

Public-Private-Community Partnerships (PPCPs) as a mechanism in enhancing food security during the COVID-19 pandemic in Zimbabwe

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199

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Abstract

Purpose – This paper examines the relevance of Public-Private-Community Partnerships (PPCPs) as an alternative mechanism in enhancing food security during the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond in Zimbabwe. It also draws attention to the complexities of adopting PPCPs, and proposes possible options to improve their effectiveness.

Design/methodology/approach – The study applied concurrent mixed research methods. The sample population comprised multiple stakeholders in the area of food security and agricultural financing in Zimbabwe. The research adopted purposive and snowball sampling techniques. Data were collected through questionnaire, in-depth interviews, focus group discussions (FGDs) and documentary analysis. Descriptive statistics were used to analyse quantitative data, while qualitative data analysis was conducted thematically.

Findings – Prior to the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, food insecurity was a consistent challenge in Zimbabwe. The pandemic has worsened the situation by further disruption of food systems and limiting people's access to food. PPCPs could be feasible alternative as they enhance value chain collaboration, improve access to inputs, reduce information asymmetry, ensure trust and facilitate risk sharing. PPCPs require proper design, control of transaction costs, clear definition of partners' roles, fair risk sharing, trust, and flexibility.

Originality/value – PPCPs are yet to be adopted in the Zimbabwean agricultural sector. The research informs policymakers on the need to implement multi-stakeholder collaborations in food production.

Keywords Collaboration, COVID-19 pandemic, Food balance sheet, Food security, Hunger, Public-Private-Community Partnerships (PPCPs)

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

With the global paradigmatic shift from New Public Management (NPM) to the New Public Governance (NPG), there is growing emphasis on citizen and stakeholder participation in the development processes of nation-states. Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs), viewed as alternative models of financing development, are now being criticised for not incorporating the community element. Accordingly, this study argues for the adoption of the community perspective through its focus on Public-Private-Community Partnerships (PPCPs) as a mechanism for enhancing food security. Notably, PPCPs are an extension of PPPs. Scholars such as Barlow *et al.* (2013) and Essegy *et al.* (2013) have argued for the implementation of PPPs, which are collaborations between the public and private sectors, aimed at the



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implementation of projects or provision of services traditionally provided by the public sector. However, [Perez \(2015\)](#) and [Adnyana et al. \(2015\)](#) have argued that PPPs do not involve the active participation of the community. Therefore, it is necessary to expand them into PPCPs by incorporating the community element. PPCPs align with the emerging NPG paradigm, which points out that the resolution of complex societal problems requires the active interaction of multiple stakeholders, including the grassroots, who were hitherto neglected in the PPPs. All stakeholders in PPCPs jointly provide resources to achieve a developmental goal ([Perez, 2015](#)).

In this study, the ‘public’ (first ‘P’ in the PPCPs) refers to the various government institutions involved in food security, agricultural financing, production, and marketing. In the Zimbabwean context, these public entities include the Ministry of Lands, Agriculture, Fisheries, Water, and Rural Development (MLAFWRD), the Food and Nutrition Council (FNC), the Grain Marketing Board (GMB), the Agricultural and Rural Development Authority (ARDA), the Agricultural Marketing Authority (AMA), and the Ministry of Finance and Economic Development (MoF). The ‘private’ (second ‘P’ in the PPCPs) refers to financial institutions represented by the Bankers Association of Zimbabwe (BAZ), as well as private companies (contractors) registered by AMA to engage in partnerships with farmers. The ‘community’ (the ‘C’ in the PPCPs) refers to the resettled ‘A1’ (smallholder) and ‘A2’ (medium-scale) farmers, who lack financing and require capacitation. The last ‘P’ in the PPCPs entails a collaborative arrangement between the public, private and community in the agricultural value chain.

Zimbabwe acknowledges PPPs as financing models for national development ([Government of Zimbabwe, 2013](#)). The Government of Zimbabwe’s Vision 2030 points towards the need for the adoption of collaborative agricultural financing models, as well as the incubation of ‘new farmers’ ([Government of Zimbabwe, 2018](#)). Moreover, Zimbabwe’s macro-economic policy framework for the period from January 2021 to December 2025, the National Development Strategy 1 (NDS1), states that PPPs are one of the financing options for national projects ([Government of Zimbabwe, 2020](#)). In addition, Zimbabwe’s National Budgets also point towards the need for private participation and the advancement of partnerships as one of the options for financing agriculture. In particular, the 2019 National Budget emphasized a review of the agricultural financing mechanisms with a view of sharing the burden between the government and the private sector ([Ncube, 2018](#)).

