

# Zimbabwe's Special Maize Programme for the Import Substitution (Command Agriculture) Scheme: A Hit-and-Miss Affair

D.I. Odunze<sup>1</sup> and D.E. Uwizeyimana<sup>2,\*</sup>

<sup>1</sup>National University of Science and Technology, Bulawayo, Zimbabwe

<sup>2</sup>School of Public Management, Governance and Public Policy, University of Johannesburg, South Africa

**Abstract:** Increasing food insecurity levels and large import expenditure have been major concerns for the government of Zimbabwe in recent years, leading to the development and implementation of different policies aimed at addressing these issues. In the wake of the devastating drought of 2015, in which only a quarter of the country's annual maize requirement was produced, the Zimbabwean government instituted a targeted command agriculture scheme known in policy terms as the Special Maize Programme for Import Substitution (SMPIS). The programme aimed to increase maize production and to reduce the grain import expenditure of the country. The scheme, although viewed by many as a panacea to the country's increasing food insecurity levels, was equally criticised by many as a drain on the highly depleted financial resources of the country, and arguments have emerged on the merits and demerits of the scheme for the struggling economy. This paper analyses the impact of the SMPIS on maize production and importation in Zimbabwe, as well as the gains and losses of the programme to the Zimbabwean economy.

**Keywords:** Command Agriculture, Maize, Imports, Government, Inputs, Subsidy.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Maize is the most important cereal crop in Zimbabwe, with a large percentage grown directly for home consumption, according to the Famine Early Warning Systems Network (FEWSNET 2016). Zimbabwe recorded an increased deficit in maize production from 2009 to 2015, leading to the country's increased dependence on maize importation from neighbouring countries such as Zambia and South Africa (Food and Agricultural Organisation Statistics [FAOSTAT] 2016). This reduced output in maize production followed a general decline in agricultural output since the Fast-Track Land Reform Programme (FTLRP) was implemented from 2000 to 2006 (Zikhali 2008; Chilunjika & Uwizeyimana 2015, p. 131). Since 2012, the Zimbabwean government has employed a series of policies and institutional reforms intended to increase the productivity of the agricultural sector. The targeted command agriculture scheme<sup>1</sup>, known in policy terms as the Special Maize Programme for Import Substitution (SMPIS), is one of the policies implemented by the government following the dismally poor yield recorded in the 2015/2016 planting season.

The planting season saw the country experiencing a prolonged dry spell that led to a poor maize yield of 511,816 tonnes, which is approximately a quarter of what is needed to feed the nation (United Nations International Trade Statistics Database [UN COMTRADE] 2017). Zimbabwe needs 1.8 to 2 million tonnes to feed both its citizens and livestock annually (FAOSTAT 2016). The poor harvest of the 2015/2016 season forced the cash-strapped government to spend millions of dollars on maize imports to avert a food shortage. Import quantities (shown in Table 1) totalled over 821,000 tonnes in 2016 due to the recorded poor yield following one of the country's worst droughts of the decade, which was believed to have been caused by El Niño (United Nations Development Programme [UNDP] 2017).

As depicted in Tables 1 and 2, maize production in Zimbabwe from 2012 to 2016 was below the country's annual requirements and the import quantity of maize into the country moved in tandem with the production quantity. Maize is the main staple food crop of Zimbabwe and is very strategic for the food security of the nation (Food and Agricultural Organization [FAO] 2006). The SMPIS was therefore necessitated by the steady increase in the food insecurity level in Zimbabwe from 12% in 2011 to 42% in 2016 due to a decline in total maize production from approximately 1.3 million metric tons (MT) in 2010, to 0.7 million MT in 2015 (Ministry of Agriculture, Mechanization and Irrigation Development [MAMID] 2015). The high import value was also a key motivation for the SMPIS command scheme instituted by the government in 2016 as a contractual farming programme aimed at attaining

\*Address correspondence to this author at the School of Public Management, Governance and Public Policy, University of Johannesburg, South Africa; Tel: +27 11 559 5115; Fax: +27 11 559 4123; E-mail: dominiqueu@uj.ac.za

<sup>1</sup>The SMPIS programme/scheme was generally referred to as command agriculture by the government and that became the name commonly used for the programme. People generally do not know why it was called "command" but that was the common name used in Zimbabwe; however, for the sake of consistency, the authors will use the acronym SMPIS.

