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The Implications of Middlemen in the Marketing of Horticultural Produce in Zimbabwe: The Case of Mbare Musika, Harare

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Abstract: ***The study was carried out to assess the implications of middlemen in the marketing of horticultural produce at MbareMusika, Harare, Zimbabwe. A descriptive survey was adopted for this study. Convenience sampling was used to select horticulture farmers and purposive to select key informants. Data was collected through questionnaires, face to face interviews and non-participant observations. The study employed descriptive statistics and logit model. Results show that profit margins of independent farmers are higher than those of farmers that engaged middlemen. Perceptions on the role of middlemen in the marketing of horticultural produce were mostly negative. Farmers face several challenges, and most are as a result of the middlemen. Type of crops grown, farmer's income, level of education and farm size significantly affect farmer's decision to engage middlemen (P<0.05). Government should provide appropriate infrastructure, security and encourage private sector to engage in contract farming to reduce exploitation of farmers by middlemen.***

Keywords: Middlemen, Marketing, Horticultural produce, Mbare-Musika, Horticulture farmers, Logit model, Vegetables

1. Introduction

The horticulture sector is one of the important sectors in the agriculture industry in Zimbabwe, as it contributes immensely to GDP, and a source of livelihood to many farmers. The main horticultural crops in Zimbabwe include vegetables such as tomatoes, cabbages, rape, onion, beans and carrots, including fruit such as peaches, plums, guavas, lychees, blueberries and papaya (Proctor, Loager, Henson, Masakure, Brouder, Bhila & Sigauke, 2000). Primary production in the sector is mainly dominated by smallholder farmers who have small plots, although some large-scale producers are also involved (CZI 2011). These small-scale farmers account for 50% to 60% of the horticultural produce in Zimbabwe (HPC 2012).

Smallholder horticulture farmers in Zimbabwe sell their produce to export and local markets. The local markets include, supermarkets, colleges, hotels and restaurants, hospitals, boarding schools and their farm gates. The bulk of their produce is sold through wholesale markets like Machipisa in Highfield, Harare, Aspindale in Harare, Mutare, Rusape and MbareMusika in Harare. This is mainly because the other marketing channels are too selective and sometimes farmers cannot meet the standards required (Juana & Mabungu, 2005).

Exporting companies and associations like Fresh Produce Marketing Association of Zimbabwe (FPMAZ) require certain quantities and quality of the produce, which most farmers cannot meet, (HPC 2012). Some markets offer little incentives to farmers so as to develop relationships, and this makes the smallholder farmer shun these marketing channels (Baggs, Poulton, Poole & Muponda 2001). Markets such as Mbare Musika are easy to access because fees charged for entry into the market are minimal and quality of the produce does not matter. Marketing in such markets, however, has its own disadvantages such as high price volatility and risk of being ripped off by middlemen, (Sandika 2011; Marufu 2018).

In Zimbabwe horticulture farmers have the option to sell their produce at vegetable wholesale markets independently or through middlemen. Middlemen are players in the marketing system who act as agents or intermediaries between buyers and sellers. They play a decisive role in the marketing of goods to determine the benefits that should reach the producer (Roy 2015). These middlemen operate in almost all the continents of the world, but mostly where economies are booming or where there are shortages due to floods or human error, but mostly where they benefit in a huge way (Sandika 2011). The middlemen act as intermediaries between producers and consumers, in this case they are intermediary between farmers, retailers, consumers including wholesalers. Middlemen can be in the form of village dealers in the smallholder communities, or pre-harvest contractors who come to farmers before their produce is ready and negotiate marketing deals (Badar 2008). Others act as commission people who find marketing channels and get paid through the sale of the farmer's produce by negotiated marketing channels.

Most horticulture farmers have no access to market information, access to reliable market and face high transaction costs (ZFU 2011), which hinders marketing of

their produce. Due to these challenges, middlemen take advantage of the farmers as they have market information. They buy produce at low prices and sell at high prices or store it in their storage facilities when the product floods the market and resale when the prices firm (Santen 2006). It is believed that prices in the markets of horticultural produce are significantly influenced by middlemen through speculative tendencies of produce price. In other studies, middlemen can also play a pivotal role in studying market trends and provide information to farmers such that losses are reduced. Also, efficiency in market can be achieved through arbitration (Chigusiwa *et al*.2010).

