' Union has yet to develop its district-level structures but is represented by its president and members who operate farms in Shamva district.

A variety of grassroots or local farmer groups are active in Shamva district. Broadly, these groups can be divided into agricultural groups and non-agricultural groups. Non-agricultural groups comprise mostly women's groups organised around income-generating activities such as sewing clubs and poultry groups. While they do not deal directly with agricultural production, they are important because money earned through these groups is also used to purchase agricultural inputs for the upcoming season. Farmer groups directly involved in agriculture can be further divided into two groups: those that pool assets and those that access services provided by governmental, non-governmental or commercial organisations.

Groups that share labour, tools and/or draught power tend to be groups comprising women and/or resource-poor farmers. Groups that access outside resources such as loan groups, ZFU groups, producers' co-operatives and savings clubs tend to have wealthier members than asset pooling groups. These individuals have money for membership dues and other payments required to become group members. An exception to this, however, are AGRITEX training and information groups which require little or no dues from members but are used to access information on agricultural technologies and information (Bratton, 1986).

### **IV. MARKET DE-REGULATION AND FARMER GROUPS IN SHAMVA DISTRICT**

De-regulation of commodity and agricultural input markets did not significantly affect local markets in Shamva District until 1993. Previously, the parastatal marketing boards, particularly the Grain Marketing Board (GMB), COTCO and certain private monopolies performed all of the services related to production and marketing (e.g., input supply, credit provision, purchase of production and setting of prices). Since 1993, however, commodity and input markets have

become more competitive. For example, agents for manufacturing and processing companies, local millers and private traders now purchase maize directly from farmers. In cotton marketing, a second company, Cargill, now purchases cotton from smallholders in Shamva and its neighbouring districts (Masuko, this volume).

In Shamva district, increased competition for smallholder business and production has driven a number of commercial enterprises to provide discounts and other incentives to attract smallholder farmers. In most cases, however, farmers must form groups as a pre-condition for accessing these production benefits. For example, competition from Cargill has prompted COTCO to expand its loan group programme despite low repayment rates. From 1993-1996, the number of COTCO loan groups increased from 37 to 77, and the number of participating farmers grew from less than 2,000 to over 3,000.<sup>4</sup> Cargill offers grain bags on loan to farmer groups of 20-50 farmers. Chibuku Breweries, in an effort to increase its purchases of red sorghum from the smallholder sector, has offered farmer groups willing to grow red sorghum pre-planting prices that exceed GMB producer prices for white maize. Fertiliser, chemical and seed companies also offer significant discounts plus free transport to smallholder farmers willing to purchase as a group.

While market de-regulation and de-control of input prices has benefitted some farmer groups, it also threatens the viability of other farmer groups. For most local farmer groups in Shamva district, contributions and members' dues comprise the lion's share of monies available for group activities. However, increasing production costs coupled with reduced yields due to drought have left smallholder farmers with little or no money to put into group activities. For example, high transportation costs force Shamva's smallholder farmers to sell to middlemen at prices considerably lower than those offered by the GMB. A farmer explained that "the margin between GMB prices and middlemen prices is less than the cost of transport to the GMB depot". According to an AGRITEX agent, "farmer groups have become 'victims of ESAP'. The high cost of fertilisers coupled with stagnant producer prices has left farmers with nothing." Of the 15 producers' co-operatives registered in the district, only two are operational. Low repayment rates on loans made to members coupled with financial mismanagement contributed to the failure of the other 13 co-operatives.<sup>5</sup> The number of savings clubs in the district has also dwindled since farmers have little money left over to re-invest back into agricultural enterprises.<sup>6</sup>

Reductions in the budget of line ministries and other governmental organisations that support smallholder agriculture also work against some farmer groups. For example, the AFC has been steadily reducing the number of loans it provides to smallholder farmers groups partly because of low repayment rates but also because government has reduced the amount of money allocated for smallholder loans<sup>7</sup> (Table 2).