**Table 1: Quantity of Maize Imported by Zimbabwe**

Code	Product Label	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
		Imported quantity: Tonnes	Imported quantity: Tonnes	Imported quantity: Tonnes	Imported quantity: Tonnes	Imported quantity: Tonnes
1005	Maize or Corn	433,057	303,452	287,432	571,775	821,672

Source: UN COMTRADE (2017).

**Table 2: Zimbabwe Corn Production for 2010-2016**

Year	Production (1 000 MT) <sup>a</sup>	Growth rate
2010	1,000	53.85 %
2011	1,010	1.00 %
2012	999	-1.09 %
2013	857	-14.21 %
2014	1,456	69.89 %
2015	742	-49.04 %
2016	512	-31.00 %

<sup>a</sup>MT - metric tons.

Source: Index Mundi (2019).

national maize self-sufficiency. The programme command agriculture scheme was therefore welcomed by many as a panacea to the hunger threatening millions of Zimbabweans and as a practical solution to Zimbabwe's huge grain import expenditure. In the words of former Finance Minister, Mr Patrick Chinamasa, "the command agriculture programme was designed to solve a fundamental problem facing the country in the aftermath of the land reform; that of mobilizing sustainable and affordable funding for our agriculture so as to ensure food security, eliminate imports of food, increase exports from this sector and reduce poverty" (Chisoko & Zharara 2017, p. 4). Based on the statement, it is evident that the SMPIS was not only seen as a safeguard against hunger but also as a means of reducing maize imports into the country. The timing of the SMPIS fitted into the broader national objective of reducing foreign currency loss through excessive imports; an aim echoed in the official policy title of the command scheme.

It is important to note that maize, as the nation's staple, is a controlled product in Zimbabwe, which means that the government controls its purchase and sale, and the terms of such regulations are defined by the Grain Marketing Board (GMB) Act. In terms of the GMB Act (section 33 (1)), "no person shall sell or otherwise dispose of any controlled product within the prescribed area except to the GMB". White maize,

which is preferred by the people, accounts for most of the maize produced and consumed by Zimbabwean citizens, while yellow maize, although grown in significant quantities, is primarily used as livestock feed (FEWSNET 2016). In contrast to most developed countries, the demand for maize for food use accounts for over 75% of the domestic demand in Zimbabwe, while approximately 15% of the domestic demand is for livestock feed (FEWSNET 2016). The Zimbabwean Vulnerability Assessment Committee (ZimVAC 2015) reported that four million people in Zimbabwe needed food aid in 2016 because of the 2015 drought. The government stated that the decision to embark on the SMPIS programme was a temporary measure to reduce grain imports, increase maize production, and enhance national food security.

### 1.1. The Special Maize Programme for Import Substitution (SMPIS)

The SMPIS commenced in October 2016 and was to continue for three planting seasons and a total amount of US\$500 million was budgeted for the scheme to be rolled out over the three growing seasons (Pindula 2017). The scheme was funded through a public-private partnership between the government and an international commodity firm, Sakunda Holdings, was claimed to be the major funder of the scheme, with lines of credit extended by various

financial institutions (Mhlanga 2017). At the launch of the programme, former Finance Minister, Patrick Chinamasa, reported that the government was working with the private firm to mobilise the funds needed for the 2016/2017 farming season, a total of US\$192 million. The role of the private partners was chiefly that of providing capital and coordinating the marketing of produce, including exporting, sharing of best practices and farming knowledge, and transfer of expertise through farmers training, while the role of the government was to provide an enabling environment and oversee the whole process (The Periscope Report 2017).

According to the FAO (2006), Zimbabwe has five agro-ecological regions, known as Natural Regions, according to rainfall patterns, soil quality, and vegetation. Most of the maize in Zimbabwe is grown in Natural Regions II and III. The total amount of arable land targeted for the scheme was 400,000 hectares (ha) and 2,000 farmers were expected to participate in the programme. A total of 264,000 ha out of the 400,000 ha were to be cultivated under irrigation, while the remaining 136,000 ha would be rain fed. The scheme targeted two groups of farmers: farmers with irrigation facilities and adequate farming equipment, and farmers near water bodies who are not fully equipped with irrigation and rely on rain-fed agriculture. An important criterion was that the farmers would be able to set aside 200 ha of land for maize production for the period of the scheme. Each participating farmer was required to commit five tonnes of maize per ha towards repayment of advanced loans in the form of irrigation equipment, seed, fertilisers, chemicals, mechanised equipment, tillage services, and electricity and water charges, all of which totalled \$250,000 per farmer for the entire period of the scheme. Five tonnes per ha means each participating farmer must produce 1,000 tonnes of maize for the government yearly (The Periscope Report 2017). The remaining harvests of the farmers above 1,000 tonnes were to be kept by the farmers to sell to private enterprises or the GMB for US\$390 per tonne – a price reportedly higher than what other countries' governments were paying per tonne in the region (FAO / Global Information and Early Warning System Reference [GIEWS] 2017).