There are so many conclusions that have been drawn from the activities of the middlemen. These range from monopoly, pricing issues, exploitation and supply chain issues (Reddy2010; Chigusiwa*et al*.2013). None of these studies has however looked at the factors that influence the farmers' decision to engage middlemen and the impact that the middlemen have on the farmers' returns in the horticultural sector. According to the Horticultural Promotion Council (HPC), the horticultural sector is operating at below 20% capacity due to marketing logistical constrains. It is against this background that the study seeks to investigate the implication of middlemen in marketing horticultural produce at MbareMusika.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

Despite the abundance of marketing opportunities and high profits that can be derived from selling horticultural produce, small holder farmers are failing to maximize profits due to lack of marketing skills, market information and access to high paying markets. Farmers are not confident and do not have information regarding current changes in horticultural produce prices, shape and size of produce required including quality and quantity. Farmers lack knowledge of produce required during a particular season, such that they end up flooding the market (CZI 2011). Horticulture farmers in Zimbabwe sell the bulk of their produce through wholesale markets like Machipisa in Highfield, Harare, Aspindale in Harare, Mutare, Rusape and MbareMusika in Harare. This is mainly because the other marketing channels that is local markets such as hotels, and the export markets are too selective and sometimes farmers cannot meet the standards that these marketing channels require (Juana &Mabungu, 2005). Selling produce at markets such as MbareMusika has the advantage of easy access to market, low market entry fees and there are no set standards on quality of the produce. However, marketing in such markets has its own disadvantages such as high price volatility and risk of being ripped off by middlemen, (Sandika 2011; Marufu 2018), which in turn leads to low farmer returns. Most farmers do not have marketing skills which are paramount to selling their produce for a good profit and manage to offset overheads. Farmers selling through middlemen are likely to lose out on value for their produce as middlemen dictate lower prices for them, and then skyrocket prices when reselling for their own benefit. This research will focus on the implications of market middlemen in the marketing of horticultural produce at MbareMusika in Harare

1.2 Justification of the study

It is anticipated that the findings of the study will help improve the farmers' marketing skills and strategies in order to maximise on their returns. Harare City Council will also be able to put in place mechanisms that ensures easy of trade by all stakeholders in vegetable wholesale markets. The study will also help the horticultural farmers get a fair price for their produce and prevent them from getting ripped off by being offered lower prices.

1.3 Objective of the study

The main objective is to evaluate the implications of middlemen in the marketing of horticultural produce at MbareMusika in Harare.

1.3.1 Specific objectives

1) To compare the socio-economic characteristics of farmers that engage middlemen in the marketing of horticultural produce and those that do not engage middlemen.
2) To assess factors that affect farmers' decision to engage middlemen in marketing of horticultural produce at MbareMusika in Harare.
3) To assess farmers' perception on the role of middlemen in marketing of horticultural produce at MbareMusika in Harare.
4) To investigate challenges faced by farmers in marketing of horticultural produce at MbareMusika in Harare.

1.4 Research Questions

1) What are the characteristics of farmers that are involved in marketing of horticultural produce at MbareMusika in Harare?
2) What factors affect farmers' decision to engage middlemen in marketing of horticultural produce at MbareMusika in Harare?
3) What is farmers' perception on the role of middlemen in marketing of horticultural produce at MbareMusika in Harare?
4) What challenges are faced by farmers in marketing of horticultural produce at MbareMusika in Harare?

2. Materials and methods

2.1 Description of Study Area

The study was conducted at MbareMusika, which is located in the southern side of Harare Central Business District (CBD). The study area has a latitude of $17^{0}51^{1}20.39^{''}$South and longitude $31^{0}02^{l}29.40''$East and altitude of 1 490 (Google maps, 2013). It is the major trading market for vegetables and fruits including other horticultural produce. MbareMusika is located on the southern side of the city, about 5 kilometres from the CBD of Harare. It is a major bus terminus for rural bound buses and other cities, (Nhambura 2014). MbareMusika acts as the distribution centre for agricultural produce in Zimbabwe and acts as both a wholesale market and consumer market, (CZI 2011).

2.2 Research design

The study used descriptive survey design. The design comprised of three sub-designs which are: simple descriptive approach used to gather facts about types of farmers involved in marketing of horticultural produce, assess farmers' decision to engage middlemen, investigate challenges faced by farmers in engaging middlemen and investigate role of middlemen in marketing of horticultural produce; comparative approach used to find existing differences among different farmers involved in marketing of horticultural produce and correlation approach to determine the relationship that existed between the practised approach used to gather facts about marketing of horticulture produce and the typical theoretical condition expected (Neuman 2000). The study used triangulation, which seeks the clearance of study loopholes which ironed out possibility of data leakages during the study process.

2.3 Target population and sample size

The target population consisted of horticultural farmers involved in selling of horticultural produce at MbareMusika. The sample size consisted of 30 horticultural farmers who supplied produce at MbareMusika i. e. independently or with the assistance of the middlemen. Horticultural produce that was looked at in the study were tomatoes, peppers, Irish potatoes, bananas, oranges, cabbages, rape, covo, carrots and cucumber.