In the 2020 National Budget, the Government of Zimbabwe reiterated the need to shift from state-led to bank-led models of financing commercial agriculture ([Ncube, 2019](#)). In the same vein, the 2022 National Budget recognised the role of private agricultural finance. In this regard, financial institutions and the private sector ought to provide funding for commercial farming activities through the National Enhanced Agriculture Productivity Scheme, with the government only providing guarantees on a risk-sharing basis ([Ncube, 2021](#)). However, both the macro-economic policy frameworks and the national budget statements tend to neglect the community dimension. Furthermore, there is a tendency to view farmers as mere ‘receivers’ of funding as opposed to viewing them as important partners in the value chains. Therefore, this study fills the gap by expanding the nature of the agricultural financing collaborations from PPPs to PPCPs. According to the Food and Agriculture Organisation ([FAO, 2021](#)), alleviating food insecurity is possible if the three development actors, namely, the public sector, private organisations, and the community, collaborate.

Food insecurity is a global concern. According to the High Level Panel of Experts ([HLPE, 2018, p. 9](#)), “after years of decline, hunger is on the rise again and 815 million people are still undernourished worldwide.” Similarly, the [HLPE \(2020a\)](#) indicated that between 83 and 132 million additional people could experience food insecurity as a direct result of the COVID-19 pandemic. The [HLPE \(2019\)](#) identified that the global food system is at ‘crossroads’, and thus requires transformation.

Food insecurity seems to be largely predominant in Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA). Despite having made progress in the fight against hunger during the first decade of the 21st Century, this situation has been reversed, and food shortages are once more predominant in SSA (FAO, 2017a). The United Nations (2017) noted that almost two-thirds of the food insecure people are in SSA and Southern Asia. In the Southern Africa Development Community (SADC) region, a myriad of factors, including farmer incapacity, as well as improper legal and institutional frameworks for dealing with climate change, have compromised food production. Accordingly, while the SADC region records food surpluses during some of the farming seasons, member countries have largely relied on imports since 2000, implying an adverse 'food balance sheet' condition.

In Zimbabwe, food insecurity is a huge challenge. The country, referred to as the 'breadbasket' of Africa in the 1980s, ranked as one of the major importers of food in Africa between 2004 and 2013. It is noted that, while Zimbabwe was ranked as a major importer of maize, Malawi, Mozambique and Zambia (countries with similar climatic conditions and whose economies were comparable to that of Zimbabwe), were part of the major exporters of maize in Africa (Daly *et al.*, 2016). Following the El Niño-induced drought in 2016, Zimbabwe also imported maize, with the cost of grain importation reaching US\$253.5 million (Chinamasa, 2016). Notably, the Government of Zimbabwe (2019, p. 1) pointed out that the nation had "lost its status as the Bread Basket for Southern Africa and is currently a basket case". The NDS1 also acknowledges the food insecure situation by pointing out that, "Food insecurity, however, has been consistently growing in Zimbabwe" (Government of Zimbabwe, 2020, p. 61). Compounding the food insecurity situation in Zimbabwe was the COVID-19 pandemic whose multiple dynamics weakened agricultural systems and threatened people's access to food.

The COVID-19 pandemic disrupted the food value chains in the wake of lockdowns and a major global economic slowdown. According to the HLPE (2020a, p. 1), "The complex dynamics triggered by the lockdowns intended to contain the disease are creating conditions for a major disruption to food systems, giving rise to a dramatic increase in hunger." Workie *et al.* (2020) argued that the COVID-19 pandemic compounded the challenges faced by vulnerable communities who were already grappling with malnutrition and other problems. FAO (2020) made the important observation that the food supply side, mobility restriction or social isolation measures had impacts along the supply chain. As a result, the HLPE (2020a) indicated that between 83 and 132 million additional people would experience food insecurity as a direct result of the pandemic. In an attempt to propose a possible alternative to the food crises, this study examines PPCPs as the alternative for sustainable food supply during the COVID-19 era and beyond. The United Nations (2021) also observed that in light of the COVID-19 pandemic, the strengthening of the multi-stakeholder partnerships is now more important than ever before.