It is important to note that Zimbabwe has six farmer groups. A1 farmers are mostly small-scale farmers with farm sizes averaging 6 ha, A2 commercial farmers with medium- to large-scale farms, A2 communal farmers with mostly medium- to small-scale farms, old resettlement farmers, small-scale commercial farmers,

and peri-urban commercial farmers (Commercial Farmers' Union of Zimbabwe [CFUZIM] 2016). The two types of farmers are different in the sense that A2 communal farmers are new farmers who have been allocated plots on communal lands and are mostly performing medium- to small-scale farming on communal lands. Old resettlement farmers are those who were farming before the FTLRP was instituted (Zvoushe, Uwizeyimana, & Auriacombe 2017, p. 123). The SMPIS was targeted explicitly at A2 commercial farmers because of their farm sizes (The Periscope Report 2017). The SMPIS was also complemented by another programme known as the Presidential Input Scheme (PIM) (Mrewa 2015). The 2016/2017 PIM targeted 1,4 million farmers, comprising A2 communal farmers and A1 farmers who produced maize, small grains, tobacco, cotton, and others. Sakunda Holdings, an international commodity firm, funded both schemes for the 2016/2017 growing season with \$192 million budgeted for the command scheme and \$30 million budgeted for the PIM (Mrewa 2015). Both schemes aimed at rebuilding the grain reserves of the country to improve maize sufficiency and food security.

## 2. PROBLEM STATEMENT

The SMPIS faced a great deal of criticism from other farmers and agro-processors in the first cropping season (2016/2017) of implementation. Many of the critics questioned whether the programme brought about any positive impact on the import situation of the country, the use of scarce foreign exchange for imports, and especially on the funding of the scheme and payment of the debt incurred (Mutenga 2017).

According to Freeth (2016, p. 1), "[t]he latest unfolding command agriculture catastrophe will result in three outcomes listed as follows:

- The Western world will once again have to come to the rescue of starving Zimbabweans and provide massive quantities of food aid, which is in itself a controversial issue across Africa.
- The Zimbabwean people will be saddled with a yet larger debt to repay to finance the 2,000 farmer beneficiaries with their quarter of a million dollars.
- The corrupt and sycophantic political elite will continue to fund their lavish lifestyles with additional money that the bankrupt Zimbabwean state cannot afford".

In addition to the critics, Mutenga (2017) presented arguments that while on the one hand the SMPIS led to lower demand for grain imports, on the other hand it increased imports of inputs such as fertilisers and agro-chemicals, which defeated one of its aims of raising foreign currency reserves. There is therefore a need to analyse the SMPIS and its outcomes in terms of its impact on maize production and importation in Zimbabwe and draw implications regarding the effects of the scheme on the Zimbabwean economy.

### 3. METHODOLOGY

This analysis was conducted using data from the Zimbabwe's MAMID, CFUZIM, published newspaper articles, and published data from the FAO's country briefs, the United States Agency for International Development's [USAID] Strategic Economic Research and Analysis (SERA), and Index Mundi. The study also made use of search engines with combinations of the following search terms: command agriculture, maize, yield, imports, prices, and Zimbabwe.

### 4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

#### 4.1. Impact of the Command Scheme on Maize Production

According to the FAO/GIEWS (2017), the total cereal production for the 2016/2017 season was 2,7 million tonnes, inclusive of wheat, with a significant increase in maize, sorghum, and wheat production. Overall maize production in 2017, including from those under SMPIS, was approximately 2,1 million tonnes, which was slightly lower than the government's prediction of 2,2 million tonnes from the scheme alone, but significantly higher than the last season when merely 511,000 tonnes were primarily attributed to the devastating drought.