2.4 Sampling procedure

Convenience sampling was used to select horticulture farmers. It is the easiest method of sampling because participants will be selected based on availability and willingness to take part. Purposive sampling was used to select key informants for interviewing such as Zimtrade, Zimbabwe Farmers Union (ZFU), Ministry of Agriculture (AGRITEX), Horticulture Promotion Centre and Harare City Council. This sampling method relies on the judgement of the researcher when choosing who to ask to participate. It is time and cost effective whilst resulting in a range of responses.

2.5 Data collection

The study used primary data. Primary data was collected using questionnaires, interviews, non-participant observation and focus group discussions. Questionnaires were given to farmers. Key informant interviews were used for qualitative data with people who are well versed with what was going on in the marketing of horticultural produce at the organisation's offices. The technique used in conducting the key informant interviews was face-to-face interviews which were administered to organisations like, Zimtrade, ZFU, Ministry of Agriculture (AGRITEX), Horticulture Promotion Centre and Harare City Council.

2.6 Data analysis

Data collected was processed using Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS 16). The study made use of descriptive statistics to summarise and interpret the data.
Logit model was used to determine factors that affect decision making. Below is the Logit Model equation

$$logit(y) = \log\left(\frac{p}{1-p}\right) = \beta 0 + \beta 1X1 + \cdots + \beta kXk$$

$Y = \beta 0 + \beta_1 Typcrop + \beta_2 Income + \beta_3 MktInfo + \beta_4 EducLev + \beta_5 FarmSiz + \beta_6 FarmExp + \beta_7 Gen + \beta_8 DistMkt + e$

Where Y is the independent variable denoting farmers' decision
X_1 refers to types of crops grown
X_2 refers to income
X_3 refers to market information
X_4 refers to educational level
X_5 refers to farm size
X_6 refers to Farm experience
X_7 refers to Gender
X_8 refers to distance to market
e refers to stochastic error term
The prior expectations are that the socio-economic factors do not affect the farmers decision to engage middlemen in marketing horticultural produce.

3. Results

3.1 Socio economic characteristics of horticulture farmers

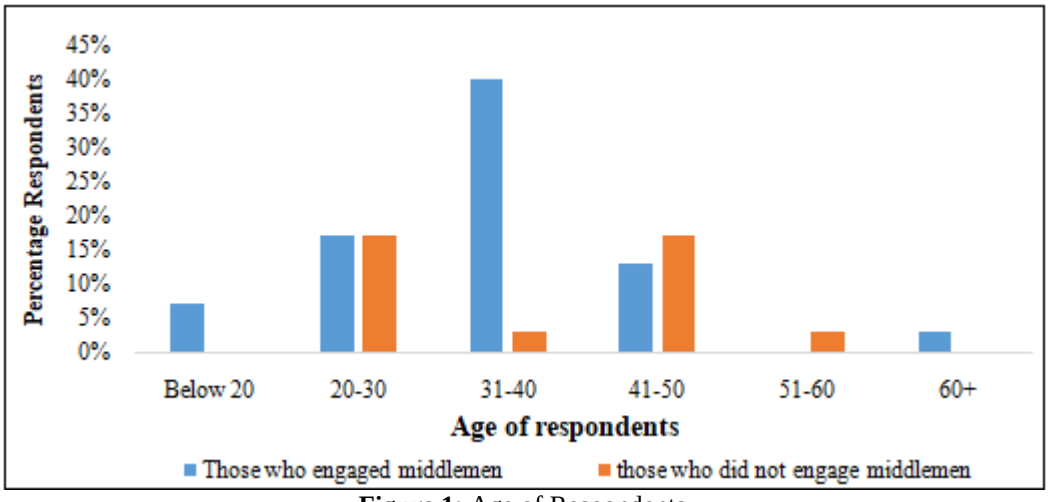

Figure 1: Age of Respondents

Fig 1 above shows age groupsof both farmers who engaged middlemen and those who did not engage middlemen. Bulk of the farmers i. e.40% of the farmers who engaged middlemen were within age range 31-40 years and none in the range of 51-60+ years. Mean age of respondents was 34.5 years. A great percentage of the independent farmers where in the 20-30 years range and the 41-50 years range. None of the independent farmers were below 20

