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Exploring Challenges and Opportunities Embedded in Small-scale Farming in Zimbabwe

S. M Kang'ethe[1] and Joseph Serima[2]

[1]Department of Social Work and Social Development, [2]Masters of Development Studies Student,University of Fort Hare, Private bag X1314, ALICE. 5700, South Africa
E-mail: [1]<skangethe@ufh.ac.za>, [2]<j.serima@yahoo.com>

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ABSTRACT Incontrovertibly, small-scale farming in Zimbabwe has increased its importance especially since the wave of the land reforms set off in the early 1980's but gaining sterling momentum after the 2008 land reform period. This is because it is a source of food, income and provide the government with revenue. The purpose of this paper is, through a review of literature methodology, to debate and discuss opportunities available for small-scale farmers and the challenges the sector faces. Findings indicate that the distribution and segmentations of land offered and facilitated ownership of the land to the poor majority; facilitated more indigenization of the economy and more grassroots local participation in agricultural productivity; and mass population's contribution to the country's Gross Domestic Product (GDP). Also, the small-scale farming's sustenance has been made possible by processes such as land contracting; and government assistance with the requisite infrastructure such as tractors and farm inputs. Unfortunately, productivity in this sector has rather been stagnating due to an array of the following factors: weaker government policies, weaker political structures and interferences, politically motivated agricultural reforms, low human capacities to bolster farming especially cash crops for exports; and contracting the land and marketing challenges of the produce. The paper recommends or advocates for training of the small-scale farmers, government to offer them meaningful subsidies and a better political environment to facilitate production and marketing

INTRODUCTION

Incontrovertibly, agriculture remains the engine of growth for many economies in Africa (Todaro and Smith 2006). This is because close to 65% of the African communities rely on agriculture as their primary source of livelihoods (International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) 2009). According to IFPRI, small-scale farmers are responsible for more than 90% of Africa's agricultural production. Realistically, it is the agricultural sector that shapes economic development in most African economies (Todaro and Smith 2009). Despite this, food security in most African countries remains a glaring challenge and thereby putting the lives of the people at risk (Todaro and Smith 2009). This is because most agriculture is driven by peasant farmers whose contribution to countries' Gross National Production is usually meager (Ellis 1993). As postulated by Ellis above, this population is economically vulnerable and suffers an array of financial related challenges such as lack of money to buy inputs, insecticides etc. They also fall prey to droughts, diseases and cannot enjoy a significant and a meaningful quality of life.

Nevertheless, despite their poor economic terrain, this population constitutes tax payers who are important contributors to national development (FAO 1993). In many economies of Africa, production of the major food crops and cash crops for export is still contributed by these small-scale farmers. In Namibia, for example, 90% of the population engages in small-scale farming for their subsistence (approximately 41% of the country's land area is composed of small-scale farmers). For Tanzania, small-scale farming contributes approximately 80% of the value of marketed surplus and 75% of export earnings (IFAD 1993: 6, cited by FAO 1993). In Malawi and Zimbabwe, these small holders are contributing significantly to the export market of tobacco. In Malawi, for example, tobacco makes about 50 % of the country's foreign exports while in Zimbabwe, the crop accounts for more than 50 % of agricultural exports and nearly 10% of GDP (Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) 2003). Tanzania, Mozambique and Zambia are some countries importing tobacco from Malawi and Zimbabwe. Nevertheless, an interesting point is that these peasant communities have remained poor despite an important contribution they are making to their national economies.

It is therefore pertinent to deeply look into the production process such as pricing and

market dynamics, payment modalities and any other factor than continues to make the small holders vulnerable despite their apparent involvement in cash crop production. Perhaps they are exploited by the middle merchants or perhaps the money they expect takes too long to get into their pockets, or there could be a barrage of factors that may inform their current poverty status (Comparative Research Programme on Poverty (CROP) 2012). It is also important to look into the policy environment that guides the production process of these small holders. It is also important to pit the benefits of having segregated small-scale farming against large farming schemes. For example, the land reform program in Zimbabwe was a very significant opportunity for the Black majority, but perceptibly its implementation has negatively affected not only the food security of the country, but also its exports in agriculture generally. This paper, therefore, describes the opportunities and challenges that are associated with small-scale farming in Zimbabwe and proposes strategies to improve the situation.

