
Free trade and its effects on women cotton farmers in Zimbabwe: A gender perspective



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Introduction

This paper discusses how women cotton farmers in Zimbabwe have been affected by the 'free trade' principle in global trade. The National Gender Policy of Zimbabwe (2004:5) confirms that, '86 per cent of the women live in the rural areas and are dependent on land for their livelihood'. This means that women are the main producers of agricultural products for both cash and domestic crops in the country. The main cash crops are cotton and tobacco, and a regional civil society organization called Southern and Eastern African Trade, Information and Negotiations Initiative (SEATINI), notes that cotton in the last three years has overtaken tobacco in export earnings (Chizarura, 2005).

Chizarura (2005) adds that:

'Zimbabwe produces around 300 million kgs of cotton annually, out of which 70 per cent is exported to the international market while 30 per cent is reserved for domestic consumption. A sizeable number of farmers grow cotton in Zimbabwe in the agro-ecological regions three, four and five as a subsistence plus¹ activity and Chizarura (2005) estimates that 200,000 farmers grow cotton in the arid and semi-arid regions of Zimbabwe (agro-ecological regions three, four and five)' (Chizarura, 2005).

Theoretically speaking that means that approximately 172,000 farmers are women in view of the high percentage of women that reside in the rural areas.

Cotton farming is an arduous crop to produce that requires careful monitoring at different levels and requires inputs such as seed, pesticides, extensive labour and protective clothing for those who can afford it. In Binga, only the better off families grow cotton because of the high input costs that are associated with growing this crop (Save the Children UK, 2001).

Cotton farming appears to be a lucrative venture as a main export crop however the local laws on land holding in Zimbabwe restrict women in communal areas from control or ownership of the land they produce cotton on. Male relatives in the family who are recognized as landholders in customary law inevitably control the proceeds from cotton sales. In addition, Chizarura (2005) highlights the trade imbalances on cotton at a global level that is depressing the cotton prices for developing countries while more developed countries, because of the dominance of cotton from the United States of America globally. Therefore this further exacerbates the farmers' difficult situation in the commercial arena because they incur losses from low pricing, more so for the women cotton farmers as they are affected by lack of control over cotton proceeds at a household level as well.

The concept of 'free trade' is being used to depress the prices for most cotton producing countries. On paper its precepts assume the possibility of a level playing field for countries involved in trade. Chimedza (1998) states that 'many countries in Africa, Zimbabwe included, embarked on structural adjustment programmes that had investment and trade liberalization as major components. The main idea was to create economic growth through expanded markets. In her editorial in *Gender, development and trade*, Keating (2004) points out that:

'The World Trade Organisation (governing international trade) is supposed to create equal opportunities for all economies in the global market place.'

Because of the trade imbalances between countries in the north and south, the latter are benefiting and will continue to do so under the so-called 'free trade' movement.² Keating (2004:2) adds that the 'free trade' system is a gender-related issue:

¹ A *subsistence plus* activity in the context of this paper describes additional income accrued from growing cash crops such as cotton. A farmer is able to sustain a livelihood as well as remain with disposable income for developmental purposes.

² 'Free trade is a global system that has adopted a liberal economic model in trade, where countries are required to open up their markets and prioritize on the development of export products which can compete globally rather than focus on local self-sufficiency measures that promote employment' (Keating, 2004). This practice assumes the same competence by countries in the north and south in exporting goods, however the net result is that countries in the south end up having an influx of 'less expensive and/or better quality products displacing locally produced ones (Chimedza, 2004).

‘1) It relies on gender inequalities to fuel production on cheap labour. 2) Trade agreements affect the way in which national priorities are set, and they have an impact on gender equality.’

Chimedza (1998) confirms that ‘global trade arrangements work to remove barriers and allow free movement of goods and services globally’.

This minimizes the protection of local industries when faced with an influx of imported goods. The inequalities in trade do not only affect countries at a macro level but the inequalities affect the primary producers such as women cotton farmers (Chimedza,1998).

This paper further discusses women cotton farmers’ situation in Zimbabwe and how free trade has negatively affected their livelihoods. The paper will also look at how fair trade campaigns between countries in the north and south; the trading processes and the institutional framework supporting cotton farming in Zimbabwe and in the region. I will also analyze the factors that either hinder or contribute to fair trade, after which I will make recommendations for a gender-sensitive trading system for women cotton farmers.

