

# COMMAND AGRICULTURE: VENTILATING THE OPAQUE CORRIDORS



## ABOUT THE ZIMBABWE DEMOCRACY INSTITUTE

The Zimbabwe Democracy Institute (ZDI) is a politically independent and not for profit public policy think-tank based in Zimbabwe. Founded and registered as a trust in terms of the laws of Zimbabwe in November 2012 (Deed of Trust Registration Number MA1223/2012), ZDI serves to generate and disseminate innovative ideas, cutting-edge research and policy analysis to advance democracy, development, good governance and human rights in Zimbabwe. The Institute also aims to promote open, informed and evidence-based debate by bringing together pro-democracy experts to platforms for debate. The idea is to offer new ideas to policy makers with a view to entrenching democratic practices in Zimbabwe. The ZDI researches, publishes and conducts national policy debates and conferences in democratization, good governance, public finance and economic governance, public policy, human rights and transitional justice, media and democracy relations, electoral politics and international affairs.

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## Introduction

Whenever we talk of the Zimbabwean army's involvement in government programs, the Gukurahundi massacres, Operation Taguta/Sisuthi, Operation Murambatsvina, August 1 shootings, January 2019 military violence on protesters, to mention a few become fresh in the minds of most Zimbabweans. All these happened under successive ZANU-PF administrations and left a despicable trail of erosion in human rights, good governance, socio-economic development and democracy indicators. Since the same still administer, more of the past is expected and therefore feared. The resurgence of military involvement in government programs in form of the Command Agriculture Program - where people expect answers to their bread and butter questions - is worrying and terrifying. Many people are still asking what CAP really is, how it is run, at what costs, at whose expense and how interested players can benefit because the militarisation therein has shrouded it in secrecy and fear. This is a threat to a decades old Zimbabwean dream of transitioning into a democratic society where people live happy, healthy and free lives in full enjoyment of their rights and economic dividends. For this dream, many civic groups, social movements, journalists and citizens in general have suffered abduction, imprisonment, stigmatisation and assaults in an independent Zimbabwe. This paper, being the first in a series of publications that the Zimbabwe Democracy Institute (ZDI) will do, seeks to unpack what CAP really is and key implications the militarisation surrounding it has on the possibility of a transition in democracy and human conditions.

## What is Command Agriculture Programme?

The Command Agriculture Programme (CAP) was first introduced in the 2016/2017 agricultural season under the Statutory Instrument (SI) 079 Agriculture Marketing Authority (Command Agriculture Scheme for Domestic Crop, Livestock and Fisheries Production) Regulations, 2017. The programme came after the government in February 2016 declared a state of national disaster as 42% of the population were food insecure.<sup>1</sup> CAP was therefore implemented as a government initiative to enhance food security, generate foreign currency which had become scarce and reduce unemployment which stood at 5.18 percent<sup>2</sup> through domestic agricultural production. The former president Mugabe even named

the programme 'Government's Special Maize Programme for Import Substitution' and oftentimes would describe CAP as a 'beautiful' programme.<sup>3</sup> Under the programme, farmers are given seeds, fuel coupons, fertilisers, chemicals and tillage services whilst in return beneficiaries are expected to deliver five tonnes per hectare to the Grain Marketing Board (GMB).<sup>4</sup> Section 4(1) of the Statutory Instrument (SI) 079 of 2017 states that under CAP, a farmer signs a contract with the government wherein the government supplies inputs and in return the contract farmer delivers produce to the Grain Marketing Board. The programme was first spearheaded by President Mnangagwa in 2016 during his tenure as Vice President. Mnangagwa hailed the scheme as a special programme having improved food security in Zimbabwe.<sup>5</sup> Minister Perence Shiri currently presides over the implementation of the programme with the Ministry of Lands, Agriculture & Rural Resettlement.

