

## TRANSFORMING SMALL SCALE COMMUNAL FARMERS THROUGH ADOPTING INNOVATION PLATFORMS: A case of Hwedza District, Zimbabwe

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### SYNOPSIS

Although agricultural research has existed for many decades, it has yet to generate the high potential and outcomes expected in terms of enhancing agricultural productivity amongst small-scale farmers and improving the quality of their agrarian lives. There are well-established arguments about the top-down approach being a major reason for such low performance of agricultural research. Therefore, there's been a shift toward more participatory methodologies in which non-governmental organisations become central. The objective of this paper is to critically analyse the contribution of agricultural innovation platforms (as a participatory methodology) in the district of Hwedza, Zimbabwe, through examining the multi-faceted social interactions and relationships embodied in the innovation platform process.

**Major Finding:** The major finding of this study is that the agricultural innovation platforms, at least as implemented in Hwedza, do challenge top-down approaches to agricultural interventions by unlocking the possibility of multiple pathways of inclusion and particularly for small-scale farmers. However, agricultural innovation platforms also involve processes marked by divergences, exclusions, tensions and conflicts which may undermine the legitimacy and effectiveness of the platforms.

**Key lessons:** It is pertinent not to consider farmers as less knowledgeable actors in the innovation process. Their endogenous knowledge may contribute a lot and serve as starting point in the innovation process. Moreover, to fully understand agricultural innovation platforms, it is necessary to understand non governmental organizations as an organisational form, given that they are the lead stakeholders in pursuing the platforms. The study also revealed that the private sector, though key in agricultural innovation platforms, may be reluctant to collaborate as they consider farmers to be high risk customers; and appropriate measures should be taken to ensure their effective participation.

**Recommendations:** It is important to scale up Innovation Platforms interventions as they develop a more participatory approach that builds inherent capacities of small scale farmers. Furthermore, considering that agriculture in Africa is highly gendered, with women for instance having secondary rights to land, it would be important to integrate feminist thinking into agricultural policies and initiatives like the Innovation Platforms in Africa.

### Introduction

The paper seeks to understand and analyse agricultural innovation platforms (IP) in the customary area of Hwedza in Zimbabwe, which

involves relations within the small-scale farmers' community and between small-scale farmers and external stakeholders. Hwedza District in large part falls in agro-ecological zone II which is suitable – under optimal conditions – for intensive crop

farming and livestock breeding. These historically-disadvantaged communal (or customary) farmers in Hwedza have not benefited from the massive land redistribution under fast track land reform since the year 2000, and their farming activities continue to be in large part survivalist (involving for example horticulture, maize and groundnuts production). The Hwedza farmers have been unable to sustainably produce for markets due to such problems as the lack of irrigation facilities and access to credit and capital.

At the same time, new agricultural research paradigms and methodologies have arisen globally within the international development system in order to foster synergies between small-scale farmers, agricultural extension agencies and Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs). These have emerged alongside renewed commitments to participatory change in agricultural interventions from national and international policy makers (Jones 2004, Hall 2007). Of significance to this paper is the initiative focusing on agricultural innovation platforms which are currently being pursued by a number of donors and NGOs in Africa and elsewhere. This type of platform is a forum or network based on notions of partnership and empowerment through which farmers and various stakeholders come together to achieve the shared agricultural objective of maximising agricultural productivity. Agricultural innovation platforms are implemented in parts of Hwedza by the Sub-Saharan Africa Challenge Programme as facilitated by the Forum for Agricultural Research in Africa (FARA). The paper aims to study the negotiations, alliances and contestations among communal farmers in Hwedza and the other stakeholders involved in seeking to develop more market-focused farming activities.