Multi-stakeholder collaborations have strengthened food value chains in a number of countries, including the United States. A multi-stakeholder collaborative financing model named the Farm Credit System (FCS), and established in 1916, helped the United States to transform agricultural financing (Gill, 2019). The FCS with multi-stakeholder collaboration is a nationwide network of borrower-owned financial institutions that provides credit to farmers, ranchers, residents of rural communities, agricultural and rural utility cooperatives, and other eligible borrowers (Farm Credit Administration, 2018). In Indonesia, the implementation of the Rural Empowerment and Agricultural Development (READ), a PPCPs model, resulted in increased agricultural production (HLPE, 2018). Ghana also implemented PPCPs, and Sarpong and Anim-Somuah (2015) pointed out that the Northern Rural Growth Programme (NRGP) transformed the northern part of Ghana from a food insecure to a productive region. Owing to the fact that the NRGP involved greater collaboration between the private and public sectors, it enhanced the smallholder farmers'

access to inputs, expertise and high value markets. Zimbabwe could draw valuable lessons from the experiences of the United States, Indonesia and Ghana by adopting PPCPs in the food value chains.

The implementation of PPCPs in Zimbabwe also resonates well with the shift from NPM to NPG. During the NPM era, PPPs were in the limelight as feasible financing models for infrastructural development and other programmes where governments had inadequate financial muscle. However, with the emergence of NPG, which emphasise citizen and stakeholder participation in the developmental processes of nation-states, PPPs could become mere 'leftovers' from the past. As already indicated, PPPs, which have been viewed throughout the NPM era as alternative models of financing development, carry the criticism of missing the community dimension. Osborne (2010), one of the main proponents of NPG, has averred that both the classic public administration (CPA) and NPM approaches are unable to deal with the growing complexities faced by globalised and networked societies. Contemporary challenges require the active interaction of multiple actors, and PPCPs could be the answer to the food insecurity threat in Zimbabwe during the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond.

Research methodology

Agricultural financing has been an area of debate in terms of how best to implement it. Zimbabwe's implementation of the Fast Track Land Reform Programme (FTLRP) resulted in the entrance of many small-scale farmers into the 'commercial farming' sector. Because of their 'subsistence nature', these farmers face challenges in accessing agricultural finance (Fadeyi, 2018; The World Bank, 2019). A comprehensive examination of the feasibility of PPCPs as financing mechanisms for agricultural production in Zimbabwe was not possible without reference to the concurrent mixed methods research. A single method was deemed inadequate to provide a complete examination of the significance of PPCPs as financing mechanisms for enhancing food security. The population comprised multiple stakeholders in the discourse of food security and agricultural financing in Zimbabwe. These entities included MLAFWRD, with the specific departments being the Agricultural Advisory Services (AGRITEX), Economics and Markets, and Mechanisation. Other governmental institutions in the study were FNC, GMB, ARDA, AMA, and MoF. Other stakeholders were RBZ, BAZ, the Zimbabwe Farmers Union (ZFU), and farmers. The suppliers of agricultural inputs, private companies involved in agricultural financing (registered contractors), agricultural experts, and development partners like FAO, the Department for International Development (DFID), the European Union Delegation in Zimbabwe, and the non-governmental organisations (NGOs) working in the agricultural sector, were also part of the study.

The research used a mixture of quota, purposive, and snowball sampling techniques. Sampling was conducted by phases with appropriate methods. In the first instance, purposive sampling was adopted to identify the stakeholder institutions involved in agriculture. Snowball or chain sampling was also used to identify some of the stakeholders, for example, AMA provided the database of registered contractors in agricultural production (private companies that engage in partnerships with farmers). In addition, AGRITEX officers were instrumental in providing data pertaining to the administrative districts and wards, as well as the farmers with a 'high potential for agricultural production'. As there were many stakeholder organisations in this study, quota sampling was used to ensure the representation. The purposive sampling method was used to select the knowledgeable resource persons within the stakeholder entities.