## How is Tax Payer's Money Involved in CAP?

Since its introduction in the 2016/2017 season, the programme is loaned by Sakunda holdings, owned by an ally to President Mnangagwa, Kudakwashe Tagwirei, CBZ holdings where the latter is a shareholder amongst other private companies. Sakunda holdings supplied 15 million litres of diesel and petrol in the first season.<sup>6</sup> In the second season the company supplied 100 million litres of fuel which was payable in twelve months.<sup>7</sup> In the 2019/2020 season, regardless of Sakunda Holdings being accused of money laundering, the government has since involved Sakunda holdings, signing a contract worth \$2.8 billion for CAP, the government expecting to farm 1.5 million hectares of maize.<sup>8</sup>

In the 2016/2017 agricultural season, the government dedicated 400 000 hectares of land to command agriculture wherein a contract farmer was expected to produce at least 5 tonnes in a hectare. Contract farmers are chosen based on their proximity to irrigation facilities and adequacy of farming equipment as a priority, however, farmers that are not equipped with irrigation and farming machinery and farmers that rely on rain-fed agriculture are also chosen. This makes the programme biased as it prioritises farmers with irrigation systems while above 70% of the farming population rely on rain fed agriculture. With the ZANU-PF and military elite having gained best land near water bodies with best irrigation equipment from the white commercial farmers during the Fast Track Land Reform Programme in 2001, they are the major beneficiaries of the CAP while the poor rural

citizens who make up around 70%<sup>9</sup> of the starving population who rely on rain-fed agriculture are the recipients of left overs.

To note is that contract farmers are supervised by co-ordinating committees at national, provincial and district levels. These coordinating committees include personnel from the Ministry of Agriculture and the Ministry of Defence. The personnel from the Ministry of Defence are known to be 'team leaders, especially in coordinating the distribution of inputs.' In 2017, the government deployed the army in the name of encouraging farmers to pay back stop orders however this was to no avail, farmers, particularly ZANU-PF elites continue to loot inputs without paying back.<sup>10</sup> This has led to the army intimidating poor farmers with little harvests in rural farms while the looters are left parading with CAP inputs.

Research has shown that the involvement of the military is not solely to encourage paying back of stop orders but also a way to safeguard the interests of the ruling party by intimidating opposition supporters and securing votes from beneficiaries or terrified farming communities who live in fear of rumours of and/or interaction with soldiers deployed in farms'.<sup>11</sup> With this, the military involvement has been defined by more aggression and greediness from the ruling political party, who are the majority among recipients of CAP inputs. At the moment, US\$3.2 billion went missing in the name of CAP, leaving a lot of questions concerning who benefited from the money and for what reason.<sup>12</sup>

### Is CAP going anywhere closer to intended Goals?

The lucrative incentives and opportunities for corruption presented by lack of transparency, accountability and citizen oversight in the CAP resulted in most ZANU-PF politicians transmogrifying into full-fledged farmers. This has been one of the reasons behind recipients' failure to pay back the loans or contract produce as the politicians' aim is to benefit from the scheme rather than enhancing food security in the country. The programme has benefited the wrong cabal who lack both skill and zeal to see it succeed. Thus the scheme has become an epitome of government failure and dismal performance. In the first season 2016/2017, the programme targeted to produce 2,1 million tonnes of maize, however, 230 000 tonnes of maize, which was less than a quarter of the target, with this the government ended up failing to pay back loans directed to command agriculture from the private sector.<sup>13</sup> Therefore, CAP has been associated with contempt and contestation. In July 2017, over 10 000 farmers out of 50 000 farmers who had been given outputs did not direct contract produce to the

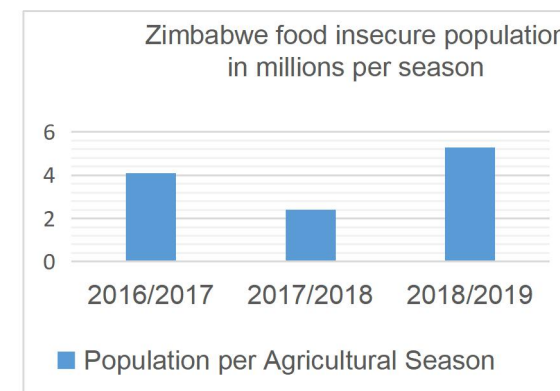
GMB leading to the total produce being 230 000 tonnes out of a 2.1 million tonnes forecast.<sup>14</sup> The government then responded by tightening the presence of the army. In August 2017, nine lieutenant-colonels and 65 majors from the Zimbabwe National Army and other senior Zimbabwe Defence forces officers were deployed under CAP.<sup>15</sup> This has even seen the programme being problematised as a 'Command -Ugly- Culture' and a ZANU PF Elites' 'corruption' scheme.<sup>16</sup>