### **The Concept of Innovation Platforms and Integrated Agricultural Research for Development (IAR4D)**

The concept of innovation platforms, which is consistent with a range of other participatory methodologies found within the donor-driven

international development system, has emerged as an alternative framework to top-down approaches in guiding agricultural research and innovation work in Africa (OECD 2005, Akullo et al. 2009, Hawkins et al. 2009). The concept of an innovation platform is in large part underpinned by systems thinking and is not entirely new to agricultural research and development. A system is defined as a collection of interrelated and mutually-dependent elements that must harmoniously function in order to achieve a commonly-desired outcome (Bean and Radford 2002). It is also important to make reference to key scholarly standpoints that have been advanced by people as Sanginga et al. (2009). They point out that agricultural innovation can be best explained as a cycle that involves the adoption, adaption and utilization of agricultural materials and practices to improve the livelihoods of farmers. As noted by Sanginga et al. (2009), innovation is defined as the economically successful use of an invention to deliver social and economic change. In the same vein, an invention delivers new technology or knowledge as a solution to a problem. It is important to understand that knowledge is the set of concepts, meanings, skills and routines developed over a prolonged time by individuals or groups as they process information. Consequently, technology can be summed up as an amalgamation of received information which allows things to be done. Conceptually, this paper posits that knowledge cannot be regarded as innovation unless it is transformed into products and processes that have social and economic use. In its broadest sense, innovation covers the activities and processes associated with the generation, distribution, adoption and use of new technical, institutional, organisational and managerial knowledge.

This paper also presents that innovation should be understood as a system. An innovation system is a group of organisations and individuals involved in the generation, diffusion, adoption and use of new knowledge as well as the context that govern the way these interactions and processes take place. This system approach shows that innovation system

should be viewed as an organizing principle that can be defined at different levels. Scoones and Thompson (2009) recommend a paradigm shift that accommodates the innovation system approach. In many of their recommendations, they emphasise on the need to focus on the broader innovation issues such as markets, institutions, politics and policies because they really matter, too. This requires new skills, new partnerships and new institutional configurations – largely absent in most agricultural research and development systems. At a conceptual level, this paper exploits this proposed trajectory of charting a new pathway that seeks to improve the diffusion of innovation being driven by the farmers themselves.

The actualisation of innovation systems approaches, or of functional multi-stakeholder linkages and collective action around a commonly-agreed challenge specifically in the field of agriculture, is through such initiatives as the Integrated Agricultural Research for Development (IAR4D). The IAR4D is being developed, promoted and pursued in southern Africa by FARA. FARA focuses on generating innovative activities of national and sub-regional research institutions to deliver more responsive and effective agricultural services to small-scale farmers. With funding from the United Kingdom's Department for International Development (DFID), FARA has initiated the Sub-Saharan Africa Challenge Programme with Pilot Learning Sites (SSACPPLS) in Nigeria's Kano and Katsina states, Niger's Maradi Province, the Lake Kivu area in the Democratic Republic of Congo, and in specific sites in Kenya, Rwanda, Uganda, Zimbabwe, Malawi and Mozambique (EPZA 2005, FARA 2009, GoK 2004, Dormon et al. 2007, Spielman 2006). In Zimbabwe, an NGO called International Centre for Tropical Agriculture (which has offices in Harare) has been mandated by FARA to implement the IAR4D broadly and SSACPPLS more specifically. It has selected innovation sites at district level, as well as counterfactual sites where there is no intervention. Hwedza and Murehwa districts were selected in 2008 as intervention districts in

Zimbabwe, with Marondera and Chikomba districts as counterfactuals. With the approval of the implementing partners in Hwedza, this paper analyses the activities, partnerships and contestations between and amongst actors to understand the social organisation embedded in agricultural innovation platforms.