Problem Statement

To say the least, small-scale land holding is a common phenomenon in many African country settings including Zimbabwe. Although land reforms started way back in the 1980's, but reached a climax in 2008, big erstwhile White owned mechanized chunks of land were subdivided into small holdings and given to the Zimbabwean farmers. Since then, the economy of Zimbabwe has been collapsing and thereby seriously compromising food security. The commercial farming sector was badly damaged turning the country into a net importer of food products. These researchers want to investigate the opportunities that the small-scale farming embraces in the contribution of their lives and also the country's Gross Domestic Production. This paper also aims to look into the challenges that these small-scale farmers experience. These researchers consider that looking into the policy environment, support system, skills at the small-scale farmers' disposal and any other environment that may be affecting their capacities to optimize production is critical. This is to hopefully offer solutions and recommendations that can hopefully contribute to addressing the challenges of small-scale farming in Zimbabwe food insecurity and country's ever dwindling economy. The paper also intends to offer an explanation of the possible failures of these small-scale farming.

METHODOLOGY

Basing this study on unveiling the challenges and opportunities of small-scale farming, these researchers have made use of existing literature to form debates and discourses on factors negatively impacting upon small-scale farmers in Zimbabwe. A mere experience of one of these researchers who is a Zimbabwean has also been critical.

Study Rationale

The aim of this paper is to debate, discuss the place, benefits, contribution and challenges that small-scale farmers make in Zimbabwe economy especially in the unfolding scenario of land reforms. This is to possibly make recommendations as to whether such land reforms are necessary and if so how they should be implemented.

Conceptualizing Small-scale Farming Production (Household Economics)

Shultz (1964) quoted by Wiseman (1998: 39) suggests that peasant households are 'efficient but poor'. They are classified to be efficient because they make decisions and take actions that are rational in economic terms and hence are effective in allocating resources. The allocation of scarce resources by peasant households is based on the principle of 'safety first'. Resources are allocated in such a way that risks understood as subjective evaluations of probabilities are minimized and therefore subjectively expected utility is maximized on balance over a longer period of time (Wiesmann 1998).The latter expands his view by clarifying that peasant production is also regulated by the generation of profits. Hence the profit maximizing peasant is efficient in the sense that no change in either input or output would have an additional positive effect in his/her net income. The consensus generated by a cross section of researchers in the period of 1960s and 70s held that peasant households are efficient but only in the allocative sense and not in terms of technical efficiency (Wiseman 1998).

In his explanation of peasant economics, Wiseman (1998) identifies some constraints that impede the peasants from enjoying their profits despite their efficiency in production. Some of the constraints identified include imperfect market exploitation and subjugation and competition from other household aims such as those of moral economy. It is postulated that peasant households face a broad range of high risks associated with uneven harvests, market uncertainty and political unrest (Onimode 1988).

Phenomenon of White Land Settlers and Denial of Zimbabweans Economic Democratization

These researchers agree with Berry (193) that it is the colonial government in Zimbabwe that hugely contributed to stalling development in Africa. This is because they grabbed the best land and forcibly settled the Africans in undeveloped land. This affected African people's social, cultural and psychological balance in their life. They therefore took long to adjust to the new milieu with the result that their social functioning as human beings was severely disturbed (Segal et al. 2007; Sheafor and Horejsi 2008). As a strategic move, the post-colonial government in Zimbabwe since the 1980s has been trying to repudiate the dominance of the colonial powers in its economy. This is because they realized that the White farmers through their western allies were a force to reckon with and could interfere with the democratic processes of the country. Some critics also argue that despite their capacities to produce and immensely contribute to GDP, the White farmers were clandestinely supporting those who were opposed to the way the incumbent government was ruling. The phenomenon of White settlers' dominance in the farm also did not give the country a good picture of economic liberation and freedom that the Africans felt they bitterly and expensively fought for. The government and a cross- section of Zimbabweans' saw White farmers eviction it as an opportunity of achieving economic emancipation (Scoones et al. 2011). The government in the latter part of the 90's and driven by the indigenisation policy and the desire to have increased control of its country's economy by the Zimbabweans themselves decided it's time to forcefully make the White farmers to relinquish the farms. The operation was not peaceful but in some cases very cruel that led to the death of some of the White settlers (Scoones et al. 2011). Although the country has been demonized for what it did, insiders indicate that the White settlers refused to honor the pact they had with the government of surrendering a portion of their land after an agreed period of time. This however led Britain and its allies from the west to unleash strong condemnation to the country. This resulted in imposing serious heavy economic sanctions against the country. This partly explains the source of Zimbabweans economic woes and it's near collapse especially in the last part of the first decade of the 21st century (Elich 2011).