**Table 2: AFC Loan Groups in Shamva District, 1993-1996**

	1993-1994	1994-1995	1995-1996
<b>Madziwa</b>			
# loan groups	6	29	38
Repayments rate	80%	50%	45%
<b>Bushu and RA</b>			
# loan groups	15	38	20
Repayment rate	75%	30%	44%

The support AGRITEX and other governmental organisations give to farmer groups has decreased due to budget cuts. AGRITEX no longer provides savings clubs with savings books, an important tool for tracking members' donations. Community development workers as well as local government no longer provide the level of service that they had in the past.<sup>8</sup>

To summarise, market de-regulation and other changes to the context of smallholder agriculture in Shamva district has stimulated the formation of certain types of farmer groups and worked against the sustainability of others. Notably, commercial businesses have played a stronger role at providing incentives for group formation in response to a more competitive market but also in an effort to reduce their transaction costs of doing business with smallholder farmers. Farmer groups initiated by its members such as savings clubs, multipurpose groups such as producer's co-operatives and farmer groups supported by governmental organisations such as the AFC have faltered in the wake of economic structural adjustment.

## **V. FARMER GROUPS, ACTIVITIES AND MEMBERS' USE**

### **PROVIDING INFORMATION ON PRICES AND MARKETS**

The increasing complexity of commodity markets, and in particular, maize markets, has introduced a great deal of uncertainty into a farmer's decision-making. The ZFU Provincial Organiser for Mashonaland Central summed up the challenge now facing smallholder farmers:

With market liberalisation, the marketing and production of farming have become too complex. New programs are being implemented by the former marketing boards but farmers either do not know of them or they only have a partial understanding of the program rules . . . Overall, farmers have greater information needs with ESAP.<sup>9</sup>

For many smallholder farmers, the costs of gathering information on buyers, prices and markets discourage them from participating fully in the market. The ZFU Provincial Organiser explained:

In Shamva District, there are few buyers outside of the marketing boards. Most of the buyers are still located in Harare, so farmers are unaware of their prices, their demand for certain commodities, and their grading system. All these make marketing with private actors highly uncertain . . . In this case, they take themselves out of the market and go sell to the marketing boards at whatever price they'll offer because this is the tried and true way.

## **GROUP ACTIVITIES**

As suggested earlier, higher-level organisations are more likely to provide services such as the provision of market and price information than local groups because of the costs of gathering, aggregating and disseminating such information. In line with this proposition, this study found that the ZFU was the only farmer group providing this type of service to its members. The ZFU marketing department at head office put out a monthly marketing bulletin and a quarterly report on buyers and prices for members. At the provincial level, the provincial marketing officer organised marketing groups at the ward level to act as focal points for the dissemination of district-specific marketing information. None of the local farmer groups interviewed in the study provided this service with the exception of COTCO loan groups. These groups channelled to members changes in COTCO's prices and loan programmes as well as agricultural advice from COTCO's extension agents. COTCO subsidised this activity by paying for chairpersons' bus fares and giving them per diem so that they could attend monthly information meetings at Tafuna depot.

It is notable that ZFU village clubs were not active in gathering or disseminating price and marketing information to members. While the ZFU national office has a sizeable operating budget, its grassroots structures do not. The ZFU national office has access to over 50% of all members' dues, donor funds and levies collected on smallholder cops.<sup>10</sup> ZFU village clubs, on the other hand, retain only 5% of the \$20 annual fee collected from each club member. Based on an average club size of 23,<sup>11</sup> the typical ZFU club in Shamva District had an operating budget of \$92; just enough to pay for its committee members' bus fares to ZFU district meetings.

