

Effects of Covid-19 on urban and peri-urban farmers in central Zimbabwe

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Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic has affected the global economy since its advent in 2020. The agricultural sector is among the sectors that have been significantly affected by the pandemic. The effect of the pandemic in the agriculture sector is cutting across all the value chains inclusive of production, marketing and input supply, among others. In addition, both small-scale and large-scale producers have been affected. This study looks at the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on urban and peri-urban agriculture in Gweru, Zimbabwe with a view to derive lessons that can inform discussion on how the urban and peri-urban farmers can circumvent economic shocks such as COVID-19 in the future. Agriculture in and around urban areas is practised by a significant number of people in some continents including Africa. Urban and peri-urban agriculture has a noticeable contribution to food and nutrition security and has a potential to reduce poverty. Face-to-face interviews were conducted with a total of 40 individual farmers using a structured questionnaire and three virtual focus group discussions were held with a total of 24 farmers. Simple random sampling was used to select participants from a list of farmers provided by the Department of Agricultural Technical and Extension Services. Each member of the population had an equal chance of being selected. The study established that the pandemic has had several effects on these urban and peri-urban farmers including limited access to markets, loss of income, increased cost of farming, competition from non-traditional farmers, adoption of innovative delivery mechanisms, difficulty in accessing inputs and reduced farm labour. Farmers were forced to adopt information technology to enhance communication among themselves and other stakeholders. To protect and safeguard livelihoods within the agricultural system, the study recommends that the government increases spending on social safety nets for urban and peri-urban farmers, reform agricultural finance and improve financial support to smallholder farmers.

Key words: COVID-19, Agriculture, Urban, Peri-Urban, Food Security, Information Technology, Safety Nets