Do women cotton farmers receive ‘profits’?

The situation of women farmers in Zimbabwe

Traditionally women had no independent access to land; their access was through marriage and this is still the case in communal areas. Land, as the host of all natural resources, is required for growing cotton. As indicated above, male landholding is recognized in the communal areas and this has a gendered impact on the control of the proceeds from cotton farming. In the 1990s, women’s organizations in Zimbabwe and in the region³ and others collected information on ‘cotton suicides’ by women resulting as a consequence of their spouses’ misuse of money from cotton sales. Sometimes the money was used to marry a second wife. Such injustices led the women to desperate measures of suicide, usually done by drinking the cotton pesticides. Statistical information can be sought from the Legal Resource Foundation Office in Gokwe district.

Looking at the legal framework, the constitution declares women’s equality with men and prohibits sex discrimination with the exception, among others, of section 23 (3) (b). This section allows for discrimination on the grounds of customary law, applying to women in their social and cultural life, and therefore it negatively impacts on their economic and political capabilities. The reality is that women cotton farmers residing on communal land are not protected from discrimination in the use of land.

From my observation and interaction with my in-laws in Gokwe in previous years, women had cotton marketing board cards in their husbands’ names. That meant that most men tended to enter into contractual agreements with the cotton companies even when they only minimally participated in cotton production. Cheques from cotton sales were written in their husbands’ names who, in some cases, worked in the urban areas. As a result of poor communication between women and their spouses, there could be a delay in women cotton farmers accessing money from their husbands. The men also controlled the money earned from cotton farming resulting in mismanagement of funds and improper planning for the next planting season.

In this scenario the cotton companies that are largely male dominated and the rural men, created their own set of rules and norms that gave men entitlements to the end product, while women and children were treated more as a resource in the form of labour in cotton production. This practice further exacerbated the gender inequalities with the local trading processes and systems as they failed to recognize rural women’s contribution in agriculture.

³ Organizations included Zimbabwe Women’s Resource Centre (ZWRCN); Musasa Project, Women in Law and Development in Africa (WiLDAF) and Legal Resources Foundation (Gokwe).

However, in recent years more women, regardless of status, have been able to access cheques in their own names. Cloud (1999) analyzed Cargill's gender mainstreaming process in her report. The same report recognizes the important role of women in cotton production and the gender inequalities that are inherent in some of the cotton trading processes. Hopefully the fact that more women are accessing cheques in their own right is an indicator of gender sensitization on the part of this cotton company.

Cotton is a difficult crop to manage because of the spraying sessions and the picking of cotton; on the other hand it is vital to ensure food security and maintain rural economic livelihoods for women. Many factors constrain women from achieving these developmental, social and economic developmental outputs because the majority of them are growing cotton in the communal areas that are governed by the Communal Lands Act 20:04. The Act allows for customary practices to preside over this state land. In these areas women have entitlements to use land under the headship of a male relative. In view of this social stratification women are not guaranteed control over the proceeds from cotton farming.

Women, as the main producers of cotton in developing countries such as Zimbabwe, are not aware of the market forces that determine the prices of agricultural goods. Randriamaro (2002) notes that trade policies affect men and women differently and generate different responses from men and women, due to pre-existing gender inequalities in 'access to and ownership of resources such as land, capital, credit, time and income.'

Cotton farming practices

According to Chizarura (2005) the method of tillage used significantly determines areas under cotton with most farmers using animal traction. On average, those using tractors cultivate seven acres of cotton, those using animal traction cultivate five acres and those using hand tillage cultivate two acres. Agricultural Research and Extension (AREX) officers claim that these methods influence the ultimate productivity of the crop. Where tractor and animal traction are used, weed control is more effective and moisture retention is improved as opposed to with hand tillage. This implies that hand tillage depresses productivity though it is the main method used by women cotton farmers.

The expected yield assessed by the cotton companies per hectare for an efficient farmer should be seven bales per hectare. Such a level of production would lower production costs and increase net profit per kg for cotton yields (Cloud, 1999). Chizarura (2005) points out that:

‘in the 2005 season, the Z\$1,000 per kg that the merchants were offering (in Zimbabwe) was over 13 times below the subsidy a Spanish farmer got for every kilogram of cotton she or he produced.’