Land Reform in Zimbabwe, Indigenization, Local Participation and Ownership of the Economy

Just like the case of South Africa, it appears that Zimbabweans had a partial independence dispensation, perhaps enjoying freedom but not fully in control of their economy (O'Sullivan 2009). This is because even after attaining independence in 1980, large pieces of land remained under the dominance of the White majority. Having conceptualized the exploitations and the negative consequences that this form of dominance had on the Black population, the government of Zimbabwe sought to reverse this form of ownership. This saw during the period 2000 to 2002 some important reforms being implemented. This was the transfer of ownership of land from the White settlers to the Black population of Zimbabwe. The land reform program can be recorded to be one of the most significant opportunities that the poor Zimbabweans got to own the land and importantly to have a bigger stake in the control of their economic productivity (Chitsike 2003). To ensure a fairer distribution of land to as many people as possible and of course to ensure a significant score in the political support and mileage, these big erstwhile mechanized forms were cut to small holdings for people to continue pursuing agricultural production in the same line as the White settlers (Chitsike 2003). This also fitted well within the government's policy paradigm of indigenisation (James and Mkodzongi 2013).

Succinctly, the land reform process was comprehensive and intricate. It entailed changing laws, regulations and customs regarding land ownership. Although according to the govern-

ment political and policy players the transfer was officially supposed to involve compensation, it is doubtful whether that ever happened. This could also be because the White farmers were also not cooperating. They never thought the plan was executable. More so because they thought the international community pressure especially from Britain and its allies could force Zimbabwe to retract the plan and the implementation thereof. The process therefore had a lot of intrigues, political machinations, threats especially from the international community players who had interest in Zimbabwe, or the plight of the White farmers; or the peace and economic dispensation of the country of Zimbabwe. Interestingly, the White farmers were accused of being possible supporters and financiers of the opposition parties (Laakso 2013). Despite the outcome of the execution of the transfer that saw some White farmers being cruelly handled and some killed, of course under the patronage of the ruling party powerhouse, net result was that it was an important strategy of strengthening the peasant livelihoods. This ownership strengthened their power of citizenship because land itself has a sentimental value to the people (Lipton 2010).

The Mechanization of Small-scale Farmers' Program: A Panacea to Sustaining the Land Reform Program

The mechanization program was another significant opportunity to bolster production of the newly small-scale land resettled farmers. In order to make the land reform a success, the government of Zimbabwe sought to enhance the capacity of the beneficiaries by supplying them with equipment and machinery to facilitate farm labor productivity (Chisango and Ajuruchukwu 2010). The new farmers were given tractors, irrigation equipment and fuel for cultivation, electrical equipment and generators. This is a clear indication that the government was willing to assist in the production of the newly resettled farmers, hence a golden and a gratifying opportunity to the small-scale producers.

However, critics from both Zimbabwe and outside suspect that although the land reform could be in a way be an invaluable step towards indigenising the economy and of course strengthening local participation and empowerment, a larger part of the ploy was politically driven. Some critics suggest that as the opposition politics gained mileage and strong roots, the ruling party saw the White farmers as a possible threat that needed to be eliminated or annihilated altogether. This is because of the suspicion that they were working clandestinely in cohort with the political opposition fraternity. And some think this could be true because most of the opposition stalwarts were against the land reforms (Chisango and Ajurukuchwu 2010).

Bolstering Small-scale Farming Through Contract Farming

Contract farming became important after the land reform which replaced large scale commercial farmers with small-scale farmers. Kirstin and Sartorius (2002) suggest that this system has been a significant opportunity because it provided a way to integrate the small-scale farmers into the modern economy. It is asserted that contract farming provides an opportunity for new technology, ready markets and secured inputs and prices (Minot 2011). Through contract farming, small-scale farmers were given the opportunity to overcome barriers of entry into crop and animal specific sectors. In addition to this, small-scale farmers were able to gain access to information technology and market channels, managerial skills, technical expertise, access to plant and equipment and patented production procedures (Kirstin and Sartorius 2002). The phenomenon also presented an opportunity to the improvement in the access to capital and credit for the small-scale farmers (Kirstin and Sartorius 2002).