The scheme was also extended to wheat farming, which is the second most important cereal crop in the country, according to the FAO (2006). Being a winter crop, the scheme for its production kicked off in May 2017, and like that of maize, the programme was a success in terms of the increase in yield. There was an estimated yield of 158,000 tonnes, up from the previous year's 20,000 tonnes (FAO/GIEWS 2017).

According to the government's final crop assessment report of 2017, the scheme produced only about 30% of the country's maize output in the 2016/2017 season. The total output from the A2 commercial farmers, most of whom were part of the SMPIS, was 643,790 tonnes, or just under 30% of total production. The output falls far below the expectation by the A2 farmers at the beginning of the scheme. Out of the 400,000 ha initially targeted for the programme to produce a minimum of 2 million tonnes on an average yield of at least 5 tonnes per ha, only 168,666 ha were under the command scheme, and the average yield was 3,68 tonnes per ha (Mutenga 2017).

Communal farmers, many of whom were beneficiaries of the \$30 million support from the PIM, retained their position as the mainstay of Zimbabwe's maize production, with a total output of 770,682 tonnes. A1 farmers produced 521,588 tonnes, and old resettlement farmers produced 147,068 tonnes. Small-scale commercial farmers and peri-urban farmers produced 64,538 tonnes and 7,680 tonnes respectively (Mutenga 2017). In total, 1,875,297 ha were used for growing maize in Zimbabwe for the 2016/2017 growing season. Zimbabwe's MAMID forecasted at the beginning of the season the production of at least 2,2 million tonnes of maize from the over 1,8 million ha planted at the end of the summer season, up from 511,000 tonnes in 2015/2016 and 300,000 tonnes more than the local consumption of 1,8 million tonnes. According to Mutenga (2017), the expected yield of 2,2

**Table 3: Zimbabwe's Cereal Production for 2016/2017 Planting Season**

Crop	2012-2016 averages	2016	2017	2016/2017 change
	Yield (000 tonnes)			Percentage
Maize	913	512	2,156	321%
Sorghum	58	36	182	406%
Millet	37	29	107	269%
Wheat	23	20	158	690%
Others	69	59	91	54%
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,136</b>	<b>656</b>	<b>2,694</b>	<b>287%</b>

Source: FAO/GIEWS (2017).

**Table 4: The Estimated Maize Area Planted, Production, and Yield by Different Categories of Farmers in Zimbabwe for the 2015/2016 and 2016/2017 Cropping Seasons**

Farmers	Maize output 2015/2016 (tonnes)	Maize output 2016/2017 (tonnes)	Contribution to total output in 2017 (%)	2016/2017 change from 2015/2016 (%)
A1 farmers	122,358	521,588	24.2%	326%
A2 commercial farmers	162,665	643,790	29.9%	296%
A2 communal farmers	166,216	770,682	35.75%	364%
Old resettlement farmers	40,359	147,068	6.8%	264%
Small-scale commercial farmers	14,893	64,538	3%	333%
Peri-urban farmers	5,325	7,680	0.35%	44%
<b>Total</b>	<b>511,816</b>	<b>2,155,346</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>421%</b>

Source: Mutenga (2017).

**Table 5: The Estimated Maize Area Planted, Production, and Yield in the Different Provinces of Zimbabwe for the 2015/2016 and 2016/2017 Cropping Season**

Province	2015/2016			2016/2017		
	Corn area planted (ha)	Production (tonnes)	Yield (tonnes/ha)	Corn area planted (ha)	Production (tonnes)	Yield (tonnes/ha)
Mashonaland East	122,546	89,338	0,72	218,559	274,491	1,26
Mashonaland Central	136,201	110,316	0,81	229,917	455,486	1,98
Mashonaland West	123,651	143,573	1,16	279,456	543,622	1,95
Midlands	163,164	52,049	0,32	392,777	321,394	0,82
Manicaland	99,285	71,774	0,72	264,695	267,369	1,01
Masvingo	66,668	11,818	0,18	245,178	150,938	0,62
Matabeleland South	18,521	17,793	0,42	117,531	74,287	0,63
Matabeleland North	44,281	15,155	0,34	127,184	67,759	0,53
<b>Total of provinces</b>	<b>763,317</b>	<b>511,816</b>	<b>0.66</b>	<b>1, 875, 297</b>	<b>2, 155, 346</b>	<b>1,15</b>

Source: USAID SERA (2017).

MT was on the assumption that there would be an improvement in yields from the previous year's 0,8 tonnes per ha due to sufficient rainfall during the season.