## **MEMBERS' USE OF SERVICES**

Table 3 summarises members' and non-members' use of farmer groups to access information on prices, markets and buyers. Only the responses of loan group members and ZFU members are presented because of the low level of response from other farmer group members. While the ZFU national office puts out a monthly marketing newsletter, a monthly magazine and a quarterly report on all companies who offer contracts for various commodities, very few of the ZFU members surveyed indicated that they used those services. Only 3% used the ZFU to access information on prices and none went to the ZFU to get information on buyers or markets. When asked if they had ever seen any of these publications,

ZFU club members said that they were unaware of such publications with the exception of the magazine. These results suggest that although the national office provided services that could assist its members, these services were not reaching down to the grassroots. A staff member at the ZFU national office explained that the ZFU did not have the money to produce enough marketing bulletins for all of its members. Rather, these bulletins were to be distributed to ward chairpersons who were then responsible for funnelling the information down to the village clubs.<sup>12</sup> "The problem is that the leadership at the [ward] area level is not very active and this can be explained by the lack of money. Committee members lack the bus fare to attend area council meetings." ZFU members, like COTCO and AFC loan group members overwhelmingly went to AGRITEX to get price and marketing information.

**Table 3: Use of Services to Access Information on Prices, Markets and Buyers**

<b>Information Sources</b>	<b>COTCO (n = 78)</b>	<b>AFC (n = 32)</b>	<b>ZFU (n = 35)</b>	<b>Non-group members (n = 97)</b>
<i>Access information on prices</i>				
ZFU	0%	0%	3%	0%
COTCO	14%	13%	0%	4%
AFC	0%	0%	0%	0%
AGRITEX	18%	31%	37%	10%
Other farmers, radio and other sources	32%	16%	23%	21%
Own initiative	4%	6%	9%	0%
Did not do	31%	34%	29%	55%
<i>Access information on new markets</i>				
ZFU	1%	0%	0%	0%
COTCO	6%	3%	3%	1%
AFC	0%	0%	0%	0%
AGRITEX	45%	59%	51%	27%
Other farmers, radio and other sources	14%	19%	11%	16%
Own initiative	1%	3%	3%	0%
Did not do	32%	16%	31%	55%
<i>Access information on new buyers</i>				
ZFU	0%	0%	0%	0%
COTCO	0%	0%	0%	0%
AFC	0%	0%	0%	0%
AGRITEX	26%	50%	34%	20%
Other farmers, radio and other sources	17%	22%	17%	10%
Own initiative	4%	0%	3%	6%
Did not do	54%	28%	46%	67%

Notably, about a third of all loan group and ZFU members and more than half of all non-group members did not try to access price or market information. This supports an earlier observation that for many farmers, the increasing complexity of the market plus its uncertainties discourages them from looking for the best price or market for their production. Rather than looking for new buyers, these farmers fall back onto the familiar. Over 80% of the survey respondents who marketed maize in 1995 sold their production to the GMB.

## **B. Realising Economies-of-Scale**

Certain goods exhibit economies-of-scale where unit cost or average cost falls as more units are purchased or produced up to a certain point (Schmid, 1987). In a period of rising transport and input costs, the ability of farmer groups to organise group transport, bulk purchase of fertilisers and group marketing can significantly reduce members' production costs. As noted previously, bulking activities among smallholder farmers is actively encouraged by companies who service the smallholder sector since dealing with groups rather than individuals is less costly for them.

## **GROUP ACTIVITIES**

This study proposed that local groups would be more likely and effective at organising bulking activities since this type of activity requires levels of trust and co-operation between members that did not exist in higher-level groups. Of the 40 farmer groups interviewed, less than half reported that they organised some type of bulking activity. COTCO loan groups and Chibuku grower reports reported that they organised group transport of inputs and production. When asked why farmer groups in Shamva district did not in general organise bulking activities, several of the AGRITEX agents interviewed commented that "there is too high a level of competition among them".

While the ZFU may not have a comparative advantage in organising bulking activities, it does recognise the importance of these activities to reducing members' production costs. Consequently, the provincial marketing officer is charged with training members in how to organise bulk purchase of inputs, group transport and group marketing. None of the ZFU clubs interviewed indicated that they organised any of these activities. When asked why this was so, the ZFU provincial marketing officer for Mashonaland Central noted that "farmers in Shamva district do not work well together".