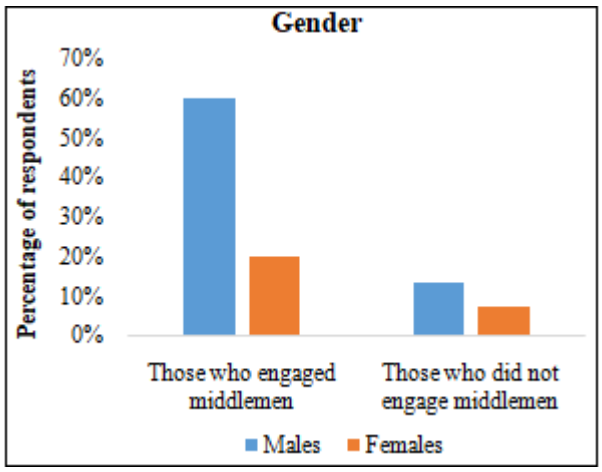

Figure 2: Gender of Respondents

Results on Fig 2 shows that A greater percentage of the farmers in both groups are males This trend was also noted through the focus group discussions where males were more than females during the discussion session and also from non-participant observation entailed the same results. The results showed that there more males than females because of high theft rate at MbareMusika where man can secure their produce easily than women. Women will have to stay home and take care of the family.

3.1.1 Level of Education

Table 1: Highest Level of Education of Farmers

Level of Education	Farmers Who Engaged Middlemen	%	Farmers Who Did not Engage Middlemen	%
Primary	1	4	0	0
ZJC	1	4	0	0
Ordinary Level	14	58	3	50
Advanced Level	5	21	1	16
Tertiary Education	1	4	2	34
No Formal Education	2	9	0	0
Total	**24**	100	**6**	100

Table 1 above shows that over 50% of farmers in both groups attained Ordinary Level. All farmers that did not engage middlemen had formal education and attained at least O level i. e.50 percent had O-level, 16 percent A-level and 34 percent Tertiary Education whereas 9% of farmers that engaged middlemen did not go to school.4% of the farmers who engaged middlemen went up to primary level and 4% ZJC. Very few attained tertiary education i. e.4%

3.1.2 Farming experience and assets owned

Table 2: Farming Experience

Farming Experience (Years)	Farmers Who Engaged Middlemen	%	Farmers Who Did not Engage Middlemen	%
Less than 1 Year	2	8	0	0
1-2	5	21	1	16
2-3	0	0	0	0
3-4	6	25	2	34
4-5	5	21	0	0
More than 5 Years	6	25	3	50
Total	24	100	6	100

On table 2, results revealed that 25 of the farmers who engaged middlemen had more than five years' experience in horticultural farming whilst 50% did not engage middlemen. Farmers who engaged middlemen in the category of 4-5 years of experience were 21% while those who did not engage middlemen were 0%. In the 3-4 years of experience, farmers who engaged middlemen were 25% whilst those who did not engage middlemen were 34%. The table revealed that farmers in the age range of 2-3 years had 0% of both farmers who engaged middlemen and those who did not engage middlemen. In the 1-2 years of experience, the farmers who engaged middlemen were 21% whereas the farmers who did not engage middlemen were 16%. Lastly, the farmers who had less than a year in horticultural farming were 8% who engaged middlemen and 0% did not engage middlemen.

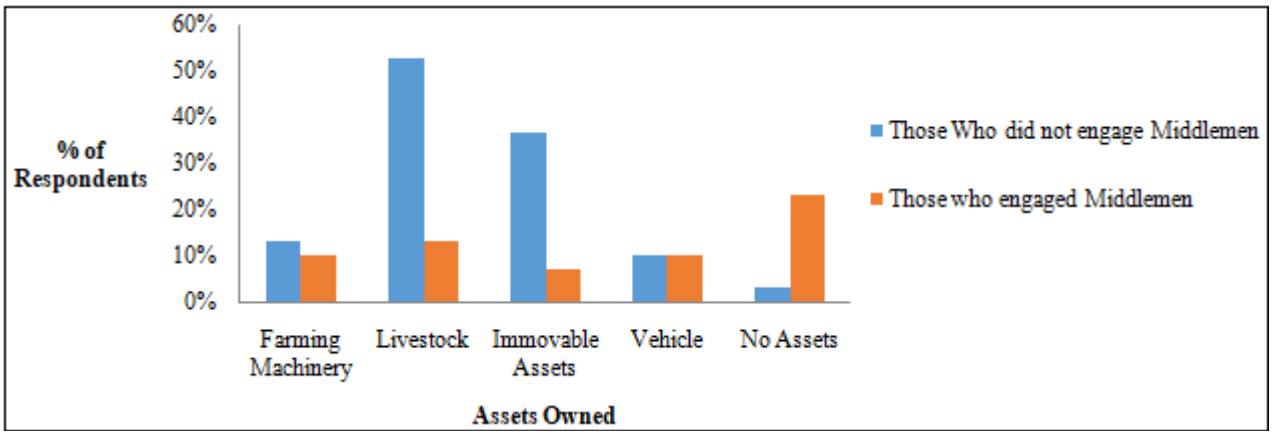

Figure 3: Assets owned by Farmers

A total of 53% of the respondents who did not engage middlemen had livestock, 40% had immovable assets followed by 13% who had farming machinery, 10% who had vehicle, while 3% of the respondents had no assets as shown on Fig 3. The results above also revealed that of the farmers who engaged middlemen, 13% had livestock, 10% had vehicles, 10% had farming machinery, 7% had immovable assets and 23% had no assets at all. A smaller percentage of the farmers who did not engage middlemen had no assets as compared to those who engaged middlemen