However, the government has supported prices for cotton farmers in light of the low prices offered by the cotton companies. Through the Reserve Bank of Zimbabwe (RBZ) an additional Z\$3,500 per kg on the cotton support price was authorized in the policy review document of May 2005. The Governor of the Reserve Bank, Dr. Gono, stated that:

‘On the back of depressed international prices of cotton this year, and the recognition of the strategic importance of cotton as a foreign exchange earner, a support price of Z\$3500 per kg to the cotton growers, over and above what they are paid by cotton buyers has been introduced with immediate effect.’

Therefore the total price for farmers for 2005 was Z\$4,500 per kilogram but this is still low when compared with the costs of inputs and expected profits by cotton farmers. In a telecommunication with a former Cargill finance manager in the Midlands area, he confirmed that cotton prices were still low compared to the input costs of the farmers. With the rise of inflation it is not clear if the government will be able to sustain this kind of support to cotton farmers in line with the Reserve Bank's May 2005 policy review report.

It is evident that women are the main producers of cotton in Zimbabwe however they do not have control over the proceeds due to the patriarchal nature of the communal areas and of the cotton companies which both

exclude women from the mainstream of local and international trading in cotton. The other concern is that women in their numbers produce cotton in the most difficult way, by hand tillage, in addition to their reproductive roles of caring, food processing and collection of fuel wood and water for home consumption.

The human rights framework in trade

After independence, the government enacted major laws supporting women's rights, including labour legislation that prohibited discrimination in employment. In 1982, the supreme court upheld the Legal Age of Majority Act, now section 15 of the General Law Amendment Act, that stipulates that both men and women over the age of 18 years are legal adults with equal rights in every area to include rights to contractual agreements (Cloud, 1999). Despite this achievement the gap remains in women's access, control and ownership of resources such as land and credit, among other resources, where men continue to have autonomy over resources, putting women at a disadvantage with regard to economic and social development in the country.

At a regional and international level there are human rights frameworks that can be used by women rights activists in Zimbabwe to seek recourse. Zimbabwe is a member of the African Union and should be in agreement with the contents of the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa. Article 19 (f) in particular, ensures that:

'The negative effects of globalization and any adverse effects of the implementation of trade and economic policies and programmes are reduced to the minimum for women.'

Though the African Charter's women's protocol advocates for women's rights in trade, most of the countries represented are in the south where male trade negotiators represent the concerns of the African countries without any gender considerations. Gender issues are presumably implied in the negotiation processes.

The Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), articles 13 and 14, focus on women's right to access credit and technical training and economic opportunities for an improved livelihood. Article 14 of CEDAW particularly relates to rural women's empowerment and refers to support areas that relate to rural women like educational programmes, access to credit and agricultural support programmes. One hundred and ninety-one countries in the United Nations have pledged to meet the Millennium Development Goals, including Zimbabwe and to this end Zimbabwe sent its Millennium Development Goal report to the United Nations in December 2004 and recently launched the Millennium Development Goals in Zimbabwe, adopting three out of the eight goals:

Goal 1: Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger

Goal 3: Promote gender equality and empower women

Goal 6: Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases

(The Sunday Mail, 11th September, 2005)

The above points to a human rights framework at a national, regional and international level that recognizes women's rights and their equal participation in economic activities. Zimbabwe's worsening economic and political situation further poses challenges for the government to uphold the human rights principles.⁴ However small-scale farmers, particularly women cotton farmers, continue to be subjugated by the dominant paradigms in cotton production in the communal lands and in the trading cycle, from cotton companies in the global market. The plight of women cotton farmers is clearly worsened by their exclusion in the trading processes of this export crop and is compounded by the operating environment.

⁴ An example is one of the goals that Zimbabwe has adopted – whereby ten years ago, goal 1 would not have been an issue for Zimbabwe because the country was more food secure and had a good social service system.

Fair trade: Subsistence plus for women cotton farmers

Cotton fair trade campaigns

The Southern Africa Cotton Campaign programme is one of the many initiatives on agricultural trade policy and livelihoods in the region and internationally that is being spearheaded by SEATINI, Oxfam Southern Africa Regional Office, ABIODES and Zimcodd, and supported by a host of other organizations, governments, producers and the private sector (Chizarura, 2005). In Zimbabwe all of these organizations have contributed to the evolution of the fair trade agenda.⁵ Noting the plight of small-scale producers in southern Africa, stemming mainly from low world prices of cotton, this programme seeks to proffer practical suggestions for improving livelihoods in cotton through a coordinated stakeholder campaign.