At this point, it is important to note that many of the groups included in this study had come about in response to economic incentives put forth by commercial businesses. Loan groups formed to access production loans, production groups came together to get better prices and ZFU clubs organised to get a 15% discount on inputs and access to a cattle restocking programme. Rather than organising activities, these groups served more as a channel for its

members to gain differential access to goods and services. Also, membership between these groups was rather fluid with farmers joining different groups to access different services. For example, the study found overlapping memberships between ZFU clubs, loan groups and Chibuku production groups. The under-representation of local groups who came together to provide a good collectively can be attributed to the inability of many of these groups to remain viable in the context of economic structural adjustment. As noted earlier, many savings clubs and producers' co-operatives are no longer operational because their members have little money left after paying for household necessities to save or to pay back loans.

### **MEMBERS' USE OF BULKING ACTIVITIES**

Table 4 summarises members' and non-members' use of farmer groups to organise bulk purchase of fertilisers, group transport and group marketing. It is not surprising to find that a significant percentage of COTCO and AFC loan group members used their group to organise the bulk purchase of agricultural inputs since loans are disbursed to the group and not the individual. ZFU group members also used COTCO or AFC loan groups for the bulk purchase of inputs. This result can be explained by the fact that 89% of the ZFU members surveyed were also members of either AFC or COTCO loan groups. Responding to the discount and free transport incentives offered by fertiliser and seed companies for group purchases, about a fifth of all group members and a fifth of non-group members bought inputs as members of these one-time purchase groups. The results show that group members were more likely than non-group members to participate in the bulk purchase of fertilisers even though they often went outside of their group to do so.

Less than half of group members sought to organise group transport. Among them, almost all sought opportunities for group transport on their own rather than through their groups. Among non-members, only a quarter sought to organise group transport, and like the group members, these farmers relied on their own initiative to organise this activity. As for group marketing, only about a quarter of group members and non-group members attempted to organise this activity. Among them, almost all relied on their own initiative to do so.

The three bulking activities discussed above vary according to the level of co-operation required to successfully carry them out with bulk purchase of inputs requiring the least amount of co-operation and group marketing requiring the highest degree of co-operation. Given the relatively low levels of group cohesiveness present in many of the loan groups and ZFU clubs in the study, it is not surprising to find that members used them primarily to organise bulk purchase of inputs and that members sought other groups to organise group transport and marketing. It is notable that the percentage of farmers using group transport and group marketing was not significantly different between group



**Table 4: Members and Non-members' Use of Farmer Groups for Bulking Activities**

	COTCO (n = 78)	AFC (n = 32)	ZFU (n = 35)	Non-group members (n = 97)
<i>Sought bulk purchase of inputs through . . .</i>				
ZFU	3%	9%	9%	1%
COTCO	35%	9%	23%	6%
AFC	6%	41%	23%	3%
AGRITEX	4%	0%	1%	2%
Retail shops, fertilizer companies and other sources	21%	22%	20%	20%
Own initiative	3%	0%	3%	0%
Did not do	24%	18%	20%	58%
<i>Sought to organise group transport through . . .</i>				
ZFU	3%	3%	9%	0%
COTCO	9%	3%	3%	0%
AFC	0%	9%	0%	0%
AGRITEX	0%	0%	0%	0%
Other farmers, radio and other sources	10%	3%	9%	0%
Own initiative	39%	41%	51%	25%
Did not do	40%	41%	29%	79%
<i>Sought to organise group marketing through . . .</i>				
ZFU	0%	0%	0%	0%
COTCO	6%	0%	0%	0%
AFC	0%	9%	0%	1%
AGRITEX	1%	0%	3%	0%
Other farmers, radio and other sources	7%	6%	9%	0%
Own initiative	21%	19%	14%	25%
Did not do	64%	66%	74%	79%

members and non-members. If the groups in the study had greater levels of group cohesiveness, we would expect a higher percentage of group members engaging in group transport and marketing.

### FARMER GROUP RESPONSE TO ESAP

Thus far, this study has looked at how changes in the external environment have affected the capacity of farmer groups to provide production services to members. Equally important is understanding how members' perceptions of opportunities and constraints in the context of ESAP affects the types of services that they demand from their farmer group (Esman and Uphoff, 1984).