3.1.3 Farmer profit margin

Figure 4: Profit Margin for Farmers Who Engaged Middlemen and Those Who Did Not

Fig 4 shows that farmers who did not engage middlemen had higher profit margin i. e.70% as compared those who engaged middlemen had a profit margin of 30%. Relatively, the answers from the focus group discussion showed that farmers who did not engage middlemen had more profits as indicated from the findings above.

3.2 Factors Affecting Farmers' Decision in Marketing of Horticultural Produce

Table 3: Factors affecting farmer's decision in Marketing Horticultural produce at MbareMusika

Coefficients[a]					
Model	B	Std. Error	Beta	T	P Value
(Constant)	-.312	.118		-2.637	.017
Type of crops grown	-.065	.013	-.668	-4.950	.000**
Farming experience	-.015	.004	.959	3.808	.001**
Age of farmer	-.045	.024	-.271	-1.871	.078
Distance to market	.004	.004	.152	.827	.419
Market information	.025	.003	.0114	1.304	.041*
Gender of the farmer	.025	.019	.083	1.344	.195
Farmer educational level	.028	.010	.671	2.832	.011*
Income	.004	.019	.144	.900	.011*
Farm Size	.025	.005	-.152	.866	.031*

*Significant at p< 0.05, ** Significant at p< 0.01, ns = not significant
Dependent variable: Farmers decision to engage middlemen in marketing horticultural produce.

Table 3. shows that a total of 6 variables were found to be statistically significant at 1% and 5% level of significance. The estimates of the model indicate that the types of crops grown, experience in horticultural farming significantly affects farmers' decision in engaging middlemen in the marketing of horticultural produce at 1% and 5% level of significance. Market information, farm size, income and educational level of the farmer significantly affects farmers' decision in engaging middlemen in the marketing of horticultural produce at 5% level of significance. From the survey age, distance to market and gender of the farmer do not affect farmers' decision to engage middlemen in the marketing of horticultural produce at 1% and 5% level of significance as shown in Table 3

3.3 Farmers' Perception on the Role of Middlemen in Marketing of Horticultural Produce

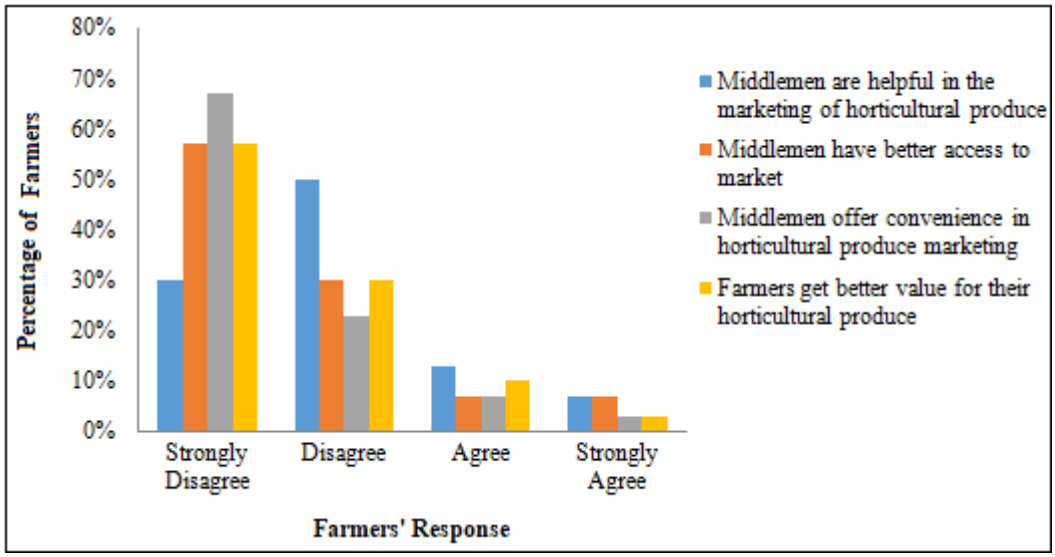

Figure 6: Assessment of Farmers' Perception on the Role of Middlemen in Marketing Horticultural Produce

The graph above (Fig 6) shows that 7% of the farmers strongly agree that middlemen are very helpful in the marketing of the horticultural produce while 13% agree that middlemen are helpful in the marketing of horticultural produce. However, 50% farmers disagreed and 30% farmers strongly disagree that the middlemen are helpful in the

marketing of horticultural produce as shown on Fig 6. From the focus group discussions most farmers argued that middlemen are of little help in the marketing of horticultural produce.