Current records show a decline in CAP productivity by approximately 20%. For instance, in the 2017/2018 season, the GMB received 1,5million tonnes of maize<sup>17</sup> from CAP while in the 2018/2019 season less than 1.2 million tonnes<sup>18</sup> were produced. This has also been due to the fact that the Command Agriculture Programme has not made any efforts to appreciate the work of rural and rain-fed farmers. The contract farmers are given no incentives or cushioning to sacrifice and perform. They toil for produce only to pay back CAP loans, leaving the farmers food insecure.<sup>19</sup> Thus due to fear of food insecurity, farmers end up resorting to not paying back government loans. In light of this embarrassing performance, the government resorted to deploying the army in order to force farmers to pay back the owed loans.<sup>20</sup> The deployment of the army did not change anything, what was paid back remained less than what was expected in the 2017/2018 season. The government ended up settling the 40% after farmers had only managed to pay 60% of the total amount owed to the private sector.<sup>21</sup>

In reality, food insecurity continue to escalate further despite use of billions of taxpayer's money in CAP. As shown in the graph below, the total number of food insecure Zimbabweans has increased from a national population of 4.1 million in the

2016/2017 season to a population of 5.3 million in the 2018/2019 season.<sup>22</sup>



Source: World Food Programme<sup>23</sup>

These statistics clearly make all reports describing CAP as a 'beautiful' programme and a way towards economic development a deceiving work of propaganda.

Given an increase in food insecurity rate in 2019, Zimbabwe is ranked one of the forty-one countries in the world in critical need of food assistance<sup>24</sup> despite an increased channeling of taxpayers' money towards CAP. Urgent intervention measures to audit and monitor CAP and advocate for accountability, transparency and feasibility audits are needed in this area more than ever before. The current economic slowdown and total back-down cannot be disassociated from these government spending adventures. CAP has turned into more of a liability to the state and its citizens rather than an asset. The programme has dragged Zimbabwe into a debt that is likely to be payable in more than 5 years. This should teach the current leadership and the coming governments that military deployment in government programmes rarely delivers economic development.



## What lessons does the Past and Empirical Studies Give?

Military involvement in government agriculture programs in Zimbabwe can be traced back to 2006 during Operation Taguta, a programme that was introduced prior to CAP. Most Zimbabwean farmers remember the abusive nature of the army in farms during this period wherein the military presence turned to be a patronage disguise which brought fear and trembling amongst rural farmers who were forced by the army to surrender their hard earned harvests to the government. This on its own has made people and prospective investors skeptical about the return of the army in the field behind a new banner.<sup>25</sup> Violence and other human rights violations characterised this military led operation Taguta/Sisuthi which resulted in some vacating from their farms. Despite having a heavy military back up and presence, Operation Taguta/Sisuthi programme was a monumental failure in the history of agriculture in Zimbabwe which left the government with at around a \$75 billion loss<sup>26</sup> and the responsibility for its servicing has been transferred to ordinary citizens through the 2% Intermediate Money Transfer Tax introduced through SI 205 of 2018. The same should be expected in the near future out of the debt accumulation scheme under CAP.

Many studies on militarised government programs have shown a worrying trend of failure to deliver expected results, corruption, and embarrassing accumulation of debt without accountability. For instance, Acemoglu *et al* (2008) found that in authoritarian regimes, dark traces of corruption, inequality and human rights injustices are always covered up by deploying the army to intimidate citizens.<sup>27</sup> Oyewale and Osadola (2018) describe this 'ugly culture' as a threat to economic development and human survival.<sup>28</sup> Oyewale and Osadola (2018) present that the Nigerian economy in the years 1960 to 1999 was plundered by the Nigerian military regime whose rule was characterised by corruption and state failure. This should be a lesson ought to caution Zimbabweans that the involvement of the military in socio-economic and political spheres of a country has long-term negative impacts on the growth of the nation as it eclipses transparency and accountability norms.

Political systems that engender democratic norms among which are good-governance, transparency, accountability and an apolitical military enhance economic growth and development as doing business and investor confidence measures are always persuading (Heo and Tan, 2001).<sup>29</sup> In the context of CAP, the soldiers in charge of it lack the necessary skill to handle democratic processes, since

engendering democratic principles is not their area of expertise. The moment a government prioritises the will of the few elite, and deploys soldiers to administer important government economic programs like CAP, the majority suffers and many transparency issues go missing while accountability questions go unanswered. This erodes the doing business and investor confidence in the economy which must be the most chided 'ugly culture' in a country hunting for investors and claiming to be 'open for business.' For CAP to really yield economic dividends and attract investors, it needs to be demilitarized and run by technocrats with no deficiency of trust and confidence.