The cotton campaign has formed a strong alliance between non-governmental organizations of the north and those of the south. There has been an attempt to bring gender issues on board and involve rural women cotton farmers in the trade debate in Zimbabwe after realizing that they cannot clearly understand the trading processes that start from the cotton Cargill or COTCO rural depots. Extensive work has also been done with cotton farmers in the lower Zambezi Valley, such as lower Gurov, and, to some extent, Gokwe by nearly all the economic justice related organizations working in Zimbabwe.

Chizarura (2005) notes the importance of civil society organizations' participation in what they call a 'cotton mob strategy' in trying to address the imbalances in trade on the world markets. To this end a cotton campaign has developed largely unnoticed over the past decade. The cotton crisis that has affected millions of farmers in most developing countries, particularly in West Africa where cotton growers have been driven out of production as a result of artificially managed low prices influenced by USA at the world market. Cotton growers in southern Africa, particularly Mozambique and Zimbabwe, have also been plunged into deep poverty, as incomes from cotton farming continue to dwindle under the all time low prices offered by cotton merchants.

The above illustrates positive steps by civil society organizations in addressing the trade injustices by countries in the north and south. However, the concern still remains about the extent to which gender is inculcated in the campaign strategies by this alliance of northern and southern non-governmental organizations. A holistic approach is required in the campaign strategy that should go beyond a focus on the reduction in world prices for cotton but should also look at who the producers are and at possible empowerment strategies for cotton farmers. As mentioned above the majority of the farmers are women who do not own the means of cotton production, therefore a gender and human rights framework using international instruments needs to be mainstreamed in the campaigns to ensure that the women producers' concerns are met.

Another area of concern regarding the Southern Africa Cotton Campaign should be HIV/AIDS because the region as a whole has a high prevalence of HIV. In Zimbabwe the National AIDS Council has rated it at 24.6 per cent. The epidemic has a bearing on the capacity of the women cotton farmers to produce as they are the primary care givers as well. Women have little space to negotiate for safe sex where in some cases the spouse is working in the urban or mining areas and goes home once a month after having sex, protected or unprotected with multiple partners prior to his visit. There is also a general belief among men that 'there is no reason to have protected sex with a woman whose *lobola* (bride price) has been paid for by her husband'. So this puts the woman in a precarious situation by putting her at a high risk of HIV infection with the net effect of reducing productivity in cotton farming, resulting in inadequate income to sustain her and her family's livelihood.

⁵ The Fair Trade agenda is advocacy work on trade imbalances on the world market being done by a joint initiative of countries in the north and the south. Developing countries have issues on the unequal global trends on the world pricing of agricultural goods and services. Trade 'liberalization', enforced by the World Trade Organization makes it increasingly difficult for small traders to compete. 'Free trade' is supposedly in the interests of increased competition, but when multinational companies are able to benefit from subsidies and protections denied to small economies this competition is unfair. See: http://www.oxfam.org.uk/what_we_do/fairtrade/why_ft.htm

Gender and trade activism

Gender and trade advocacy is a relatively new area that needs to be strengthened in order to ensure that women as the key producers of export crops and other products fully participate in 'informed trade'. Women cotton farmers should become part of what SEATINI calls the 'domestic alliance' that will mainstream gender in trade. White in Keating (2004) confirms that:

'...women's advocates have been calling for gender and social assessments of trade agreements in the past seven years, with governments arguing that such assessments are a social issue and unrelated to trade.'

Regardless of governments' reluctance to focus on gender issues, women's organizations such as the United States based Women's Edge Coalition have developed an assessment tool called the 'trade impact review' (TIR) in order to examine how trade agreements can affect gender and development issues. Unlike most gender analysis frameworks the TIR includes both economic and legal or regulatory analysis (White, 2004).

According to Gammage *et al.* (2003) there is talk of having a framework for analysis that includes a conflict analysis of trade and investment agreements. The team also advise that an office should be set up to conduct such assessments with an annual budget of US\$650,000 and also call on the technical support of the United States government for wider implementation of such programmes. The idea is noble and perhaps the TIR tool should be used to analyze the cotton trade issue vis-à-vis the United States' dominance in cotton trade on the global scene and other cotton producing countries in order to assess the effects of cotton farming on women. Gammage *et al.* (2003) indicate that this is an expensive exercise therefore more cost-effective and participatory measures should be designed in gender analysis and trade to ensure that women can also participate and tell of their lived realities of trade.