The survey results suggest that farmers' understanding of ESAP is unclear. Consequently, the solutions that they identify for overcoming perceived marketing and production constraints are derived more from personal experience rather than from a factual definition of ESAP. For example, most of

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ZFU	3%	9%	9%	1%
COTCO	35%	9%	23%	6%
AFC	6%	41%	23%	3%
AGRITEX	4%	0%	1%	2%
Retail shops, fertilizer companies and other sources	21%	22%	20%	20%
Own initiative	3%	0%	3%	0%
Did not do	24%	18%	20%	58%
<i>Sought to organise group transport through . . .</i>				
ZFU	3%	3%	9%	0%
COTCO	9%	3%	3%	0%
AFC	0%	9%	0%	0%
AGRITEX	0%	0%	0%	0%
Other farmers, radio and other sources	10%	3%	9%	0%
Own initiative	39%	41%	51%	25%
Did not do	40%	41%	29%	79%
<i>Sought to organise group marketing through . . .</i>				
ZFU	0%	0%	0%	0%
COTCO	6%	0%	0%	0%
AFC	0%	9%	0%	1%
AGRITEX	1%	0%	3%	0%
Other farmers, radio and other sources	7%	6%	9%	0%
Own initiative	21%	19%	14%	25%
Did not do	64%	66%	74%	79%

members and non-members. If the groups in the study had greater levels of group cohesiveness, we would expect a higher percentage of group members engaging in group transport and marketing.

### **FARMER GROUP RESPONSE TO ESAP**

Thus far, this study has looked at how changes in the external environment have affected the capacity of farmer groups to provide production services to members. Equally important is understanding how members' perceptions of opportunities and constraints in the context of ESAP affects the types of services that they demand from their farmer group (Esman and Uphoff, 1984).

The survey results suggest that farmers' understanding of ESAP is unclear. Consequently, the solutions that they identify for overcoming perceived marketing and production constraints are derived more from personal experience rather than from a factual definition of ESAP. For example, most of

the survey respondents (74%) saw the high cost of inputs as posing the major constraint to production. When asked to identify ways in which this constraint could be overcome, over half said that government should control input prices to keep them within the reach of small-scale producers (Table 5). While antithetical to the idea of economic reform, this response is not surprising when put in the context of a gradually transforming market. As Masuko (this volume) notes, changes in the structure of smallholder production in Shamva district had only begun to come about in 1993 and outside of maize, the changes have been minimal. Thus, the idea of market liberalisation has little meaning in the everyday lives of Shamva's smallholder farmers.

**Table 5: Services Needed to Overcome Production Constraints**

Service	Response (n = 98)
Government control over input prices	64%
Provision of more credit	4%
Provision of free inputs	4%
Provision of draught power	4%
More land, cheaper transport and other	24%

Farmers were also asked to identify constraints that they now face in the marketing of their crops. The most common responses were the high cost of transport (55%), an unfair grading system (8%), and low producer prices (6%). To overcome these constraints, farmers said that they needed the following services: cheaper and more timely transport services (48%), higher producer prices (17%), more marketing outlets in their areas (4%) and a more transparent grading system (4%). Unlike the services identified as necessary to overcome production constraints (Table 5), the services requested to facilitate marketing can, for the most part, be provided through farmer group activities such as group transport and arranging contract sales.

The farmers surveyed did not find their groups useful in addressing the marketing and production constraints described above. Most relied upon themselves to access services which might assist them. Members have low expectations regarding the services that their groups can provide. On one hand, this can be attributed to their past experience with farmer groups. In Shamva, these groups mostly come together in response to an external incentive. Groups do not often coalesce around a commonly perceived need for collective action to provide a good. On the other hand, members' unclear understanding of ESAP prevents them from demanding services from their group which can assist them in production and marketing. Oddly enough, when asked if group membership were important for overcoming production and marketing constraints arising from ESAP, almost 60% said that it was (Table 6).

