AN ANALYSIS OF THE SOCIOECONOMIC IMPACTS OF ICT'S UTILIZATION BY SMALHOLDER FARMERS ON FARMING COMMUNITIES IN ZIMBABWE

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1.0 Introduction

The inefficient administration and coordination of input and market linkages in sub Sahara Africa has traditionally been the major deterrent to the achievement of agricultural production and business efficiencies due to communication bottlenecks. The dispensation of modern Information Communication Technologies (ICT's) have undoubtedly improved communities livelihood with regard to these linkages through efficient dialogue communication channels. This research paper intends to make a socio -economic impact analysis of ICT's contribution to rural (small holders) and marginalised urban (urban slum resettlement zones) agricultural communities in Zimbabwe's. The objectives of the study are defined candidly with focus on efficiencies relating to input and market linkages and the socio-economic result thereof. The methodology is briefly outlined, the study variables are crystallised into 6 focal areas and a justification is provided which details why this study is valuable and its contribution to the further improvement of the livelihood of farming communities in Zimbabwe.

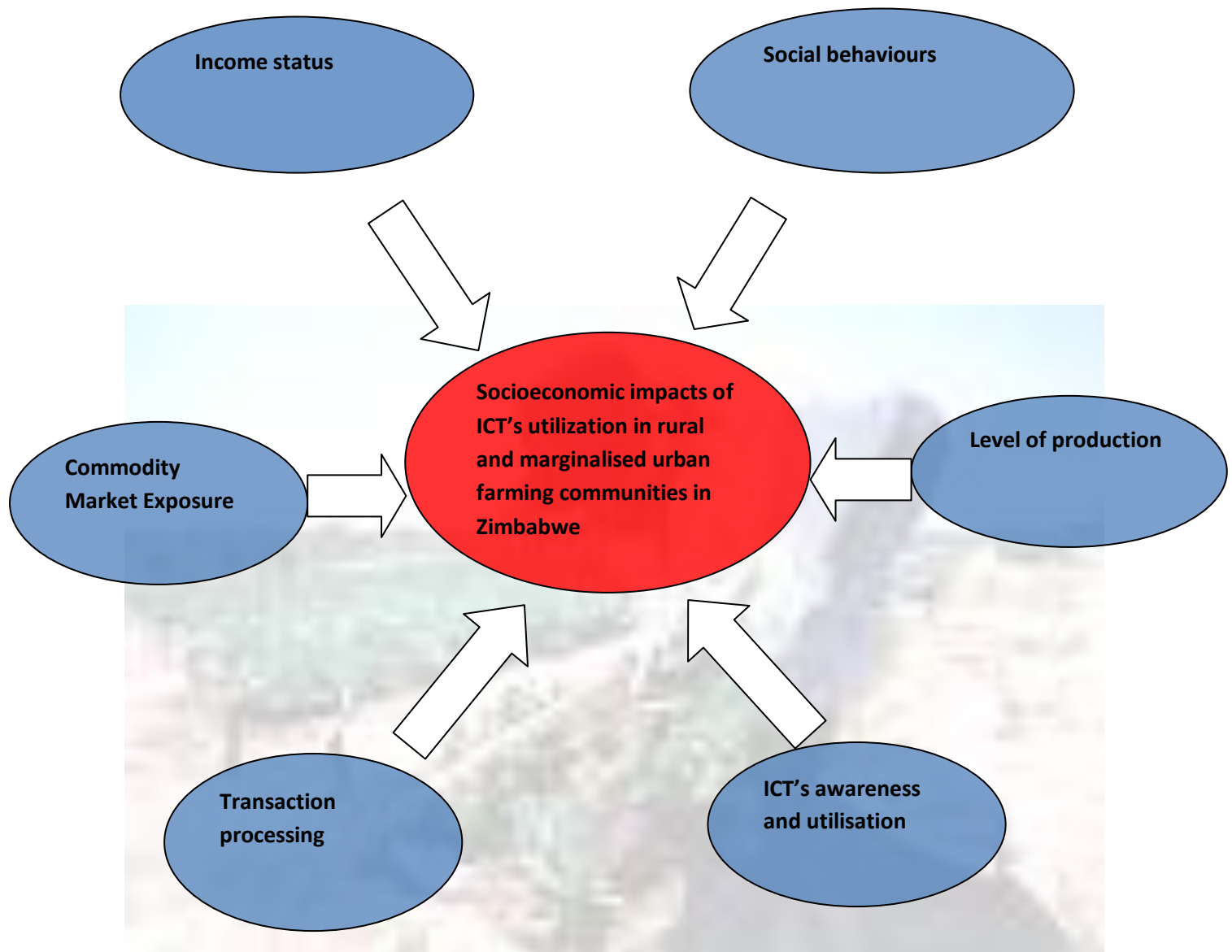## 1.1 Problem definition and analysis

The last decade has seen a transition in small holder communities in Zimbabwe with the interactive ICT's evolving from the monologues' of predominantly shortwave transmission and mild cable connectivity to the current diversified dialogue ICT's. The contribution of these ICT's to the development of agricultural communities in Zimbabwe must be explicitly known. The entire agricultural value chain evolution must be assessed in the light of the dispensation of ICT's with regards to the various linkages. The efficiency drivers must be identified and their contribution be analysed. Such drivers may comprise of the government, nongovernmental organisations, business corporations, farmers unions and other awareness groups. Each drivers role must be identified to enable the further identification of gaps which could be filled and hence improve the livelihoods of such communities. The degree of awareness and utilisation of ICT's in rural communities must be assessed to determine their developmental impact in those communities and also to assess whether the communities are exploiting ICT facilities available to them advantageously. The current financial and infrastructural livelihood improvement should be known in comparison to the era prior to the influx of modern ICT's.

1.2 Research objectives

a) To assess the level of utilisation of ICT's amongst small holder farmers in acquiring inputs, seasonal production practices and risk management.

b) To determine smallholder farmers degree of exposure to diversified markets as a result of ICTs.

c) To determine the extent to which incomes have improved per farming household in rural and marginalised urban Zimbabwe as a result of ICT's usage during the past 5 years.

d) To analyze how the utilization of ICT's impacts on the key business - related social behaviour of smallholder farmers in Zimbabwe.

e) To determine the contribution of other stakeholders in terms of promoting the use ICT's by smallholder farmers.

f) To analyse factors that pose as hindrances to the utilisation of ICT's by smallholder farmers in processing their agribusiness transactions.

g) To proffer recommendation on how the use of ICT's by smallholder farmers can be further encouraged in Zimbabwe.

1.3 Key Study variables

1.4 Methodology

The methodology to be employed comprises of a survey which in essence will utilise the questionnaire and in-depth interview data collection methods. Four provinces will be studied which are namely Mashonaland West, Mashonaland East, Mashonaland Central and Harare Metropolitan respectively. Four categories of respondents will be utilised which are the small holder farmers, the market providers, the input manufacturers and governmental institutions. Microsoft analytics will be applied to analyse and interpret the

data, diagrammatic and tabular presentations will be utilised in order to depict the findings.

1.4 Justification

This study in essence will analyse how small holder and marginalised urban farmers livelihoods have been improved as a result of the utilisation of the ICT's with specific regards to input and market linkages. The stakeholder involvement will be dissected and gaps for further opportunity exploitation will be identified.