Opportunity for Small- scale Farmers to Contribute to Gross National Production

To elucidate further, the smallholder producers were also given the opportunity to contribute to national GDP (Growth Domestic Product), taking the case of tobacco as an important cash crop production for promoting economic growth. Tobacco production facilitates trade and it is an important source of foreign currency (Keyser 2002). As postulated by FAO (2003), approximately 98% of all tobacco produced by all farmers, big and small is exported, thus making an important contribution to the country's GDP. The crop normally accounts for more than 50% of agricultural exports, 30 percent of total exports and nearly 10% of GDP. Tobacco is also an important source of government revenue and based on the 2001 tax rate, the crop generated an estimated US$132 in government revenue per

hectare (FAO 2003). In the past 10 years, tobacco production has been dominated by large scale commercial (LSC) farmers and these had a share of 87% in both the production and the sales. Nevertheless, during the period 2009-2011, production was increasingly led by small-scale farmers (Roger 2011). Therefore, this clearly supports the view that small-scale producers have been given the opportunity to contribute to national growth.

Challenges to Sustaining Small-scale Farming in Zimbabwe

In spite of actions by the state of trying to empower the masses, an array of factors lay on the way and thereby undermining the productive capacity of small-scale producers in Zimbabwe. Hugely, these factors have thwarted the production of food crops leading to glaring state of poverty in rural economy. To say the least, since these small farmers took over, national production of tobacco and other crops has unprecedentedly gone down (Scoones et al. 2011). The country that was once a net exporter of several food products has ironically been reduced to a net exporter of common foodstuffs (Mudzonga and Chigwada 2009). This means that the impact of these small-scale farmers despite making some steps to get into the shoes of the erstwhile While farmers is still scoring very low in agricultural production. Consequently, small-scale farmers have remained poor despite perhaps affording to get food for consumption. This glaringly points to areas of further research and policy reformulation as well as restructuring to look into several crucial factors that can strengthen the capacities of these small farmers. This is because since the land reform took roots through the so called White land invasion, Zimbabwe has been at its lowest economic ebb. In fact were it not for the Southern African Development Community's intervention in which the country was advised to do away with its currency and replace it with the dollars and eventually with the South African Rand, the country was on its economic knees with people finding it difficult to meet basic needs. According to Maslow's hierarchy of needs, the country had moved many ranks down the hierarchy to settle on the bottommost rank of wishing to meet the most basic and physiological needs. However, this state has been changing especially when Southern African Rand took strong ground. The country from these researchers' observation and contention must have moved up some ranks in the Maslow's hierarchy of needs (Maguire 2002).

Uncertainty of Government Policies

The uncertainty of government policies can be pinned as a crucial factor explaining the malproduction and the well-being of small-scale producers (Chimhangwa 2013). Looked at broadly, the issue of land reform had been successful in disrupting rather than directing rural life (Scoones et al. 2011). Berry (1993) contends that the presence of the state in rural economies has been intrusive rather than hegemonic. The state intervention of land reform apparently was driven greatly by political tempo of strengthening the ruling party's political mileage and clout rather than being guided by well conceptualized, well democratic and economically feasible and plausible plans (Scoones et al. 2011). In these researchers' perspective, the development policies have been ineffective because politicians are more concerned in maintaining and retaining power rather than minding the vision and economic health of the country. This is the manifestation of the African governance and leadership greed that has seen the continent of Africa despite being the richest continent remaining the poorest continent. African leaders have immensely let down its citizenry. Zimbabwe has to change its political landscape if its economic state is to change positively. These researchers would like to see a Zimbabwe that was some decades back the food basket of SADC countries, not an importer of even basic foodstuffs. The country needs to reclaim its national and international glory that shone brightly among its neighboring countries (New Agriculturist 2008).

The critics of apparently poor policy implementation in Zimbabwe suggest that the process is riddled with a lot of corruption with government officials choosing to spend money on rural development projects for their political survival and mileage. The policy environment has not augured well because the farmers' produce have not been attracting good prices. All these factors and increased food prices have compromised food security in Zimbabwe and the country is now characterized by hunger and famine and thereby making approximately 2.2 million households in desperate need of food aid (Roger 2011).