## Methodology

The fieldwork for this study was done as part of the doctoral studies of the author in Hwedza which involved an interpretative-qualitative methodology based on methods such as in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, questionnaires and observations. This study of agricultural innovation platforms (as social systems) in Hwedza customary area is informed by interface analysis, with Norman Long's influential work as a starting point. Interfaces typically occur at points where different life worlds or social fields intersect or, more concretely, in social situations or arenas in which interactions become oriented around problems of bridging, accommodating, segregating or contesting social, evaluative and cognitive standpoints. Interface analysis aims to elucidate the types and sources of social linkages and discontinuities present in such situations and to identify and examine the organisational and cultural means which reproduce, alter or transform them (Long and Long 1992, Long and Villarreal 1993, Arce and Long 1992, Long 2001). Continued interaction encourages the development of flexible social boundaries and shared expectations of participants so that over time the interface itself becomes an organised entity of interlocking relationships (van der Ploeg 1987). In the case of agricultural innovation platforms, this means understanding the manner in which different (and perhaps competing) technical and cultural knowledge is utilised by each group of stakeholder involved in agricultural productivity initiatives. Importantly, Akullo et al. (2009) point out that, although interface interactions generally presuppose some degree of common interest, they also have a propensity to generate conflict due to

contradictory interests and objectives as well as unequal power relations.

## Case study

The lead NGOs, in introducing the innovation platforms in Hwedza, sought to respect local forms of governance (such as traditional authorities) and work through existing (often) informal social networks amongst farmers, so as to build upon these bases and to minimise disruptions within prevailing community and village arrangements. In fact, the platform arrangements further facilitated knowledge sharing amongst farmers. Once established, there was differential engagement by different stakeholders in the platform with many government agencies becoming heavily involved from the start. Other stakeholders, including private corporations but also some state agencies (such as the Environmental Management Agency) adopted a more aloof and wait-and-see attitude because the rationale for the platform – from their partial perspective – did not seem immediately apparent. At times, it seems that they were cajoled into engaging with the platform.

In the case of the agricultural innovation platforms in Hwedza, the actors included small-scale farmers, NGOs, government officers, traditional authorities and private corporations. The platforms were pursued in the broader political and economic context of Zimbabwe, marked by systematic crises in terms of economic decline, state incapacities and heightened political conflict. Further, prior to the establishment and operationalisation of the innovation platforms in Hwedza, small-scale farmers had their own agricultural knowledge and practices, forms of governance and social networks, such that the platforms required sensitivity to these local dynamics if they were to have any chance of being accepted by the small-scale farmers. As well, the actors who came together under the auspices of the agricultural platforms had no previous relationship or interaction with each other, had interaction

marked by only sporadic contact, or had reasonably well-established relationships.

The defined roles informed the working plans that were formulated by each IP based on its vision, goals and critical issues it set out to address.

**Table 1: Roles of Stakeholders in Innovation Platforms**

	ROLES OF INNOVATION PLATFORMS	TARGETED BENEFICIARIES
1	Identifying small scale farmers` needs in Hwedza	Farmers
2	Implementation of agreed programmes	All actors
3	Assisting in the selection of demonstration sites for use in IPs	All actors
4	Generic training on conservation agriculture	Farmers
5	Training workshops	Farmers, Extension Workers
6	Record keeping to improve efficiency of farmers	Farmers
7	Mobilisation of new stakeholders to join the IPs.	All actors
8	Linking farmers to service providers (inputs and output markets)	Farmers, Input and Output Suppliers
9	Influencing policy and legal frameworks governing IP activities	All actors
10	Coordination of activities and stakeholders	All actors
11	To consider and develop research concepts from farmers` indigenous knowledge systems	Researchers, Farmers

	ROLES OF INNOVATION PLATFORMS	TARGETED BENEFICIARIES
12	Planning, monitoring and evaluation of conservation agriculture activities	Researchers, CIAT <sup>1</sup> and CIMMYT <sup>2</sup>
13	Motivation and dissemination of information to farmers	Farmers
14	Advise researchers on challenges being faced and areas of concern	Researchers, CIAT, CIMMYT and Farmers

Source: Field Work 2014.

Tabulated in Table 1 are the identified perceived roles within the Hwedza innovation platforms, as articulated by actors in the stakeholder workshops. Some of the roles listed in the table have been touched on already and will receive further attention in later sections. For now, it's crucial to highlight in particular the importance of information dissemination as well as monitoring and evaluation.