**Table 6: "How important has membership in a farmers' organisation been in helping you to overcome the constraints posed by ESAP to agricultural production and marketing?"**

	Very Important	Important	Somewhat important	Not very Important	None
Member	20%	25%	14%	14%	27%
Non-member	8%	8%	3%	13%	68%

### CONTRIBUTIONS OF GROUP MEMBERSHIP TO AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTION

Bratton (1986) and Zinyama (1992) made a distinction between different types of farmer groups and found a strong correlation between membership in farmer groups that accessed outside services (i.e., loan groups, COTCO groups, Chibuku groups and ZFU clubs) and increased maize production. Both authors argued that non-access groups, while benefiting from group membership in overcoming production bottlenecks such as labour shortages during field preparation, did not have access to credit, inputs and marketing outlets. Also, non-access group members lacked the productive assets — land, farm tools and draught power — necessary for commercial production of maize. Consequently, access group members realised greater maize production gains than non-access group members.

The results of this study only partially confirm the findings in Bratton (1986) and Zinyama (1992). First, there was no significant difference in the maize hectareage (1.4 ha versus 1.5 ha respectively) and cotton hectareage (0.9 ha versus 1.0 ha respectively) available to access group members and non-members in 1995. Second, access group members were not more likely to own farm equipment nor oxen than non-group members (Table 7). More than two-thirds of all of the respondents had a plough and at least one ox.

**Table 7: Distribution of Farm Assets Between Members and Non-members**

	Access Group Member (n = 76)		Non-member (n = 69)	
	Don't own	Own 1 or more	Don't own	Own 1 or more
<b>Farm Tools</b>				
Scotch Cart	55%	45%	59%	41%
Plough	22%	78%	21%	79%
Cultivator	59%	41%	47%	53%
Harrower	99%	1%	88%	12%
Planter	99%	1%	97%	3%
Tractor	100%	—	100%	—
<b>Other Assets</b>				
Bicycle	76%	4%	77%	23%
Car/lorry	100%	—	94%	6%
<b>Draught power</b>	35%	65%	42%	58%

Over 90% of all respondents grew maize in 1994-1995. While maize yields did not differ significantly between access group members and non-members there was a significant difference in cotton yields (Table 8). Access group members produced almost twice as much cotton per hectare than non-members. This result could be explained by the fact that most of the access group members surveyed were COTCO loan group members who received fertilisers and chemicals on credit and in a timely manner. The acquisition of inputs at the start of the season was cited as the biggest constraint to production because in addition to the high cost of inputs and transport, farmers often lacked the money to purchase inputs. It should be noted, however, that the production data was collected during a drought year and may not be representative of production figures during non-drought years.

Another significant difference between access group members and non-members was the percentage of farmers who marketed any production during the 1994-1995 drought season (Table 8). A greater percentage of access group members marketed maize and cotton than did non-access group members. Greater access to inputs can explain the difference in production between access group members and non-members. Having had fertilisers and seed at the start of the season allowed access group members to plant maize early. During the 1994-1995 season, only those who had planted early realised any production.<sup>13</sup>

**Table 8: 1995 Cotton and Maize Yields for Access Group Members and Non-members**

	No production	Mean yield (kg/ha) for those who marketed
<b>Maize</b>		
Access group member (n = 67)	21%	274
Non-member (n = 65)	39%	283
<b>Cotton</b>		
Access group member (n = 34)	9%	242
Non-member (n = 37)	22%	125

## **VI. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

The purpose of this study was to understand the potential of grassroots farmer groups to assist members in overcoming the potentially negative impacts of economic structural adjustment on production. As noted in the analytical framework, farmer groups can assist members in maintaining or enhancing production in three ways: (1) identifying and consolidating demand; (2) organising bulking activities; and (3) providing services not otherwise provided by private or public sector actors. This study specifically looked at farmer groups, the services that they provide and the use of those services by members in Shamva District.