Weaker Political Structures

Political structures that are responsible for shaping government policies also provide an important challenge to the well-being of small-scale holding in Zimbabwe. Several studies have described African regimes as neo-patrimonial characterized by personalistic rule and authoritarian tactics. According to Sandbrook (1986: 321) cited by Berry (1993: 19), "leaders treat public offices as prebend to thank key political supporters of the ruling party for their loyalty. To say the least, corruption has become a way of life especially by the political establishments and their henchman in an endeavor to maintain leadership status quo. The peasants remain affected because they are not given the opportunity to be voted into these political positions and have therefore remained uncatered for by the government policies.

Politically Motivated Land Reform Program - Not Economically Motivated

Substantial literature has pointed out that the land reform program deteriorated the economic base of the rural society Zimbabwe. This is epitomized by the fact that in the few years especially after the 2008 land invasion, the country has become an importer of food rather than an exporter (Scoones et al. 2011). Apparently, this situation seems to have taken deeper roots after massive land invasion of 2008. Most studies point out that this land reform program was politically other than economically motivated. It was meant to strengthen the political power of the dominating ruling party and hence not development oriented (Scoones et al. 2011). This is supported by the fact that after the political execution of these land reforms especially in 2008, productivity in the sector declined tremendously. The country started experiencing food shortages and the share of agriculture to GDP declined. The government failed to prepare or motivate people into the agricultural production system because such an intervention was intrusive and not hegemonic.

Low Human Capacities to Drive Farming

Furthermore, due to the fact that the land reform initiative was a political rather than an economic gesture, the government ignored the fact that the new farmers may not have had requisite skills to manage the land, the infrastructure, or whether they had motivation to do that. Some wanted the land simply because they were the supporters of the governing party (Laasko 2013). In order to get into the shoes of the erstwhile White settlers, the government provided the new farmers with farm infrastructure which in these researchers observation have been underutilized or fast leading to a state of disuse altogether (Laakso 2013). For example, most people who were given tractors are no longer using them but hiring them out, the diesel is being sold on Black market, and the irrigation pipes are diverted to tools of making pots. It has been a total mess and an economic mockery of the whole situation. Also, these privileges were never available to all the people. Some think that the privilege followed the line of loyalty to the ruling party. Therefore, the small-scale holders continue lacking infrastructure and technological appropriateness and hence continue to use traditional practices that have hitherto hindered agricultural productivity.

Contract Farming Defeating the Empowerment of Small Holders

To the contrary, despite contract farming cushioning the production of small-holder producers, it has rather impeded the well-being of these households. The small-holder farmers have lost their autonomy because they operate under a centralized control system and are just reduced to little more than a hired hand (Clapp 1994, cited by Kirstin and Sartorius 2002). It is rather an exploitative business whereby the produce by these small-scale producers is sold through these contractors. They continue to be trapped in poverty because revenue generated from their output is usually concentrated in the hands of the contractors and the disposable income they get is insufficient for re-investment or for promoting sustainable well-being. Thus their dependency has rather increased.

Market Challenges by the Small Holders

Marketing of the small holders products poses a huge challenge. These small-scale producers have no power to influence the market and thus continue to be exploited by their contractors and the shares they get from their crops are even lower. This has been worsened by the withdrawal of the state subsidized credit, input de-

livery and price fixing on food crops. This means most small-scale farmers have to rely on the unsustainable contract farming. Contract farming has rather decreased food crop production and food security has been threatened because of concentration on contract crops (Glover 1994, cited by Kirstin and Sartorius 2002). Instead of promoting development of these small-scale communities, contract farming has even exacerbated the retrogression of these communities.

Theoretical Framework

In-order to conceptualize the problem and to rationalize the solution, these researchers have sought to employ the sustainable agriculture approach. Also basing on the argument of the ineffectiveness of the government policies, the paper has utilized the capability approach basing its rationale on the necessity to build the capacity of the populace to be able to participate and contribute in decision making processes for local development initiatives.