In referring to pre-existing relations within villages and the current IP-based interaction, a village head likewise noted:

*The village has its own traditional forms of enforcing rules. This is defined by the societal consensus that people have on issues of common interest. This meant that even the agreements that were made for IPs were communally owned by all involved villagers (Village Head for Chidora Village and communal farmer, March 2014).*

At village level in Hwedza, the IPs inherited and adopted existing village administrative structures (traditional authorities), or were crafted into the existing networks of communities more broadly, to enforce agreed-upon IP positions. Pre-IPs, people in the villages were bound by collective ideas around community membership and interests. Traditional

authorities in the villages then became an organising force, or instrument, used by the lead NGOs to facilitate active farmer participation in the IPs based on agreements reached by IP stakeholders. Thus, the agricultural extension officers (with a coordinating role) were supported by local traditional authorities who were *de facto* members of the IPs with the sole responsibility of mobilising farmers on the basis of their status as traditional authorities, which small-scale farmers tended to respect.

However, especially before the inception of IPs in Hwedza, issues of agricultural extension incapacity to reach out to small-scale farmers emerged in a stark manner during the interviews. This is demonstrated by the following remarks of two extension workers:

*We are trained to help farmers and this we know is our mandate. However, there are issues of capacity that we always lament here. We wish if we could be motivated enough to carry out our job happily. Personally, I am excited to be partnering stakeholders like CIAT and CIMMYT in our areas of jurisdiction. The partners have contributed to the building of capacity in our department especially now when the government is struggling to capacitate us (Interview with an Extension Worker in Hwedza, April 2014).*

*Before the inception of IPs in Hwedza, extension workers were operating in the area but because of the issues of limited capacity, extension services were ineffective because of lack of transport to reach villages. The coming in of NGOs with the intervention of IPs in Hwedza has created some capacity in our department. There is now a clear difference between the period before IPs and after their implementation. CIAT and other NGOs working on the IP*

<sup>1</sup> International Center for Tropical Agriculture

<sup>2</sup> International Maize and Wheat Improvement Center



*intervention have been providing transport to the extension workers and this has improved our mobility (In-depth Interview with an Extension Officer, August 2014).*

Fieldwork evidence showed that, in terms of crop production, farmers were producing different crops depending mainly on their capacity and household needs. The following are some of the remarks made by farmers responding to the question on choice of crops:

*My primary focus is to produce maize for my family to consume. We also produce groundnuts, cow peas and round nuts primarily for domestic consumption. In the years that we produce a surplus, then we can have an opportunity to sell. Even though we know that cash crops pay more than the crops we produce, we lack the capacity to produce them. Maybe one year we are going to produce cash crops (In-depth Interview with a communal farmer from Chidora Village, June 2014).*

*My child who is in Harare has been generous with me because he buys me inputs to produce sugar beans for sale. Even though I also produce maize for consumption, my main crop is sugar beans because I can get more money from selling sugar beans. Cash crops are capital and labour intensive and I get much of my support from my child in Harare who normally helps me with inputs such as fertilisers and seed (In-depth Interview with a communal farmer from Wagoneka Village, September 2014).*

Besides the lead NGOs as well as of course the small-scale farmers, the most engaged stakeholder was the agricultural extension officers and they played a critical role in transmitting and demonstrating conservation farming methodologies. The farmers though had their own historically- and culturally-established agricultural methodologies and they

selectively chose which Conservation Agriculture (CA) methodologies to adopt in line with their agricultural life-world, even against the ongoing advice of extension officers and lead NGOs. The intimate social arrangements and solidarities between the Hwedza farmers at village level, which prevailed before the Innovation Platform (IP) process began and continued thereafter, provided a strong basis for farmers to act against agricultural change which went contrary to their agricultural rationalities.