There was a general increase in maize production in all the provinces in Zimbabwe in the 2016/2017 cropping season (USAID SERA 2017). Mashonaland provinces in the northeast of Zimbabwe experienced the most significant increase in the 2016/2017 cropping season under the SMPIS, with Mashonaland East experiencing a 48% increase, Mashonaland Central a 31% increase, and Mashonaland West a 35% increase. Matabeleland North recorded an increase of 28% and Matabeleland South recorded an increase of 31% from the previous year. The lowest increase in maize output for the first year of the SMPIS occurred in the Midlands and Masvingo provinces, with a recorded increase in maize output of 19% and 8.5% respectively. The Mashonaland provinces fall under the Natural Regions

known for maize production and other cash crops (FAO 2006). The production of cash crops like cotton and tobacco was also estimated at high levels in 2017, given the adequate rainfall and input support programmes like the PIM. The Zimbabwean government said that the 2016/2017 command scheme achieved its intended purpose of boosting maize and other cereal production in the country (Mutori 2017). For the first time in years, the government was able to fund schools with maize to feed children during school hours. The claim, however, according to Mutenga (2017), was rejected by many based on the fact that the scheme fell short of its expected outcomes.

The hectareage for maize production increased by 40% in the 2017/2018 growing season from 168,666 ha of the previous year to 235,256 ha; however, the total output for cereal crops exclusive of wheat for the 2017/2018 command scheme decreased by 23,6%, with maize decreasing by 21,1% (FAO/GIEWS 2018).

**Table 6: Zimbabwe's Cereal Production for the 2017/2018 Planting Season**

Crop	2013-2017 averages	2017	2018	2017/2018 change
	Yield (000 tonnes)			Percentage
Maize	1,113	2,156	1,701	-21.1%
Sorghum	85	182	78	-57.1%
Millet	51	107	58	-45.7%
Wheat	51	158	200	25.6%
Others	72	91	101	11.0%
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,356</b>	<b>2,694</b>	<b>2,138</b>	<b>-26.0%</b>

Source: FAO/GIEWS (2018).

The reduced output was mainly due to unfavourable weather conditions at the beginning of the planting season and a prolonged dry spell in the middle of the growing season that affected the yield. Import of cereals into Zimbabwe for the 2018/2019 marketing year remained low given the bumper output and the large carryover stock from the 2016/2017 planting season. Wheat production for 2017/2018 increased by 26,5% from the previous year's yield of 158,000 tonnes to 200,000 tonnes (FAO/GIEWS 2018). The government extended the scheme to other sectors such as soya bean and livestock in the second season, but it was not as popularly accepted as in the first season (Scoones 2017).

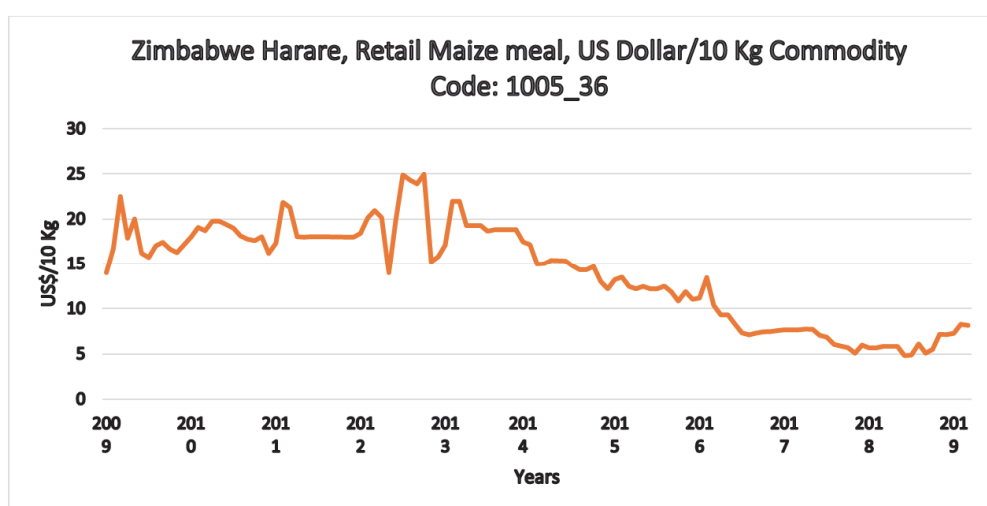
There is an estimated decrease of over 40% in output for maize for the 2018/2019 planting season, with total production pegged around 800,000 to 1 MT (FAO/GIEWS 2019). What this implies is that Zimbabwe will need to import maize in the current year. The number of maize ha planted decreased by 36%,

according to the MAMID, and the national average maize yield estimation was approximately 0,98 tonnes per ha compared to the previous season's 1,2 tonnes per ha (CFUZIM 2019). Wheat uptake for the 2018/2019 planting season is also reportedly low due to input price increases and the general downturn of the economy (CFUZIM 2019).