Data were collected through questionnaire, in-depth interviews, and focus group discussions. The design of the questionnaire was guided by the research objectives and

important issues pertaining to PPCPs, which were identified from the literature review. Closed questions were used, as well as a five-point Likert scale ranging from ‘Strongly Disagree’ (code 1), ‘Disagree’ (code 2), ‘Unsure’ (code 3), ‘Agree’ (code 4), and ‘Strongly Agree’ (code 5). After administering 117 questionnaires, responses were obtained from 107 individuals, indicating a response rate of 88.89 percent. In addition, 25 in-depth interviews complemented the data from the questionnaire. Data from the farmers (A1 and A2) were collected through 23 FGDs. The FGD guide was designed in line with the study’s research objectives. The FGD participants were selected with the assistance of AGRITEX officers who helped identify the farmers with a high potential for agricultural production.

Quantitative data were captured on the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) Version 25 spreadsheet. Descriptive statistics were used to analyse the findings, with computations of the mean score and standard deviation. A flexible model was adopted for analysing qualitative data, including basic analysis during data collection (interviews and FGDs). Data were then analysed thematically, and related findings were grouped together.

This study adhered to several ethical principles. The first ethical principle was that of informed consent. The relevant government ministries were informed about the research and written authorisation was obtained. Written consent forms, which explained the nature of the study, its objectives and benefits, were signed by the respondents and participants. Participation in this study was voluntary and there was freedom to withdraw, in case of any discomforts. The names of the respondents and participants were not disclosed in any part of the study report, as a way of protecting their identity.

Relevance of PPCPs in enhancing food security in Zimbabwe

The actual and potential food shortages in Zimbabwe call for huge investments in the value chains. The quantum of resources required for adequate financing of food production seems to be beyond the capacity of the government, and there is a strong case for the implementation of PPCPs. Table 1 summarises the respondents’ views on the relevance of PPCPs in agriculture.

Table 1 depicts the significance of PPCPs as financing models for agriculture. As observed, PPCPs are significant in many ways, and the mean scores ranging from 4.24 to 4.47 provide sufficient evidence in this regard. The succeeding paragraphs elaborate on the merits of PPCPs in agricultural value chains.

Relevance	Summary of descriptive statistics	
	Mean score	Standard deviation
PPCPs enhance value chain collaboration and mutual benefits	4.45	0.62
PPCPs make it possible to integrate smallholder farmers into high value chain markets	4.37	0.59
Access to adequate inputs by farmers is enhanced and PPCPs enhance yields and national output	4.41	0.49
PPCPs enhance the ability to adopt new technology	4.42	0.50
PPCPs enhance mobilisation of resources, which is not possible without collaboration	4.28	0.58
Multi-stakeholder collaborations help in reducing information asymmetries, enhance transparency, and trust	4.47	0.50
There is risk sharing in PPCPs	4.24	1.19

Table 1.
Relevance of PPCPs as financing models for Zimbabwean agriculture

PPCPs enhance value chain collaboration, and integrate smallholder farmers into markets

With a mean score of 4.45 as shown in [Table 1](#), most of the respondents were in agreement with the assertion that PPCPs enhance value chain collaboration, and that there are mutual benefits. The findings of this research are in line with existing literature, for instance, [Neely et al. \(2017\)](#) hold that multi-stakeholder collaborations could contribute towards cross-sectorial coordination by bringing diverse actors from civil society, the private sector as well as government. Moreover, PPCPs increase synergistic advantages through sharing of ideas between the government, the private sector and farmers. To corroborate the quantitative findings, one of the participants said, “*The cocktail of challenges in Zimbabwe’s agricultural sector requires active sharing of ideas.*” These findings align with existing literature, as the [HLPE \(2018\)](#) pointed out that multi-stakeholder partnerships bring together business, government, smallholder farmers, and civil society actors to improve productivity.

In addition, most of the respondents were in agreement with the assertion that PPCPs are relevant in the agricultural sector because they enhance integration of smallholder farmers into high value chain markets (mean score 4.37). Literature also supports these findings, and [Obosi \(2017\)](#) opined that PPCPs promote the integration of smallholder farmers into markets, resulting in mutual benefits for all the actors involved.