A total of 56% of the farmers strongly disagreed that middlemen have better access to market and 30% disagree that middlemen have better access to markets. However, 13% farmers and 2% of the farmers agree and strongly agreed respectively that middlemen have better access to market as shown on Fig 6.

The graph above shows that 67% of the farmers indicated that they strongly disagreed that middlemen offered a most convenient way of marketing horticulture produce at MbareMusika while 23% of farmers indicated that they disagreed. Few farmers, that is 7% of the farmers and 3% agree and strongly agree respectively, that middlemen offer a convenient way of marketing horticultural produce at MbareMusika as shown on Fig 6.

Fifty-seven percent of the respondents strongly disagree that middlemen give better value for their produce and 20% disagreed. Out of the respondents a total of 10% of the farmers and 3% agree and disagree respectively, that middlemen give better value for their horticultural produce as shown on Fig 4.5.

3.4 Challenges Faced by Farmers in Marketing of Horticultural Produce

Table 4: Challenges Faced by Farmers in Marketing Horticultural Produce

Challenges	Frequency	Percentage	Ranking
Low prices on commodities	25	83	1
High competition	25	83	2
Weak market information system	23	77	3
Transport costs	22	73	4
Theft of produce	21	70	5
High storage costs	11	36	6

Table 4above shows the challenges faced by farmers at MbareMusika in marketing their horticultural produce from the highest scoring using the score by ranking method. The major challenges faced by farmers were low prices being charged by the middlemen and high competition with 83% of the farmers responding positively to the challenge. Results on Table 4 revealed that 77% of the farmers stated weak market information, 73% transport cost and 70% theft of produce by dishonest middlemen as other challenges being faced. The least challenge according to the ranking by scoring method is that of high storage costs as most of the commodities would have been taken by some of the vendors/ middlemen, scoring 36% as shown on Table 4.

4. Discussion

4.1 Socio-economic characteristics of respondents

The socio-economic characteristics of the respondents were analysed on age, gender, sex, educational level, farming experience, assets owned and profit margin. The overall mean age of the farmers for the sample was considerably low, which is in consistent with that of Leedy and Ormrod (2005), who established that the average age of farmers involved in production and marketing of produce is considerably low around 38.5 years. The results on Fig 4.1 revealed that more males than females were involved in marketing of horticultural produce.

The literacy level was very high amongst respondents who marketed their produce without engaging middlemen. This implies that because they are educated, they can source and interpret information on markets thus making it easy for them to market products on their own unlike those that engage middlemen. Livestock was the most common asset owned by the respondents who did not engage middlemen. Farmers who engaged middlemen did not as many assets as compared to those who did not engage middlemen. This shows that the farmers receive less income due to exploitation by middlemen thereby receiving less income from their sales, which will make it difficult to acquire assets.

Farmers who did not engage middlemen have more than five years of experience, indicating that they have vast experience in marketing of horticultural produce. Farmers who did not engage middlemen had highest profit margin compared to those who engaged middlemen. This indicates that engaging middlemen decrease farmers' profit. This was the same as the findings by SNV (2016) revealed that middlemen exploit farmers by buying at low prices then later sale the produce at very high prices thereby making huge profit margin. The results were consistent with findings by Juana and Mabungu (2005). From the focus group discussions, farmers also indicated that middlemen are offering low prices resulting in low returns.

4.2 Factors Affecting Farmers' Decision to Engage Middlemen in Marketing of Horticultural Produce at Mbare Musika

4.2.1 Types of crops grown

The types of crops grown were significant at 1% and 5% significance level. There was a negative relationship between the types of crops grown and middlemen engagement. This is due to the perishability and longevity of the produce that the farmers are mainly marketing. The willingness of the farmer to engage middlemen is reduced by 0.065. This was due to the reason that potatoes, tomatoes, carrots and cabbages farmers are most likely to engage middlemen since these are highly perishable and should be sold quickly. According to Juana and Mabungu (2005), farmers risk making huge losses due to weaker bargaining power since they have limited time in the market to sell their produce which they cannot afford to carry back home because of the transport expenses and perishability.

