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Adaptive strategies employed in circumventing the effects of mono-cropping: a case study of smallholder tobacco farmers in Hurungwe district

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ABSTRACT

The advent of the Fast Track Land Reform Programme influenced a major shift of small scale farmers from subsistence cereal cropping to the commercial growing of tobacco. Smallholder tobacco farmers enjoyed economic prosperity in the tobacco farming sector but that prosperity was short lived. Smallholder farmers face a lot of marketing, production and policy problems within the tobacco farming industry and these problems are increasingly rendering them unproductive. Most smallholder tobacco farmers are entrapped in a 'vulnerability context' in which they are exposed to food and income insecurity owing to the problems which they face. However, despite the challenges which they face, smallholder tobacco farmers are largely resilient; they formulate and reformulate their livelihoods on a daily basis in endeavours to cushion themselves against the overwhelming odds. It was against this background that this qualitative study sought to explore the adaptive strategies that are pursued by smallholder tobacco farmers in response to the effects posed by tobacco mono-cropping. This study also sought to examine the factors that influenced the choice of the adaptive strategies that were pursued by those farmers as well as the factors that constrained their adaptive capacity. To meet the aims of this study, a purely qualitative methodology was adopted in which unstructured interviews and focus group discussions with smallholder farmers who were purposively selected were conducted in Hurungwe district. The study found out that smallholder tobacco farmers were highly adaptive and agricultural intensification, migration, and micro-enterprise activities were found out to be the main activities that were pursued by those farmers. The study also found out gender, income levels, educational levels, infrastructure and equipment ownership as the main factors that either determined or constrained the adaptive capacity of those farmers. Based on key findings, the researcher recommended the government and non-governmental organisations to enhance rural people's education and credit facilities access, ensure infrastructural development in rural areas and encourage peer to peer sharing of vocational skills.

Key terms: adaptation, vulnerability, resilience, intensification.