## Conclusion and Recommendations

It is crucial for the government and key players in the civil society to note that real development does not come from military deployment but it comes from viable economic and political reforms. Thus, ZDI lists some of the advocacy and programming action points that are germane to revamping the CAP, protecting tax payers' interests and to ensuring that it responds to the pressing food insecurity pressure in the nation:

- Revision of SI (79) of 2017 so as to cater for every willing Zimbabwean citizen equally.
- Need to look closer on the purpose of the programme so as to avoid abuse of CAP funds.
- The government should desist from using the military as a tool to discourage opposition from benefiting in government programmes.
- Need for the programme to be headed by the Ministry of Agriculture and Agriculture specialists and move away from making the programme a ZANU-PF and military programme.
- There is need for monitoring and evaluation of the programme including citizen oversight.
- Need to audit the intersection between CAP and electoral fraud, patronage and institute advocacy around this intersection.

- Civil society should hold awareness campaigns to educate farmers on the expectations of CAP, challenges and implications.
- There is need to enlighten farmers on their human rights in regards to CAP.
- There is need to hold the government accountable for the missing US\$3.2 billion.
- There is need to keep the government in check so as to avoid further abuse of funds.

<sup>1</sup>President E.D Mnangagwa on Facebook. Available at: <https://www.facebook.com/presidentmnangagwa/posts/command-agricultural-program-2016-17-summer-cropping-season-food-insecurity-has-r/1058249554265675/>.

<sup>2</sup>The World Bank Statistics. Unemployment rate in Zimbabwe. Available at: <https://www.bing.com/search?q=unemployment+rate+in+Zimbabwe+2016&form=PREXEN&pc=ACTE&mkt=en-us&httpsmsn=1&msnews=1&refig=a567c4f345b046b1b55d31b1e576352a&sp=-1&pq=&sc=0-0&qsn=&sk=&cvid=a567c4f345b046b1b55d31b1e576352a>.

<sup>3</sup>The Zimbabwe Situation. Command Agriculture beautiful, says President. Published on 1 July 2017. Available at: <https://www.zimbabwesituation.com/news/zimsit-m-command-agric-beautiful-president/>

<sup>4</sup>See AgroChart. Available at: <https://www.agrochart.com/en/news/6500/zimbabwe-will-not-have-to-import-any-corn-in-the-2017-18-my.html>

<sup>5</sup>The Zimbabwean. Mnangagwa blames G40 for Command Agriculture failure. Published 8 February 2018. Available at: <https://www.thezimbabwean.co/2018/02/mnangagwa-blames-g40-for-command-agriculture-failure/>

<sup>6</sup>The Herald (Online). Command Agriculture fuel facts Published on 3 July 2017. Available at: <https://www.herald.co.zw/command-agric-fuel-the-facts/>

<sup>7</sup>The Herald (Online). Command Agriculture fuel facts. Published on 3 July 2017 Available at: <https://www.herald.co.zw/command-agric-fuel-the-facts/>

<sup>8</sup>New Zimbabwe (Online). Government re-engages Sakunda in new Command Agric deal. Published on 13 October 2019. Available at: <https://www.newzimbabwe.com/government-re-engages-in-controversial-sakunda-in-new-command-agric-deal/>.

<sup>9</sup>The World Bank. Available at: <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.RUR.TOTL.ZS>

<sup>10</sup>The Herald (Online). Command Agric fuel, the facts. Published on 3 July 2017. Available at: <https://www.herald.co.zw/command-agric-fuel-the-facts/>

<sup>11</sup>ZDI. Available at: <http://kubatana.net/2018/12/18/zimbabwe-transition-prisoners-dilemma-perception-corruption-reduction-service-delivery-mnangagwa-dispensation/>

<sup>12</sup>News Day (Online). Published on 6 August 2019. Available online at: <https://www.newsday.co.zw/2019/08/govt-officials-roasted-over-us32bn-command-agric-loot/>.