PPCPs enhance access to adequate inputs, improve yields, and national output

Access to adequate inputs by farmers is possible through PPCPs. Related to this assertion, one of the interviewees said that farmers’ access to adequate agricultural inputs has been a perennial challenge, and PPCPs are a viable option. Another reason for the significance of PPCPs in agriculture is that they have a potential to enhance yields and increase national output, and the mean response score in this regard was 4.41 ([Table 1](#)). One AGRITEX extension officer interviewed argued that the annual food requirement for Zimbabwe is between 2.1 and 2.2 million tonnes of maize grain, and PPCPs could ensure the realisation of this demand. In addition, another participant from AGRITEX had this to say:

The productivity rate in the maize crop sector in Zimbabwe is disappointing, with a national average of about 0.8 tonnes per hectare. Yet, if all the inputs are available and farmers have adequate expertise, the rate can be as high as 17 tonnes per hectare (10 tonnes being the average expectation for highly productive farms).

Increase in yields and national output is possible because PPCPs ensure farmer capacity building. Capacity building of all value chain actors is possible through PPCPs.

PPCPs enhance the ability to adopt new technology

Most of the respondents in this study agreed with the view that PPCPs could enhance the ability to adopt new technology (mean score 4.42). Deliberations with farmers during the FGDs showed that most of them were in need of agricultural equipment and advanced technology, which would be possible through PPCPs.

PPCPs enhance mobilisation of resources, which is not possible without collaboration

The findings in [Table 1](#) show that most of the respondents agreed with the assertion that PPCPs enhance mobilisation of resources, which is not possible without collaboration (mean score 4.28). Sound agricultural production requires adequate resources, whose mobilisation is possible through collective action.

PPCPs help in reducing information asymmetries, enhance transparency, and trust

Multi-stakeholder collaborations help in reducing information asymmetries. The mean response score for this factor, as shown in [Table 1](#), was 4.47, indicating overwhelming agreement. A participant in one of the state-owned enterprises engaged in this study said,

The food-producing sector has been labelled as highly problematic because of information asymmetries. Adverse selection and moral hazard problems are very common, and the PPCPs could help reduce the information asymmetries and agency problems.

The adoption of PPCPs will go a long way towards cultivating trust among the various actors. One of the participants from the development partners said, *“There is a lot of mistrust in the food producing sector, and funding has been elusive”*. PPCPs could be viable options for sustainable funding in the agricultural sector. The challenges in Zimbabwe’s food producing sector include mistrust among the various value chain actors. For instance, bank-led financing of food production seems non-existent because of mistrust. The opaqueness of pricing structures is a significant limitation of the existing contract farming arrangements, as highlighted by the farmers who took part in this research. The farmers raised a concern over the cost of inputs and the selling price of the produce. One of the farmers said, *“We are always at a disadvantage and we incur very high inputs costs, yet at the end of the farming season the selling price of the maize grain is usually low”*. A representative of the farmers argued that bringing stakeholders together helps to promote transparency, which is essential in Zimbabwe’s food value chains.

There is risk sharing in PPCPs

Table 1 shows that most of the respondents agreed with the narrative that there is risk sharing in PPCPs (mean score 4.24). In Zimbabwe’s food crops sector, farmers seem to shoulder most of the risks associated with production. Multi-stakeholder partnerships could be suitable for agricultural funding, given that they embody risk sharing. PPCPs are the mechanism for fair risk sharing between the partners, as well as the protection of smallholder farmers. The risk management function of PPCPs is particularly attractive to the Zimbabwean agricultural sector, where uncertainty and risk are prevalent. Agricultural risks typically range from production risks (for example, adverse weather conditions, natural disasters, pest and disease outbreak) and market risks (volatility in output price, variability in input price, exchange rate volatility, counterpart or default risk), to business enabling environment risks (regulatory risk, infrastructure risk and political risks). In Zimbabwe, the risks inherent in food production could be managed through PPCPs.

Complexities associated with PPCPs in agriculture

PPCPs can have problematic features, and it is essential to consider these negative effects. According to the HLPE (2018), multi-stakeholder partnerships are not exempt from limitations, and they do not always provide a ‘silver-bullet’ solution in all situations. Some of the limitations of PPCPs include complexities associated with balancing power asymmetries among partners in the decision-making processes. There is also a potential threat of conflicts between public and private interests, and the withdrawal of responsibilities previously assumed by states or public authorities. Another challenge is that of high transaction costs and supposed lower effectiveness associated with the multi-stakeholder partnerships, especially when the number of stakeholders is high.