4.2.2 Farming experience

Experience in horticultural farming was significant at 1% and 5% level of significance. The econometric model results show that there is positive relationship between the experience in horticultural farming and middlemen engagement. A unit increase in horticultural farming experience results in a-0.015 decrease in farmer dependency

on middlemen. Furthermore, farmers engage middlemen as "buyers of last resort" because the market can be very slow at times such that the farmers with less farming experience may fail to sell even half their produce at the time they expect to have finished selling all their produce due to low quality of produce (Sandika2012).

4.2.3 Age of the farmer

The research findings show that no statistically significant relationship exist between age of farmers and the farmer willingness to engage middlemen. However, the study findings show that there is a negative relationship between the age and the willingness of the farmer to engage middlemen.

4.2.4 Distance to the market

Distance to the market was another variable found to be statistically insignificant. This means that there was no significant relationship between the distance of the farmer from the market and middlemen engagement. However, the study showed that there was a positive relationship between distance to the market and farmer engagement. Different authors argued that distance to the market and poor roads will result in increased transaction costs and affect price of produce as farmers engage middlemen so as to finish their produce quickly and go back to their homes, (Torbjorn and Bharat 2012; World Bank 2013).

4.2.5 Gender of the farmer

Gender of the farmer proved to be statistically insignificant from the survey results, therefore, gender of farmers will not determine their rate of engaging middlemen. However, the beta (0.025) showed that there is a positive relationship between gender and middlemen engagement amongst the farmers, as indicated in the findings of Lee et al (2010). Gender of the farmer from the survey was also identified when the focus group discussions were held and literally males were dominating while females were a few.

4.2.6 Farmer educational level

The farmer educational level was statistically significant at 1% and 5% level of significance. There was a negative relationship between the educational level of the farmer and the engagement of middlemen. This entails that about 1% increase in educational level will result in the reduction of engaging middlemen by horticultural farmers by 0.028. This result shows that as the farmers get more education they turn away from middlemen and they will be able to market their own produce as well as creating a more customer-based clientele. This was supported by findings fromSNV Zimbabwe (2014).

4.2.7 Income of the farmer

The farmers' income was statistically significant at 1% and 5% level of significance. This result shows that there is a negative relationship between the farmers' income and the farmers' willingness to engage middlemen. Thus, the increase in farmer's income by $1 will result in the decrease of his willingness to engage middlemen by 0.04. The research findings showed that the farmers who sell their products independently have more income than those who sell through middlemen as middlemen will exploit the farmers by buying at very low prices. This was in agreement with findings by Tanyanyiwa and Bakasa (2018).

4.2.8 Farm size

Research findings showed that the farmers' farm size is statistically significant at 1% and 5% level of significance. The results show that there is a positive relationship between farm size and the willingness of the farmer to engage middlemen. Thus the results stipulate that an increase of 1 hectare to the farm size will result in the farmer engaging middlemen to sell their produce for them by 0.025. Focus group discussion held indicated that farmers had different types of farms and different sizes. This will result in them having more income from the little profits due to bulk selling and economies of size. This was in agreement with findings by Nicki (2013) who stated that middlemen buy farmers' produce in bulk so as to resale to either vendors, hawkers, wholesalers, retailers and or the ultimate customers.

4.2.9 Marketing information

Research findings showed that the farmers' marketing information is statistically significant at 1% and 5% level of significance. The results show that there is a positive relationship between marketing information and the willingness of the farmer to engage middlemen. According to Njaya (2014), low level of education on marketing result in farmers having limited information on prevailing market situation as compared to middlemen. Thus, they will be forced to engage middlemen in marketing their produce. Furthermore, middlemen get larger share at the expense of the farmers who apparently have low level of education and limited information on the prevailing market situation.

4.3 Challenges Faced by Farmers in Marketing of Horticultural Produce

4.3.1 Low prices on commodities

The sampled horticultural farmers ranked low prices on produce being charged by middlemen as the major challenge that they are facing. The findings corresponded with those done by Tanyanyiwa and Bakasa (2018). In their study, they brought out that, low and inconsistent prices on the market was a major challenge in the marketing of horticultural produce and therefore there is reluctance in engaging middlemen by farmers. The middlemen control market prices and dupe the farmers into selling their produce at low prices after which they resale at higher prices. According to USAID (2005) most horticultural farmers are price takers thus poor pricing affects farmer's profitability.

