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Abstract

The evolution of agricultural systems in response to ever changing demands of consumers and policy shifts in environmental conservation has “crowded out” most rural farmers. These face a spectrum of challenges emanating from stiff competition of pricing, standard conformance and reliability of supply among others. Poorly developed market networks are keeping cheaper and nutritious sorghum products away from domestic consumers worsening their livelihoods. Yet potentially competitive domestic producers of sorghum exist in under-developed rural communities such as Mbire. Addressing market failures sustaining the poor state of development of an otherwise commercially viable commodity value chain for Mbire District is essential for inclusive economic development of marginal farming regions of Zimbabwe. The effectiveness of a number of mechanisms including cooperatives and contracts for cash crops has been greatly documented in literature. However there still remains a significant challenge of fragile market networks in small grains value chains due to the mutually unbeneficial results generated by the implementation efforts of these traditionally adopted mechanisms. The main question to be addressed in the study is what mechanisms will facilitate the smooth flow of products and value thereof in the sorghum market systems. There is therefore a need to look at alternative approaches to link actors along the value chain as a number of new potentially viable product-based end markets emerge. The LINK methodology blended with experimental economics based approaches will guide the study. Various market linkage approaches will be tested and blended to design the “most appropriate” mechanisms for linking sorghum value chain actors beyond the traditional local unviable markets. This will create new avenues for enhancing and strengthening the net value extracted by the various value chain actors, including small holder sorghum producers. Ultimately, this will reduce poverty in Trans-Frontier Conservation Areas (TFCAs) of rural semi-arid Zimbabwe where income from sorghum can form a strong foundation for livelihoods if optimally tapped into.