Table 2 depicts the disadvantages of adopting PPCPs as financing models for food production in Zimbabwe. As per the findings in the table, there could be many problematic issues associated with the adoption of PPCPs in the food value chains. The succeeding paragraphs elaborate on the identified challenges.

Complexities associated with balancing power relations and conflict of interest

According to Table 2, the majority of respondents agreed with the assertion that there could be complexities associated with balancing power asymmetries among the partners

(mean score 3.68). Accordingly, the success of PPCPs in Zimbabwe’s food value chains is depended on the extent of containment of the power balances among the actors. Some of the questions asked in relation to multi-stakeholder partnerships are to do with their capacity to balance power asymmetries among partners in the decision-making process.

The findings in [Table 2](#) illustrated that one of the challenges associated with PPCPs is the conflict of interest which may arise among partners (mean score 4.34). The stakeholders may have different interests and motivations for engagement in the PPCPs, and they usually pursue multiple, sometimes competing objectives at different scales. To corroborate these findings, one of the interview participants argued that some government officials are shareholders or have links with private companies, which they use to siphon public resources. One of the farmers who participated in the focus group discussions opined,

Corruption is a huge challenge in Zimbabwe. Weak governance and accountability mechanisms may lead to wastage of resources that are meant for food production.

The preceding argument aligns with existing literature. The [HLPE \(2018\)](#) has also observed that the private sector can see their participation in multi-stakeholder partnerships as a way to influence policy discourse and decision-making.

Inadequacies in planning, and institutional incapacity

The success of PPCPs in the maize crop sector requires astute planning and institutional capacity, which may not be available. [Table 2](#) shows that most of the respondents were in agreement with the view that lack of capacity to manage PPCPs could compromise success (mean score 4.22). This finding is in line with the sentiments expressed by the [FAO \(2017b\)](#) that the lack of capacity to manage PPCPs is a challenge in most developing countries. [Sathiyah \(2013\)](#) also stated that PPCPs are quite complex to navigate through as they often comprise multiple stakeholders who may hold diverse views on development and varying degrees of influence over decision-making.

High transaction costs compromising active participation

As evident from [Table 2](#), high transaction costs can compromise the success of PPCPs (mean score 4.31). PPCPs entail interactions by many actors, which is a costly exercise. In light of the high transaction costs associated with PPCPs, ensuring active participation of multiple and diverse stakeholder groups is a challenge. [Table 2](#) shows that most of the respondents agreed with the view that active participation by all is not possible (mean score 4.18). One of the agricultural experts interviewed said,

Disadvantages	Summary of descriptive statistics	
	Mean score	Standard deviation
Complexities associated with balancing power asymmetries among partners	3.68	1.16
Conflict of interest among partners	4.34	1.02
Management incapacity in PPCPs compromise success	4.22	0.96
High transaction costs in multi-stakeholder partnerships	4.31	0.75
Ensuring active participation of multiple and diverse stakeholder groups is a challenge	4.18	0.83

Table 2.
Disadvantages of PPCPs in financing of food production

The views of all the farmers may not be heard because of the limitations associated with genuine participation. There may be ‘road-side elites’ who hijack participatory processes.

The multiplicity of actors in PPCPs could make active participation by smallholder farmers impossible. In one of the FGDs, the farmers argued that not everyone could provide their views and a few powerful individuals may dominate the processes.

Enhancing the success of PPCPs in agriculture

The basic question asked was, “What are the options for enhancing the utility of PPCPs in the financing of food production in Zimbabwe?” Figure 1 shows the results.

Figure 1 illustrates the options for enhancing the utility of PPCPs in the financing of food production in Zimbabwe. These building blocks are elaborated on in the succeeding paragraphs.