4.3.2 High competition

Competition amongst horticultural farmers at MbareMusika was ranked second amongst the challenges being faced by farmers in engaging middlemen as shown on Table4. Flooding of some of the horticultural produce resulted in farmers accepting the lower price offered by middlemen. According to Mututo (2011), middlemen now get a larger share at the expense of the farmers who apparently have low level of education and limited information on the prevailing market situation. **Weak market information systems**

The technical knowledge and skills is another major challenge faced by farmers and this is mainly due to limited educational level and market information systems (Table 4). Unlike farmers, middlemen have enough experience and market knowledge which they can use in convincing the farmers to sell produce to them at a lower price. Horticulture farmers do not have skills, knowledge and market information (Chigusiwa et al 2013). SNV Zimbabwe (2014) entails that lack of marketing information is often quoted as a major reason why horticultural farmers are not realising better prices for their produces as there are no extension service nor market information system to equip farmers with knowledge of prices and potential markets.

4.3.3 Transport costs

High transport costs due to fuel price hikes in Zimbabwe are also adding to the farmers' problems as it erodes their income. This also was proved by Correia and Rola-Rubzen (2010) that increase in fuel prices and poor roads will result in increased transaction costs and affect price and availability of produce at the market. This was further supported by different authors who stated that poor and expensive transport is a constraint faced by farmers and poor roads will result in increased transaction costs and affect price and availability of produce at the market (Torbjorn and Bharat 2012; World Bank 2013).

4.3.4 Theft of produce

Theft is one major challenge faced by farmers at MbareMusika market. Some of such thieves are the middlemen. Some middlemen tend to steal from the farmers when they come to marketing their horticultural products. According to Santen (2006), market middlemen at vegetable wholesale markets are a menace to farmers as they can steal from the farmers. Furthermore, middlemen are crooks and continuously terrorise farmers unabated (Chikwati 2016).

4.3.5 High storage costs

Poor infrastructure within the market results in horticultural farmers engaging middlemen for safe keeping and storage of their produce. This will therefore affect horticultural farmers as they are charged exorbitantly. Tanyanyiwa and Bakasa (2018) also states that most farmers do not have cold rooms to store their produce before and after marketing resulting in loss of produce due to rotting or over-ripening. eMkambo (2016) also states that poor infrastructure for storage, processing and marketing of horticultural produce contributed to losses of the farmer.

4.6 Farmers' Perception on the Role of Middlemen in Marketing of Horticultural

Most of the interviewed farmers strongly disagreed that middlemen have better access to market, offered convenience in marketing and that farmers got better value for their produce through use of middlemen in marketing (Fig 6). Furthermore, horticultural farmers disagreed that middlemen were helpful in the marketing of horticultural produce (Fig 6). Farmers tend to lose more when they give their produce to middlemen compared to when they sell directly to the consumers. According to Santen (2006), middlemen buy goods from producers or farmers and sell them at a profit to retailers or consumers. Mashangwa (2018) further argued that middlemen are responsible for farmers' low share of income because they offer unjustifiable low prices, therefore the farmers suffer in trying to secure reasonable prices for their produce hence, they shun using middlemen. Oguama (2010) argues that the middlemen intervention in the market increases buying price for consumers and reduces selling price hence lowering farmer's profit margin.

5. Conclusions and Recommendations

5.1 Conclusion

The main objective of the study was to evaluate the implications of middlemen in the marketing of horticultural produce at MbareMusika in Harare. The research findings revealed that farmers at MbareMusika mostly depend on middlemen in marketing their horticultural produce. Farmers that market through middlemen have lower levels of education, lower farming experience and lower profit margins as compared to those that did not engage middlemen. The study also showed that the type of crops grown, farmer's income, level of education and farm size significantly affect the farmer's decision to engage middlemen. Middlemen at MbareMusika take advantage of horticultural farmers' characteristics like low literacy levels, type of produce and lack of experience, and they buy their produce at low prices so as to resale at high prices, thereby getting higher revenues. Most of the farmers that engage middlemen have very low profit margins. The middlemen are not helping the farmers to get better value for their horticultural produce. Instead, they exploit the farmers for their own advantage. The farmers strongly disagreed that middlemen were helpful, had better access to market, offered convenience in marketing and that they gave better value for farmer's produce. The horticultural farmers did not like the idea of middlemen marketing their produce on their behalf. Farmers face challenges such as low prices of produce, high competition, weak market information system, high transport costs, theft of produce and high storage costs and some of these are a result of engaging the middlemen.

5.2 Recommendations

It is recommended that the Harare Municipality should increase storage facilities, vehicle parking area and facilitate the smooth flow of goods and services in the market by way of computerised registration. This will solve the problem of storage space. Municipality should improvement on security at the wholesale market to reduce theft of produce. Unions like Vendors Association, Farmers Union and Agricultural Marketing Authority need to find ways of making sure that horticulture farmers in wholesale markets get fair prices of their produce. The government should also encourage the private sector to enter into contracts with the farmers so as to reduce losses due to product damage and perishability, thus reducing exploitations by middlemen and the in the process increase farmer's returns.

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