The lead NGOs such as International Center for Tropical Agriculture (CIAT) invested considerable effort over an extended period in seeking to develop and consolidate the agricultural platforms in Hwedza, and they did so for instance by introducing a range of procedures including ground rules as a basis for interaction between stakeholders. In doing so, they sought in effect to construct a binding and interlocking interface which would sustain the platforms over time. In emphasising the importance of innovation platforms and conservation agriculture, a CIAT agent put it in the following way:

*It is only human to be futuristic about food production. Today's agricultural constraints are not only a threat to today's generation, but to humanity as a whole. So if small scale farmers are not equipped to solve today's challenges, then we are endangering future generations. Food production should be a priority of every concerned citizen across the world (Key Informant Interview with a CIAT official, April 2014).*

This should not involve an over-reliance on external bodies, as IPs are supposed to build the capacity of farming communities in relevant agricultural and social competencies. But, overall, the agricultural interface in Hwedza was more jagged than smooth, with partial buy-ins by some actors, full buy-ins by others and even no buy-in whatsoever by even others. As well, the commitment to the platform was subject to ebbs and flows by different stakeholders. Evidence collected from the field shows that by

participating in the IP process, local government officials saw an opportunity of making themselves active and relevant, and hopefully legitimate from the perspective of small-scale farmers, and thus they grabbed the opportunity. One disgruntled farmer pointed out the following:

*I am worried that government officials are going to hijack this project. They are rarely available for small scale farmers but now they want to be seen as if they work with us. I think they want to steal ... things that are supposed to benefit us (In-depth Interview with a farmer from Nhukarume village, May 2014).*

This suspicion of government by Hwedza farmers seemed to be quite prevalent and, indeed, it would become a potential source of conflict. It also emerged from NGOs leading the process that the domination of government departments and absence of key private sector actors was rooted in the criteria followed in selecting the research site:

*We chose research sites that were clean from current interventions as a way of safeguarding the purity of our findings. Lack of active non state actors [such as input suppliers and banks] running any major programmes in Hwedza is an indication of the effectiveness of the parameters that we set to select some sites. However, this doesn't mean that it is the ideal composition of an IP as non-state actors are important to the success of any IP. Efforts will then be made to mobilise all relevant actors as currently we have excess of some actors and a deficit of some (In-depth Interview with official from CIAT, April 2014).*

To show reluctance by other actors to participate in the Innovation Platform, the following evidence was gathered from the field: National Foods, which distributes foodstuffs and animal feed based on agricultural produce (such as maize and soya bean)

was likewise hesitant because small-scale farmers, unlike commercial farmers, are not generally able to supply large quantities of crops on a regular basis:

*The problem that we have with small scale farmers is that they do not produce enough quantities that warrant us to come and buy directly from them. Most of these farmers they produce different crops. Some produce maize, some soya beans, some sugar beans and some even tobacco. So it becomes difficult for them to adopt a coordinated production that will increase the quantities of a specific crop. As a buyer, I would rather wait for the farmers to be coordinated first before I expend my energies (In-depth Interview with a buyer from National Foods, May 2014).*

And Farm and City, which supplies inputs to farmers, expressed concern about the capacity of small-scale farmers (because of their inconsistent agricultural production) to repay loans for inputs:

*I have had some previous experiences with small scale farmers. Their major problem is that they are high risk borrowers. They rely more on rain fed farming and this increases the risk of non-payment of inputs borrowed. It would be welcome if they are capacitated to produce more (In-depth Interview with a Farm and City input supplier, May 2014).*

Based on these interviews, it is clear that private sector corporations were extremely sceptical about engaging from the start with the IP process, as though they wanted to see the results of the IP process first before making any firm commitments. Though they had their reservations, most of these actors expressed some optimism with the agricultural potential of the small-scale farmers. What these actors lacked though was the willingness to be part of the solution to the many challenges that they were even acknowledging. This of course raises problems for the IP process, as IPs are intended to

bridge the gap between actors and create lasting networks among key actors.