Farmer capacity building

Figure 1 shows that farmer capacity building is essential in PPCPs (mean score 4.74). Sound planning, which is possible when there is capacity building, is essential if the PPCPs are to be a success. Planning to ensure that all the inputs requirements for food production are available when required is of utmost importance. In Zimbabwe’s food production sector, it is very common for the farmers to make rushed buying decisions at the onset of the farming season. There is pressure on the suppliers, who for a short period during the year, are not able to meet demand. As a result, there are shortages of basic inputs like seed and fertilisers, resulting in farmers being ‘forced’ to buy at exorbitant prices.

Farmer capacity building, so that there is a reduction in unit production costs and an increase per-hectare productivity is necessary. The food-producing farmers may need to take

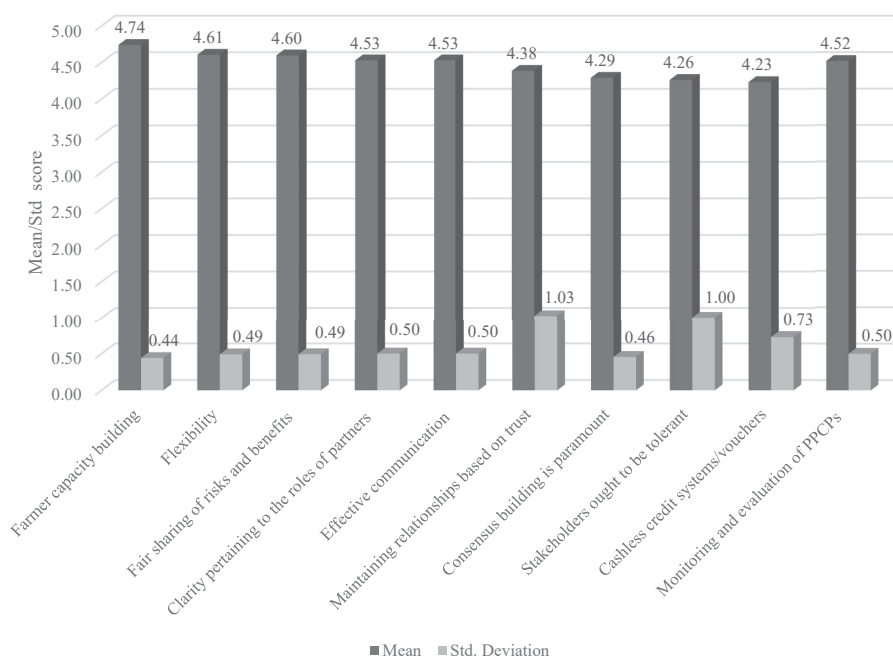


Figure 1.
Options for enhancing
utility of PPCPs in
financing of food
production

advantage of technical and technological expertise (available through PPCPs) and improve productivity. In addition, one of the agricultural experts argued,

There is need to focus on the farming areas and on farmers with a very high potential for maize production. Only a few capable farmers need to have the capacity to produce adequate food for Zimbabwe. It is also essential for the government and the private partners to identify competent farmers. There is a need to differentiate 'farmers' from 'politicians', and also to identify 'the new master farmers'. Involvement of genuine farmers is a prerequisite for success.

Flexibility in the PPCPs is essential

Flexibility is essential in the partnerships, and the mean score for this building block is 4.61 (Figure 1). This finding resonates with existing literature, as seen from [Almarri and Blackwell \(2014\)](#) who stated that flexibility comes in many forms, one of which is the incorporation of a renegotiation clause in the partnership contract. Renegotiations are necessary when there is a need to balance the risks and economic benefits. In the food value chains, adaptation is paramount, especially if the macro-environment is volatile.

Fair sharing of risks and benefits, and clarity on the roles of partners

On the issue of the importance of fair sharing of risks and benefits, Figure 1 shows a mean score of 4.60, indicating overwhelming agreement with the assertion. It is also vital to define what 'success' means for each of the partners involved. There is a need to maintain relationships built on trust and transparency to ensure fair pricing of food produced. In one of the focus group discussions, the farmers emphasised that trust, fairness and risk sharing are essential in PPCPs. When sharing risks and benefits, there must be clarity on the roles of partners (mean score 4.53). There is also mitigation of challenges and risks through a proper selection of competent private sector partners. The findings from interviews and focus group discussions also showed that the active involvement of as many partners as possible is important. Devolved structures in PPCPs arrangements, down to the district and ward levels ought to be established. The debates on food production should take place in the farming areas, and not in cities and towns.