Randriamaro (2002) confirms that:

'In most African countries, Agriculture is the most important sector of the economy (where) the export-led, market-based and private sector-driven growth that multilateral trade arrangements seek to promote depends to a large extent on women's labour in both the production and reproduction spheres. Therefore trade liberalization in agriculture has aggravated gender inequalities thereby undermining women's livelihoods'.

Women are found at the bottom of the trading process of agricultural products and have very little say on the end result of the pricing of their products. This is why gender should be mainstreamed in the fair trade campaigns on cotton and other agricultural products.

Fair Trade Foundation

Another fair trade campaign initiative is the Fair Trade Foundation that was established in 1992 by CAFOD, Christian Aid, New Consumer, Oxfam, Traidcraft and the World Development Movement. These founding organizations were later joined by Britain's largest women's organization, the Women's Institute. The Foundation is the UK member of Fairtrade Labelling Organizations International (FLO), which unites 20 national initiatives across Europe, Japan, North America, Mexico and Australia and New Zealand, (<http://www.fairtrade.net/sites/contacts/ni.html>).

This programme is a positive step in ensuring that fair trade occurs in the export of products from the south, concerning largely agricultural products. According to the fair trade website, a label with the fair trade sign is used on products and outlets such as Sainsbury in the UK that are selling fair trade products. Though the foundation is made up of non-governmental organizations based in the north, there are programmes being done with cocoa farmers in Ghana, for example. Case studies of successful trading processes have also been posted on the website revealing that it is possible to advocate for fair trade on products at the global level. The Fair

Trade Foundation is a good initiative alongside other fair trade campaign initiatives; however, it would be useful if more countries from the south could be involved, from programme design to implementation. Currently countries from the north dominate the foundation.

There is also a need to interrogate the dominant paradigm that entails looking at men's dominance in local laws because they are the basis for women's subjugation to men. This has a bearing on their access to land and other inputs required for the production of cotton. The gender inequalities mentioned above inevitably have a bearing on the effectiveness of the 'cotton mob strategy' in the cotton campaigns at a macro level. For a successful campaign strategy, women farmers need to be empowered to participate effectively as stakeholders in such a campaign. Therefore a gender sensitization programme should be incorporated in the cotton campaigns where women will realise their rights in the production of cotton while countries will recognize women's important role in cotton production.

Processes in trading cotton: Action and implementation analyzed

In Zimbabwe there are two main cotton companies where the farmers sell their cotton, Cargill and COTCO. Cargill is an international company while different Zimbabwean stakeholders own COTCO. Both companies are often found situated side by side, at rural depots (Cloud, 1999).

In light of the problems faced by the women cotton farmers where cotton prices are going down and eroding their gains, it seems that cotton companies perpetuate gender inequalities in cotton production. Besides having a negative effect on the export returns in Zimbabwe and the rest of the region, the gendered impacts have included cotton suicides or 'cotton mental distresses' of women.

I will give an example of how Cargill functions in Zimbabwe, using Kathleen Cloud's gender analysis of the cotton company in Zimbabwe.

Cotton marketers: The development and evolution of Cargill's cotton production

According to Cloud (1999):

'Cargill is a privately held international marketer, processor and distributor of agricultural, food, financial and industrial products, headquartered in Minneapolis, United States. The company is one of the two largest cotton traders in the world, handling more than 10 per cent of the global trade. Through participation in international cotton auctions, it buys and sells cotton that moves all over the world.'

This illustrates Cargill position and influence over cotton prices at a global level.

Historically, Cargill found African cotton, particularly Zimbabwean cotton, to be of very high quality because the varieties grown had good colour and length and handpicking meant there was little debris. Because of the southern growing season, it came to market early, creating a price premium. Zimbabwe is also in a position to produce its own seed for planting. In the process of ginning (separating the seed from the lint) the seed is used for cooking oil as well as for manufacturing stockfeeds (Wilson, 2002). It would appear that business should be lucrative for Cargill, the government of Zimbabwe, the cotton farmers and producers of cooking oil and stock feed:

'Cargill entered into Zimbabwe's privatization process where the Cotton Company of Zimbabwe (COTCO) emerged as Cargill's direct competitor in the purchase of cotton.' (Cloud, 1999).