Since 1993, the structure of agricultural production and marketing in Shamva District has become more competitive with the entrance of new economic actors. To gain or retain market share, COTCO, Cargill and various input retailers, offered incentives to smallholder producers such as inputs and bales on credit, free transportation and discounts. To avail of these incentives, farmers were required to form groups. Response by farmers was significant. Over 50% of the respondents from Madziwa CA and Bushu CA belonged to farmer groups, and in the resettlement areas, over 75% of the respondents were group members.

Membership in farmer groups is high in Shamva District, yet this study revealed that the level of services provided by these groups was actually low. Most of the groups identified in the study came together in response to economic incentives provided by commercial firms interested in doing business with smallholder farmers. For example, COTCO loan groups came together because COTCO would only provide input loans to groups and not to individuals. Farmers joined AFC loan groups for similar reasons. Farmers joined ZFU clubs to get a 15% discount on agricultural inputs and to be eligible for a cattle restocking programme. What is significant is the under-representation of farmer groups that were initiated by farmers themselves and organised around the provision of a collective good. For example, savings clubs are a very popular form of farmer group in Zimbabwe, that provide members with an alternative institution for saving money for future purchases of agricultural inputs. In Shamva district, the number of savings clubs has fallen partly because rising production costs coupled with declining yields has left farmers with little money to put into savings. Evidently, while market de-regulation and privatisation of the state marketing boards has stimulated the formation of certain types of farmer groups, it has also reduced the viability of other groups.

The implications for smallholder production are complex. In the short-run, the decline of farmer groups with high levels of group cohesiveness appears not to have had much of an effect on smallholder production. Farmer group members, because they had greater access to inputs and were able to apply them in a timely manner, realised higher maize and cotton yields than non-members. However, one must keep in mind that the structure of agricultural production and marketing in Shamva has not changed significantly since the pre-ESAP period. As of 1995, farmers continued to turn to the AFC and COTCO for production loans and by season's end, sold their production to either COTCO or GMB. Middlemen accounted for less than 5% of the cotton marketed in 1995. Within this environment, the need for price and market information was minimal since the marketing boards were *de facto* monopolies. Bulking activities such as the bulk purchase of fertilisers and group transport did reduce production costs and assisted farmers in overcoming production bottlenecks.

As economic structural adjustment progresses, input and commodity markets will become more complex. Farmers will increasingly need information on

buyers, prices and new markets in order to remain viable. Farmer groups, because they rely on member dues and contributions to fund group activities, lack the resources to provide this service nor is it likely that they will have sufficient resources in the future. Even the ZFU which has a paid staff and a sizeable operating budget, lacks the resources to effectively provide this service. Given the importance of this service for smallholder agricultural development, the GoZ might consider providing this service. Within this schema, farmer groups could act as the focal points for the dissemination of price and marketing information to farmers, a role that they now play in the dissemination of agricultural information.

A farmer group's ability to organise bulking activities, especially group marketing, will be critical to maintaining their members' production as markets become more competitive. Marketing as a group allows smallholder farmers to gain leverage *vis-à-vis* middlemen or private traders. Group marketing could be an effective solution to the current problem of "briefcase" buyers who are accused of taking advantage of farmers by paying them low prices. Group marketing can also be used to attract buyers. While this is not particularly relevant for cotton and maize for which there is a well-developed market in the district, it is germane to horticulture marketing. However, group marketing requires higher levels of trust and co-operation between members than group transport or purchase of inputs. The survey results indicate that many of Shamva's farmer groups lack this cohesion and highlights a need for training in group development, management and organisational skills. While the Ministry of National Affairs does provide this type of training as does the ZFU national office, their resources are not enough to reach out to the majority of smallholder farmers. This role can perhaps be better played by service NGOs such as DAPP (Danish Aid People-to-People) who already have programmes in place in Shamva district to facilitate smallholder agricultural development.

The inability of Shamva's farmer groups to respond to the changing production and marketing conditions partly arises from members' and leaders' unclear understanding of ESAP. Groups are unlikely to organise activities if members do not see a need for them. Farmer groups, and smallholder farmers in general, would benefit from a clear, simple and comprehensive explanation of ESAP. The ZFU national office has recognised this need among its membership and has invested considerable resources toward training members in what ESAP is and how to profit from it. Governmental organisations such as AGRITEX or NGOs can provide this service for the wider smallholder population.

