

Chapter 7

Digitizing Marketing in Agriculture:

Leveraging Information Communication Technologies for Success in Zimbabwe

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ABSTRACT

This chapter explores the transformative role of ICTs in revolutionizing agricultural sector of developing nations like Zimbabwe. By scrutinizing the current state of traditional and inefficient agricultural marketing in Zimbabwe, the study advocates for the potential of ICTs to enhance competitiveness and profitability. The benefits of digitizing marketing include minimizing information asymmetry, facilitating price discovery, expanding market linkages, improving financial access, and enabling traceability. Simultaneously, the paper delves into key challenges such as infrastructure limitations, skills gaps, affordability issues, gender disparities, and cultural factors that must be addressed. To create an enabling environment for digitizing agricultural marketing, the study recommends targeted policy and regulatory interventions. It concludes that strategic investments in ICT infrastructure and the capacity-building of farmers are crucial to fully unlock the potentials of ICTs, leading to improved incomes and enhanced rural livelihoods in Zimbabwe.

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INTRODUCTION

The global digital revolution in agriculture, marked by innovations like digital advisory services, e-commerce platforms, precision techniques, and blockchain traceability, is reshaping how smallholders engage with information, markets, finance, and services. Developing countries, including Zimbabwe, have the opportunity to leverage digitization for enhanced transparency, commercialization, productivity, sustainability, and inclusion in agricultural systems.

Despite the potential benefits, Zimbabwe lags behind regional and global peers in technology adoption. Barriers such as inadequate connectivity infrastructure, high data costs, limited local content, low digital literacy, unsupportive policies, and a lack of specialized capacity hinder progress. Presently, less than 27% of farming households have internet access, exacerbating the existing “digital divide” in agriculture, which is crucial for rural development.

This paper underscores the importance of coordinated efforts among public, private, and development partners to create an enabling environment for digitization tailored to Zimbabwe’s smallholder context. The approach necessitates integrated investments, policies, innovations, and skills building across the agricultural ecosystem. Solutions must align with farmers’ priorities, addressing concerns related to affordability, access, transparency, and value.

Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) refer to technologies that provide access to information through telecommunications. This includes the Internet, wireless networks, cell phones, computers, software applications, and other communication mediums (Mapiye et al., 2023). ICTs enable the rapid exchange of information and support the transition to digital economies. They have transformed how individuals, organizations, and societies create, collect, store, and share information, enabling innovation, productivity, and social and economic benefits (Tiwari, 2022). The study emphasizes the role of ICTs in digitizing agricultural marketing systems in Zimbabwe. It explores how ICTs can facilitate commercialization, enhance climate resilience, empower farmers, and contribute to systemic competitiveness. However, realizing these benefits requires the establishment of 21st-century digital infrastructure as the foundation for a successful digital transformation in Zimbabwe’s agricultural sector.

BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Historically, Zimbabwe held the title of the “breadbasket of Africa” due to a robust large-scale commercial farming sector, complemented by significant smallholder production for domestic markets (Chipuriro, 2021). Agriculture played a pivotal

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