### 3.1. Impact of the Command Scheme on the Domestic Price of Maize

Prices of different brands of maize meal (the country's main food staple) in 2017 were notably low and well below the previous year's prices. According to the Zimbabwean FEWSNET (2017), cereal prices in the country declined in July 2017 to their lowest levels in five years on the back of the good agricultural season.

According to the FAO/GIEWS (2019), the price of maize meal was broadly the same in 2018 as in 2017 due to overall adequate domestic supplies. Prices



**Figure 1:** Zimbabwe's retail prices of maize meal from January 2009 to March 2019.

Source: FAO/GIEWS (2019).

followed that of the 2017 trend from January to March, and peaked between February and March due to increased demand on markets and reduced supplies from source areas; however, the prices were below 2016 prices and the five-year average by 5% to 15% and 5% to 10%. The prices of wheat flour increased sharply towards the end of 2018 due to foreign exchanges shortages for the importation of an adequate quantity of grains. The reduced import volumes limited milling operations, which caused an increase in prices. Prices are estimated to rise by 5% to 10% in 2019, considering the expected decrease in maize yield and slow uptake of wheat by farmers this growing season (FEWSNET 2019).

### 3.2. Impact on Maize Imports

There was a significant decrease in grain imports following the bountiful harvest of the 2016/2017 season under the command scheme. The import expenditure for maize dropped by 92,86% in 2017, and the government announced that it was banning the importation of maize into Zimbabwe (Mutori 2017). Zimbabwe over the years spent millions of dollars on grain importation from Brazil, Mexico, and neighbouring Zambia (FAOSTAT 2017). According to Mutori (2017), the government saved over \$200 million on its grain import expenditure due to the success of the 2016/2017 command scheme.

The total cereal output in 2017/2018, the second growing season under the scheme, was lower than the first year's growing season because the cropping season did not experience as much rain as the previous season. Zimbabwe imported maize and wheat, but imports were generally low due to the large carryover stocks from the 2017 bumper harvest, which

met the bulk of the consumption requirements (FAO/GIEWS 2019). There is an estimation based on statistics from Zimbabwe's MAMID that the country will need to import 600,000 tonnes of maize to add to the 800,000 tonnes in reserve and the estimated 1 MT yield to ensure maize food security in 2019 (*Zimbabwe Business Times* 2019).

It is also important to note that while, on the one hand, 2017 saw a highly reduced demand for grain import in Zimbabwe, on the other hand, there was an increase in the importation of agricultural inputs to meet the farmers' input requirements for the programme. The government lifted an earlier imposed ban on the import of fertilisers to fulfil the command scheme's requirements. Under the programme, 5,563 tonnes of seed, 57,440 tonnes of basal fertilisers, and 21,387 tonnes of top-dressing fertilisers were distributed (CFUZIM 2019). Fertiliser, seeds, agro-chemicals, and especially farm machinery were imported massively in the 2016/2017 agricultural season by the government and some private enterprises. The question therefore remains if there was any positive impact from the command scheme on the country's scarce foreign exchange situation.

### 3.3. Other Impacts of the SMPIS Programme

Apart from the impact on maize production and importation in Zimbabwe, the SMPIS also impacted on the Zimbabwean economy in other ways. There was a significant impact on the production of other crops and on the finances of the country.