The trading process was such that farmers brought their cotton to the Cargill collection points in oxcarts, cars, or hired trucks. Each bale was labelled with the farmer's number and a bale number. Then it was moved to the grading shed where it was cut open at random spots and cotton samples removed to be graded by a certified grader. Each sample was bagged, labelled and set aside for evidence if a farmer wanted to appeal the grading.

Meanwhile, the farmer's number and grade of each bale were recorded, and the amount of payment was calculated (Cloud, 1999). This is still the practice to date.

Cargill also sells cotton inputs at a wholesale price during the harvesting and selling season, where the money is deducted from their 'cotton cheques', maize seed is also sold around the season in order to encourage farmers to buy maize seed in light of future cropping plans.⁶ This situation is not conducive for the women cotton growers in light of the hyperinflationary conditions in Zimbabwe. In August 2005 inflation rose to 265.1 per cent and is expected to be on the upside until December (*The Herald* - Business section, 14 September 2005).

SEATINI (2005) illustrates the global design in cotton trading (see the appendix below). Cotton is bought from a small-scale farmer in a developing country such as Zimbabwe; it is sold to the cotton companies who stipulate low prices that leave the African governments concerned about the receding prices of cotton on the world market. The cotton producing governments have an expectation of gaining foreign currency from the export crop. The majority of these countries have undergone structural adjustment programmes that emphasized trade liberalization and investment (Chimedza, 1998). Cotton is sold to cotton merchants on the international scene and as previously discussed; countries such as the United States are dominating the cotton market at an international level.

Stakeholders such as Cargill have the leeway to interact with the producers and the negotiators at the World Trade Organization. Within the trading framework you also find the input of the fair trade campaigners at local, regional and international levels. The diagram also shows the structure of trade policy makers and those who make the policies in the developing countries. Developed countries are driving the global policies on trade and also offer conditional aid to developing countries, for example through the structural adjustment programmes. The majority of developing countries are ill equipped to negotiate fair trade and heavily rely on aid; their only opportunity of having a voice is through the regional groupings. The Zimbabwean woman cotton farmer clearly has no interaction beyond the cotton company depot and has no influence over the trade policies on cotton.

The institutional framework in cotton farming

The government of Zimbabwe has a mandate to provide supportive environmental conditions to support farmers' agricultural activities. Cotton and tobacco farmers were given support prices for their export agricultural products (Reserve Bank of Zimbabwe, monetary review policy, May 2005). The Ministry of Industry and International Trade is aware that agriculture is the mainstay of Zimbabwe's exports however very little has been done to ensure that trade negotiations are in favour of the agricultural exports for developing countries as they face stiff competition with developed countries such as the United States.

Hess (2001) states that:

'...the overall experience and assessment of the trade negotiations in which Zimbabwe has been involved, especially the multilateral ones, show a tendency to develop negotiating positions only in reaction to other parties' agendas, rather than on a proactive basis. Within the regional negotiations, the agendas have often been set or driven by the secretariat rather than the member states.'

This shows the weak positioning of Zimbabwe as a state with concerns over global cotton and tobacco prices. Hess notes that Zimbabwe has been a member of the World Trade Organization since 1948, however much of its inability to present concerns at the trade organization is due to incapability of the trade negotiators under the relevant ministry whom, for a long time after independence, did not have the capacity to deal with trade issues.

The involvement of civil society organizations working on trade has been a breakthrough for Zimbabwe whereby organizations such as SEATINI, Trades Centre and MWE non-governmental organization have worked with

⁶ Information was sourced from a telephone interview with a former financial manager of Cargill in Gokwe, 21 September 2005.

the Ministry of Industry and International Trade as well as other relevant ministries on trade.

Cotton, as an export crop in Zimbabwe, is a crop that both the Ministry of Lands and Agriculture and the Ministry of Industry and International Trade are concerned about. The National Gender Policy of Zimbabwe (2004:5) confirms that, '86 per cent of the women live in the rural areas and are dependent on the land for their livelihoods'. At the same time, the same policy acknowledges that 'the levels of women's participation in industry and commerce and business entrepreneurship continue to be low'. In the light of the inequalities in industry and commerce some of the strategies under section 6.1.4 of the National Gender Policy are:

'Promote equitable access to, control and ownership of productive resources to reduce the level of poverty, especially among women' and

'mobilize and educate women on their own rights to own the means of production'

This policy should be used together with the international instruments on women's rights discussed in previous sections.