Sustainable Agriculture

Due to the introduction of cash crop production, food and fiber productivity declined in the developing world. Cash crop production has even deteriorated environmental sustainability. Issues surrounding food security and sustainability are now most noticeable in the developing and the developed world. As postulated by Johnson (2006), the solution to the food concerns is often encompassed with the all-embracing term of 'sustainable agriculture'. The concept of 'sustainable agriculture' can also be understood as an ecosystem approach to agriculture. It has been defined as an integrated system of plant and animal production practices that will have a long term benefit. "Sustainable agriculture addresses many environmental and social concerns. It offers innovative and economically viable opportunities for growers. Laborers, consumers, policy makers and many others in the entire food system.

The concept of sustainable agriculture integrates three main themes and these include environmental health, economic profitability and social and economic equity. It follows the principle of 'sustainable development' that development of the present should not compromise future generations to meet their needs. Therefore, stewardship of both natural and human resources is of prime importance. It is based on the following factors:

- To satisfy human food and fiber needs;
- To enhance environmental quality and the natural resource base upon which agricultural economy depends;
- To make the most efficient use of non-renewable resources and on-farm resources and integrate where appropriate, natural biological cycles and controls;
- To sustain the economic viability of farm operations;
- To enhance the quality of life for farmers and society as a whole.

The Agriculture Sustainability Institute (ASI) (2013) proposes that it is important to consider the responsibility of every participant in the system to participate in order to achieve sustainable agriculture. Amongst these participants include the farmers, farm laborers, policy makers, researchers, retailers and consumers. Each group has its duty to play in order to strengthen the sustainable agriculture community.

The Capability Approach

According to Robeyns (2005), the capability approach is a broad normative framework for the evaluation and assessment of individual well-being and social arrangements. It was propounded by Amartya Sen and it can be used to evaluate several aspects of people's well-being. It can also be used as an alternative evaluative tool for social cost benefit analysis, or as a framework within which to design and evaluate policies ranging from welfare state design in affluent societies to the development policies by governments and non-governmental organizations in developing countries. It can therefore be used to conceptualize poverty, inequality and well-being of individuals in the society (Robeyns 2005). The core characteristics of the capability approach are that individuals should be given the opportunity to do what they are able to do and thus expressing their individuality and autonomy.

CONCLUSION

Small scale farming needs to be respected, not only in Zimbabwe, but in many African countries because majority of the Africans rely on

agriculture for their mainstay. The government and any other production friendly organizations such as the NGOs need to facilitate equipment of the small farmers with requisite skills and infrastructure that will make them change their mode of production from the traditional to modern set up. The issue of market needs to be relooked because it can be frustrating if these farmers increase their production and yet market is not adequate. In Zimbabwe, the government needs to separate economic and political decisions so that economic decisions are made soberly and factor in economic factors. This is because Zimbabwe government used the land distribution policy for its political expediency and not for economic expediency and therefore land production has been on the decrease. People were not encouraged or prepared to get into the shoes of the erstwhile large scale while farmers. However, it's not too late to relook into the whole land framework and rework on the gaps so far identified.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Having noted the contribution of the small-scale farmers especially in Zimbabwean rural economy, it is now important to suggest solutions that can guarantee sustainability in their production. Perhaps it is succinctly important to embrace that close to 70 % of all agricultural produce in many African countries such as Zimbabwe is produced by small-scale farmers. They therefore support people's livelihoods and contribute to countries' export capacities. Hence the mal-performance or collapse of these households also signifies a collapse of the national economy. It is crucial to emphasize that the resolution of small-holder challenges in Zimbabwe is fundamentally political. There is need to restructure political interventions from the government down to the rural grassroots level before the necessary economic, technical and social measures proposed above can be implemented successfully. Instead of it being a top-down approach, governments should utilize a bottom-up approach whereby they will consult the population before implementing a policy. Formulation of these policies requires a progressive orientation towards the peasant majority, social justice and national reconstruction. There is need of mass mobilization of the peasantry farming around the basic issues of the land rights, production and political power. Emphasis should be put on active political participation of peasants in decision making at all levels.

In addition to this, enhancing the capacity of these peasants can be an effective way to bolster their productive capacity. Not only should it be political capacity, but productive capacity. The government should implement some training mechanisms to equip these producers with requisite skills and knowledge levels that will facilitate the process of maximizing their productivity and sustainable development. They should be given the opportunity to learn about technological advances to assist in their production. The government should also provide subsidies to these small-scale producers to foster diversification into food crop production and thus reduce their reliance on the exploitative contract farming. This could hopefully strengthen food security in the economy.

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