#### 3.3.1. Switching of Production

The command scheme led to many farmers switching production to maize and other grains funded

**Table 7: Zimbabwe's Maize Imports by Years**

Market year	Imports	Unit of measure	Growth rate
2010	300	(1,000 MT)	0.00%
2011	475	(1,000 MT)	58.33%
2012	600	(1,000 MT)	26.32%
2013	900	(1,000 MT)	50.00%
2014	500	(1,000 MT)	-44.44%
2015	800	(1,000 MT)	60.00%
2016	1,400	(1,000 MT)	75.00%
2017	100	(1,000 MT)	-92.86%
2018	300	(1,000 MT)	200.00%

Source: Index Mundi (2019).

by the programme. Notably, soya bean farmers switched to maize production in the 2016/2017 season. According to the CFUZIM's president, Wonder Chabikwa, "farmers dumped soya bean production and embraced maize cropping under the \$500 million command agriculture scheme" (Nyoni 2017, p. 1). Zimbabwean farmers in the past are known for switching production to whatever crop brings in more money, which was witnessed during the Zimbabwean tobacco boom of 2013/2014 where many farmers switched from maize production to tobacco production. This switching of production resulted in the Oil Expressers' Association of Zimbabwe (OEAZ) member companies turning to importation since local supply was not adequate (Nyoni 2017). The 2016/2017 season saw approximately 50,000 tonnes of soya beans produced while Zimbabwe's annual requirement of soya beans is approximately 220,000 tonnes (Basera & Mushoriwa 2017). Soya shortages threatened the poultry, piggery, dairy, and fish industries, which require soya-based feeds. Imports of crude cooking oil, soya cake, and raw soya bean grain gobbled up millions of scarce foreign exchange in 2017. According to Scoones (2017), the government did not consider the effects of funding only maize/cereal growers, which automatically caused most farmers to switch production. The SMPIS was extended to the soya bean sector for the second season to reduce switching of production by more farmers and to increase soya bean output for the nation.

### **3.3.2. Finances**

Although the funding for the scheme came from a partnership with private firms, the government incurred a budget deficit of \$118 million, which was due to the subsidy availed under the programme (Pindula 2017). The shortfall came about from the disparity between the price that the government paid the farmers for maize supplied and the price it sold to associated millers – a grouping of approximately 100 of the biggest private millers in the country. According to Pindula (2017), the government paid farmers \$390 per tonne while selling to members of the Grain Millers Association of Zimbabwe at \$242,50 per tonne. The Grain Millers Association committed to buying 800,000 tonnes from the state for \$194 million. This meant that the government subsidised \$147,50 per tonne, totalling \$118 million. Private players, on the other hand, offered lower prices of between \$280 and \$310 per tonne to farmers willing to sell to them.

The subsidy has been described as a fiscal nightmare, especially as there were no clearly laid-out plans of how the government intended to recoup the amount spent on the programme (Mutenga 2017). Critics pointed out the fact that no measures were put in place to prevent the reselling of maize to the government and that corrupt people could benefit massively from the command scheme by repeated buying and reselling of maize from and to the government. Maize bought from the government for \$242,50 can be resold to the government at \$390 again and again. The International Monetary Fund also raised concerns that the subsidy would be challenging to monitor, and that maize can easily be smuggled across borders into Zimbabwe for sale to the government, especially as neighbouring governments offer lower prices for maize to their farmers (Mandizha 2017). Financial analysts claim that the cost could be much higher than the calculated \$118 million, especially if the government bought more maize than initially intended. All this, of course, contributed to increasing the Zimbabwean government's debt.

## **4. CONCLUSION**

The past few years saw Zimbabwean farmers complaining about being short-changed by private contractors. The complaints were mostly about the inadequate and late supply of inputs by private contractors who then demand the whole crop at the end of the season, leaving the farmer perpetually impoverished (Chikwati 2017). Consequently, the SMPIS scheme, with its low input prices and demand for only a portion of the crop, became very popular with the farmers and many signed up for the first and second seasons. The scheme for the 2017/2018 season, however, turned out to be less successful than that of the 2016/2017 growing season. Debates on the success of the third season (2018/2019) are still ongoing and can only be conclusive at the end of the season. The SMPIS scheme for 2016/2017 is considered successful in many quarters. Many, however, do not think it a success and are quick to point out that the presumed success of the scheme rode on the back of one of the longest, wettest seasons on record. Historically, there is a correlation between good rainfall and high yields of maize in Zimbabwe; therefore the fact that the adequate rains received in the 2016/2017 growing season played a significant role in increasing production output levels cannot be disputed. Supporters of the scheme argue that Zimbabwe has had years in the past in which it experienced good rainfall yet was not able to produce



enough to feed its citizens since the FTLRP was initiated. What is sure, however, is that the command scheme demonstrated that given the right support in terms of timely inputs and with adequate rains, Zimbabwe's farmers have the capacity and determination to achieve maize sufficiency for the country.

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