Effective communication, trust, and consensus

Figure 1 also shows that all the respondents were in agreement with the assertion that effective communication is essential in PPCPs (mean score 4.53). This finding has support in literature, as evident in [Pattberg and Widerberg \(2014\)](#) who argued that clear communication and transparency are the central tools for addressing power asymmetries. Almost all the interview participants concurred that effective communication reduces information asymmetry problems, which are common in Zimbabwe's food crops sector. In this sector, it is important that suitable persons or stakeholders participate in PPCPs. There is a need for perfect and complete information to prevent moral hazard and adverse selection problems. This argument is supported by [Guizar et al. \(2015\)](#) who argued that in the agricultural sector, information imperfections may lead to adverse selection and moral hazard threats, which not only discourages potential lenders, but also leads to credit rationing. It is also essential for the stakeholders to maintain relationships based on trust (mean score 4.38). Equally important is the need for consensus among the stakeholders (mean score 4.29).

Tolerance and respect of other partners

Figure 1 shows that most of the respondents agreed with the view that every stakeholder ought to be tolerant and also respect the views of other partners (mean score 4.26). There should be a clear

division of responsibilities, as well as risk sharing. Equally important is the need to define the roles of partners and align interests, as similarly observed by the HLPE (2018) who argued that a clear definition of roles is paramount for the successful implementation of partnerships. This shows that the current study's arguments resonate with existing literature. Successful agribusiness partnerships require aligning diverse interests and visions, and reaching consensus, particularly on public sector objectives and priorities for promoting partnerships. The public partners must clearly understand the rationale for promoting a partnership approach over other mechanisms of public sector support, and also be able to identify types of projects where partnerships will be most effective in addressing market failures in a sustainable way. According to the Alliance for Green Revolution in Africa (AGRA, 2021), the government also has a role of promoting enabling business environments and facilitating private investment in agriculture. In line with this observation, Post *et al.* (2021) argued that a deficient enabling environment has deterred private sector investment in agriculture. Thus, sound policies and agriculture governance systems are essential. According to the HLPE (2020b), policy and governance systems interact with food systems in complex and iterative ways, and there is need for both formal and informal rules, norms and processes that facilitate sound decisions. In addition, resilient agriculture and food systems require sound regulatory frameworks, which do not hinder credit provision and innovation. Equally important is the need for the governments to transform from treating agriculture as a social sector, towards a bankable business (AGRA, 2021).

Use of cashless credit systems

One of the challenges associated with PPCPs identified in this study is the abuse of inputs by farmers. Therefore, cashless credit systems/vouchers are essential as they reduce the temptation to divert inputs (mean score 4.23 in Figure 1).

Monitoring and evaluation

Monitoring and evaluation of PPCPs are essential for success. Lessons from literature show that an adequate and efficient monitoring, reporting and evaluation system is of utmost importance (Rankin *et al.*, 2016). Through monitoring and evaluation, there is organisational learning, and institutions have proven more effective when they are able to quickly adapt to new circumstances. To manage this process, monitoring progress, producing reports and evaluating outcomes are essential tools for understanding how the partnership is doing vis-à-vis its targets and goals.

Conclusion

This study has shown that Zimbabwe's food balance sheet is in adverse position, a situation that has been worsened by the COVID-19 pandemic. Owing to the fact that PPCPs enhance value chain collaboration, integrate farmers into high chain markets, and enhance access to adequate inputs, they could be alternative mechanisms in food insecure countries like Zimbabwe. The various stakeholders in PPCPs imply the existence of networks. The complex challenges in the contemporary world require the active participation of multiple actors. Since PPCPs bring stakeholders together, they also promote transparency. However, PPCPs are not 'magic bullets' and they therefore require proper design. It is paramount to unite the different interests of the diverse partners in PPCPs. There is a need to limit transaction costs and to have a common understanding of the problems. Trust is essential in the establishment of vibrant, multi-stakeholder partnerships. Furthermore, in the partnership agreements, there is a need for a clear definition of partners' roles. Flexibility is also essential in the PPCPs. The climatic conditions and weather patterns, which are among the critical success factors in agriculture, are unpredictable.

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