The increasing complexity of input and commodity markets in the post-ESAP economy requires small-scale farmers to become more informed and to act collectively to access inputs and market production. Potentially, farmer groups can assist their members in these two areas. The results of this study indicate, however, that members have an unclear understanding of ESAP and so do not

demand these type of services from their groups. Farmer groups currently lack the resources and cohesion to effectively play these roles. Assistance is required from governmental organisations, NGOs and even private sector actors to provide resources and training to these groups so that they can assist members in maintaining production and remaining viable.

## NOTES

1. While current prices rose for all controlled commodities during the 1980s, real producer prices declined for all but wheat (MLAWD, 1995; Jansen and Muir, 1994).
2. All households in the Bushu and Madziwa planted maize in 1994-1995. Over 65% of households in Bushu and over 50% of households in Madziwa planted cotton in 1994-1995. Figures derived from AGRITEX crop forecasting figures (1989-1995).
3. Hectarage in red sorghum has grown dramatically since 1992 due mostly to the higher producer prices and sorghum group contracts offered by Chibuku Breweries.
4. Interview with Growers' Services agents, COTCO Tafuna Depot, November 1995.
5. Poor financial management was also a factor in the demise of these co-operatives. Interview with the Shamva District Extension Officer for the Ministry of National Affairs, Shamva, November 1995.
6. Interviews with Mupfurudzi resettlement area officer and AGRITEX agents, November, 1995.
7. While the actual number of loan groups given loans has increased steadily since the programme began in 1993, few groups have been able to secure loans from one year to the next because of low repayment rates. For example, of the 38 loan groups receiving AFC loans in 1995-1996, only 10 had received loans in 1994-1995. Low repayment rates could be partially explained by the drought during the 1994-1995 season. However, farmers have also avoided paying their loans by selling their maize to buyers other than the GMB.
8. Interview with Shamva's District Administrator, Shamva Office, November, 1995 and interview with the Agritex Provincial Extension Officer, Bindura office, November, 1995.
9. Interview with ZFU's Provincial Organiser, Bindura Office, November, 1995.
10. In 1995, the ZFU had a funding base of approximately \$25 million of which approximately 10% came from membership dues (Arnaiz *et al.*, 1995).
11. Based on reported membership figures given by the ten ZFU clubs interviewed in this study.
12. ZFU clubs are organised at the village level. Area councils, organised at the ward level, are composed of the committee members of the clubs in the ward.
13. Agritex Provincial Extension Officer, Bindura office, March, 1997.

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## APPENDIX

### A Listing of Farmer Groups/Organisations in Shamva District

<b>Small-scale Farmers</b>	<b>Large-scale Farmers</b>
ZFU clubs and marketing groups	CFU Shamva association
Loan groups	CFU commodity associations
Production groups	ZFU horticulture association
Good Farming Competition (GFC) groups	ICFU
Show groups	
Gardening groups	
Savings clubs	
Multipurpose groups	
Community development groups	
Multipurpose co-operatives	
Commodity co-operatives	
Grazing schemes	
Irrigation management group	

### A Listing of Governmental, Private and Non-governmental Organisations Working with Smallholder Farmers in Shamva District as of October 1995

<b>Governmental</b>	<b>Non-governmental</b>	<b>Private</b>
AGRITEX	Development Aid People-to-People (DAPP)	Chibuku Breweries
Veterinary Services	Commercial Farmers' Union (CFU)	Cotton Company of Zimbabwe (COTCO)
Ministry of National Affairs	Self-help Development Organisation	Windmill (fertiliser company)
Employment Creation and Co-operatives	World Vision	Zimbabwe Fertilizer Company
Rural District Council and District Administrator	Africa 2000	Farmers' Coop
Forestry Commission	DANIDA	PANNAR
Agricultural Finance Corporation (AFC)		Seed Coop
		Private buyers



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