<sup>13</sup>The Daily News (Online). Command Agriculture govt ropes in soldiers. Published on 22 August 2017. Available at:

<https://www.dailynews.co.zw/articles/2017/08/22/command-agriculture-govt-ropes-in-soldiers>.

<sup>14</sup>The Daily News (Online). Command Agriculture, govt ropes in soldiers. Published on 22 August 2017. Available at: <https://www.dailynews.co.zw/articles/2017/08/22/command-agriculture-govt-ropes-in-soldiers>.

<sup>15</sup>New Zimbabwe Vision (Online). Nine ZNA lieutenant-colonels, 65 majors and other senior ZDF officers to supervise the harvesting of maize produced under the Command Agriculture programme. Published on 22 August 2017.

Available at: <http://newzimbabwevision.com/nine-zna-lieutenant-colonels-65-majors-and-other-senior-zdf-officers-to-supervise-the-harvesting-of-maize-produced-under-the-command-agriculture-programme/>

<sup>16</sup>NewsDay (Online). Moyo scoffs Command Ugly Culture. Published on 19 June 2017. Available at: <https://www.newsday.co.zw/2017/06/moyo-scoffs-command-ugly-culture/>

<sup>17</sup>The Herald (Online). Grain deliveries to GMB top 1,5m tonnes. Published on 29 March 2018. Available at: <https://www.herald.co.zw/grain-deliveries-to-gmb-top-1-5m-tonnes/>

<sup>18</sup>The Herald (Online). Bye bye to maize imports as grain deliveries top 1.1 million tonnes. Published on 25 October 2018. Available at: <https://www.herald.co.zw/bye-bye-to-maize-imports-as-grain-deliveries-top-1-1m-tonnes/>

<sup>19</sup>Interviews, 08/09/2019.

<sup>20</sup>The Daily News (Online). Command Agriculture, govt ropes in soldiers. Published on 22 August 2017. Available at: <https://www.dailynews.co.zw/articles/2017/08/22/command-agriculture-govt-ropes-in-soldiers>.

<sup>21</sup>The Daily News (Online). Farmers pay back Command Agriculture loans. Published on 15 March 2017. Available at: <https://www.dailynews.co.zw/articles/2018/03/15/farmers-pay-back-command-agric-loans>.

<sup>22</sup>Vulnerability Assessment Committee results, 2018. Available at: <https://reliefweb.int/report/zimbabwe/zimbabwe-vulnerability-assessment-committee-e-results-2018>. Herald. (Online). Available at: <https://www.herald.co.zw/command-agriculture-boosts-wheat-production/>.

Also see World food programme. Available at: <https://www.wfp.org/countries/zimbabwe>.

<sup>23</sup>World food programme. Available at: <https://www.wfp.org/countries/zimbabwe>. Part of the data was taken from - FAO. Available at: <http://www.fao.org/countryprofiles/index/en/?iso3=ZWE>. Also see Vulnerability Assessment Committee results 2018. Available at: <https://reliefweb.int/report/zimbabwe/zimbabwe-vulnerability-assessment-committee>

<e-results-2018-erald>. (Online). Available at: <https://www.herald.co.zw/command-agriculture-boosts-wheat-production/>.

<sup>24</sup>FAO. Available at: <http://www.fao.org/countryprofiles/index/en/?iso3=ZWE>.

<sup>25</sup>Interviews with prospective investors, 10/09/2019.

<sup>26</sup>The 2007 National Budget Statement (2007). Available at: <https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&source=web&rct=j&url=http://unpan1.un.org/intradoc/groups/public/documents/cpsi/unpan027800.pdf&ved=2ahUKewi5rImy7qrAhVHsAKHX2rAucQFjABEgQIBRAB&usq=A0vVaw1KAxkQ5kaO-85gXODPyQhT&csid=1571572596>

<sup>27</sup>Acemoglu, D, Ticchi, A and Vindigni, A. (2008). The theory of military dictatorshipships. Available online at: <https://www.nber.org/papers/w13915.pdf>.

<sup>28</sup>Oyewale .O. P and Osadola. O, S, (2018). Military Regimes and Nigeria's Economic Development, 1966-1999.

Available at: <https://ideas.repec.org/a/pkp/josere/2018p29-38.html>.

<sup>29</sup>Heo and Tan (2001). Economic Growth and Democracy in Africa. Available at: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/25166030>