Some Innovation Platform actors such as the extension workers, representatives from CIAT and CYMMIT who were interviewed expressed their concern that their counterparts such as financiers and marketers were short-changing them as they showed total commitment only when they stood to benefit from the meeting but not when they would be required to make some sacrifices for the overall smooth functioning of the platform. It emerged that excuses would normally be given over inadequate staff, resources and even time. Further to this, as indicated, small-scale farmers both cooperated with the platform and contested it. In this sense, the agricultural interface was marked by fluidity.

This raises the question of relationships of domination internal to these platforms. Despite all the involvement of different stakeholders in the Hwedza platform, its very existence arises from and is dependent upon external actors. Of course, the very notion of agricultural innovation platforms as an agricultural intervention by necessity implies this. That in-and-of-itself may not lead to relationships of domination but it does lead in that direction. This is even more so when the research process, which is supposed to be genuinely participatory, is examined with respect to the Hwedza platform. For example, fieldwork evidence showed that small-scale farmers in Hwedza had deep-rooted indigenous agricultural knowledge-practice systems which they inherited from previous generations and which they adapted and refined over time. These included farming methodologies, choices of fertilisers, land preparation methods and storage arrangements for agricultural harvests. Additionally, farmers had traditional methods of curing their livestock from sicknesses and diseases using traditional herbs which were readily available in the forests. One farmer indicated the following:

*I have knowledge that I inherited from my forefathers concerning how to cure*

*livestock. This has been working for me well. At the start of each rainy season, green grass becomes available for livestock and our livestock normally react to the green grass; we mix thatching grass with cumulated smoke from our huts and other herbs with water and give to our livestock to drink. This prepares the livestock for the new grass and protects our livestock from diseases. This works excellently for me and it is also convenient* (In-depth Interview with a farmer from Wagoneka Village, June 2014).

Clearly, if these methods (curing and others) worked 'excellently', concerns would be raised by Hwedza small-scale farmers around any attempt to undermine these long-established practices and to introduce 'modern' methodologies.

Researchers such as university representatives had their own social space which was discovery, construction and ownership of scientific knowledge and this could potentially lead to a situation of dominance over small-scale farmers in Hwedza. This is particularly the case if researchers presented their knowledge as modernising knowledge which would invariably benefit the Hwedza farmers if adopted or even adapted. Thus the interface between researchers and small-scale farmers entailed fertile ground for contestations whether overt or covert. Even though I did not witness any apparent attempts by researchers to impose their knowledge on communal farmers, I concluded from my interactions with the researchers that they felt that it would be appropriate and of value for the farmers to adopt some of their (the researchers') 'new' knowledge. To quote a CIMMYT researcher:

*The whole idea behind the IPs is to allow small scale farmers to actively participate in the interaction on an equal footing. This underscores a deliberate attempt to meaningfully listen to the voices of the small scale farmers. However, [we] as researchers have been working in this area for long and*



*there are many discoveries that we have made. It would be prudent to share these discoveries with small scale farmers for possible adoption (In-depth Interview with a researcher from CIMMYT, May 2014).*

It is clear from the fieldwork evidence that the distinction between expert knowledge and lay knowledge has not been torn asunder in and through the Hwedza platform. Even more troubling is that these two forms of knowledge (expert knowledge and local indigenous knowledge) are rooted in terms of differential structural locations. More specifically, expert knowledge is seen rooted in (often university) researchers who follow the tenets of scientific knowledge, whereas local indigenous knowledge is knowledge held and used by the small-scale farmers and often based on outdated cultural and historical irrationalities. In fact, researchers with regard to the Hwedza platforms doubted the competency and motivation of agricultural extension workers. And extension officers, in turn, were tempted to treat small-scale farmers as less knowledgeable because they (the officers) are responsible for helping farmers with advice at many levels.

In terms of cooperation between innovation platform actors, fieldwork evidence as demonstrated by the following showed that trust was built from interaction of actors. In particular, politicians were not prepared to take a backseat to NGOs in relation to interacting with communal farmers as they feared that they would be relegated to the periphery and their development relevance compromised. However, transparent interactions between actors in the Hwedza IP tended to allay such tension. The following are two comments made on this issue, with the first from a local politician:

*Personally, I feel that all the actors involved in the IPs are honest in their motive. Transparency is shown by the fact that all actors attend all meetings. There are no back room meetings that are convened somewhere (In-depth Interview with*

*Comrade Muleya, local politician, August 2014).*

The lead NGO seemed to confirm this:

*We invite all actors who committed themselves to IPs. There are no meetings which are arranged separately. If someone fails to attend, it is not because they are barred from attending but it is because they will be committed somewhere. This shows transparency (In-depth Interview with a CIAT official, April 2014).*

The NGO facilitators in Hwedza also sought to situate the IPs within the existing administrative and political networks (as well as within the traditional structures of the villages) as a way of trying to legitimise the process and minimise resistance from local government and politicians.

In all the villages investigated in Hwedza there were varied development activities as well as self-help activities that existed in different forms. Evidence showed that the IPs did not suddenly introduce these activities into IP-intervention villages, as they existed prior to the coming in of IPs (including within non-intervention villages). Their significance for this paper is how the social interactions embedded in the development and self-help activities were adapted by the IP system to achieve the goals of IPs. I observed first-hand these activities and noticed that farmers engaged at times in conversations, exchanging notes as it was on issues about agricultural production and income generation, and that such conversations in fact led to visits between farmers. The implementers of IPs acknowledged the existence and importance of such activities as expressed in the following quotation:

*It is important to acknowledge that the villages that we chose to pilot IPs in Hwedza have a history that we do not intend to change. This cultural and social history is so important to the people of Hwedza and we hope to actually benefit from the socio-*

*cultural system of the area. This means that we are building our intervention on the already existing networks that communal farmers have been enjoying. It would be difficult to start something completely new in Hwedza (Key Informant Interview with a CIAT official, March 2014).*

Such already-existing social activities included the following: community gardening, sharing of labour between households (*humwe*), community road maintenance involving food-for-work schemes and agricultural prize-giving shows within villages. These activities were directly linked to agriculture but there were other various activities such as funeral ceremonies, village rituals and traditional ceremonies that provided a platform for farmers to interact in their communities.

## Conclusions and policy implications

From the interactions that the author had with the respondents (small-scale farmers and others in Hwedza), there is one thought that keeps on coming, which is a yearning for a situation in which small-scale communal farmers become self-sufficient in all dimensions of their agricultural activities. The enthusiasm that was demonstrated by these farmers for a better life was very pronounced. They showed that they are willing to listen to everyone who is working to improve their plight, and that they have a deep commitment to invest all their energy and effort in farming. The opportunities opened up by the innovation agricultural platforms in Hwedza seemed to be of some significance and it is hoped that, despite some of the conclusions reached in this study, the platforms will afford Hwedza farmers the dignity and respect they deserve and ultimately make some improvement to their agricultural livelihoods. Considering the effort, time and emotions they have already invested in the agricultural innovation platforms, this is the least the farmers deserve.

Based on the evidence presented in the case study, there are illuminable areas to it which simultaneously highlight areas for policy implications around agricultural innovation platforms. First of all, to fully understand agricultural innovation platforms, it is necessary to understand NGOs as an organisational form, given that they are the lead organisations in pursuing the platforms. Secondly, considering that land and agriculture in Zimbabwe is highly gendered, with women for instance having secondary rights to land (i.e. through the husband in the case of married women), it would be important to integrate feminist thinking into land and agricultural policies in Zimbabwe. And, finally, comparative analyses are critical to understanding the constitution of agricultural innovation platforms. Overall, there is need to scale up such interventions as Innovation Platforms as they build inherent capacities in small scale communal farmers. The attitude of the State towards the small scale farmers needs a paradigm shift. This shift needs to start developing sensitivities towards the needs and capabilities of such farmers rather than viewing them as incapable of improving their plight.

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