It seems that the cotton companies and cotton merchants are perpetuating unequal trade between countries of the north and the south and the effects spill over to the rural woman. Keating contends that;

'...instead of benefiting from trade liberalization, rural women have often lacked the resources necessary to adjust to changes in export production.'

With regard to cotton prices going down due to the United States' dominance in cotton sales, women will soon lose their source of livelihood in Zimbabwe.

The regional and international trading framework

The regional organizations such as the Southern African Development Community (SADC) and Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA) are mainstreaming gender into their institutions. Chimedza (1998) states that regional bodies such as COMESA:

'...are concerned about developmental issues as a body made up of countries that trade in agriculturally based commodities, many of which are a product of women's labour.'

COMESA to this end has developed a gender policy. SADC also makes reference to gender issues. Chimedza (1998) argues though that regional integration 'promotes intra-regional trade in commodities within the region'. There are also opportunities for countries in the south, within a regional grouping to form a critical mass in advocating for fair trade on the global market.

The World Trade Organization members, both from the north and south, are signatories of international human rights instruments that provide for equal treatment of women and men in accessing resources. However there appears to be a conflict of interest between trade and investment related issues and human rights and gender issues. Trade related concerns are prioritised ahead of human rights related issues.

The World Trade Organization is fuelling inequalities of all kinds through its principles that are driven towards protecting the interests of the already developed countries. Some critiques have said that trade is not a socially inclined issue but is clearly about economic development (Keating, 2004). On the contrary, trade at any level is not just an economic issue but impacts on the social aspects of life. For example, the rural woman cotton farmer requires fair payment for her product so that she will be able to afford access to social services, such as education and health care in Zimbabwe. Such services are now costly due to privatization and the economic decline being experienced in the country.

In concluding this section, one can say that the trading processes in cotton are complex and intertwined. There are stakeholders at different levels, with the rural woman farmer at the bottom of the production process in her

village and the cotton merchant influencing the price of her cotton at a global level. It seems that there is need for redress on the matter and an engendered fair trade campaign is the answer.

Trade is also reliant on other factors, including good governance and well-developed trade policy at national and regional levels. Zimbabwe is currently challenged in areas pertaining to good governance with the ripple effect negatively affecting macroeconomic policies, among other challenges. Hence the regional groupings such as SADC and COMESA, which Zimbabwe belongs to, should put pressure on Zimbabwe to restore law and order if any meaningful development is expected.

At a local level, the relevant ministries, Agriculture and Industry and International Trade, need to be more proactive insupporting cash crop farmers in the country. With regards to trade, trade negotiators have been ill equipped to represent issues affecting, for example, the global pricing of cotton and tobacco (Hess, 2001). In recent years organizations such as Trades Centre and SEATINI have started capacity building programmes for the Ministry of Trade and Industry so that they are better equipped to negotiate during the World Trade Organization ministerial meetings. Hence these efforts are commendable and should continue.

Conclusion and recommendations

This paper illustrates the dynamics in cotton trade and how small-scale farmers in Zimbabwe are adversely affected by the low pricing of the commodity at a global level. Women in Zimbabwe are in the majority of these farmers in communal and resettlement areas who do not have rights over the land they produce cotton on. This curtails their control over the cotton proceeds and effectively their own social and economic development.

The cotton campaign underway is a good starting point in advocating for fair trade and appears to be an effective way to lobby national government ministries, regional bodies such as SADC and COMESA, the World Trade Organization and international cotton merchants through different strategies. Now the cotton trade campaigns should also tackle the key problems of gender inequality and free trade. It is hoped that the campaign efforts will be effective in advocating for fair and gender-sensitive trade, in preparation of the December 2005 World Trade Organization Ministerial Conference to be held in Hong Kong (Williams, 2004).

In order to enable more women cotton farmers to fully participate in fair-trading of cotton, gender should be mainstreamed through the cotton trading systems and structures. Currently the main producers of Zimbabwe's quality cotton are being excluded by the dominant paradigms encouraged by the free trade agenda. The gender and trade institutions⁷ have a mandate to ensure that gender inequalities on trade are included on the Hong Kong agenda with a view to improving the participation of the woman cotton farmer, among other gender concerns in trade.

⁷ The International Gender and Trade Network; Women, Environment and Development Organization (WEDO), GERA, Commission on the Status of Women (CSW), Women's International Coalition for Economic Justice (WICEJ), Women's Edge Coalition (Williams, 2004).

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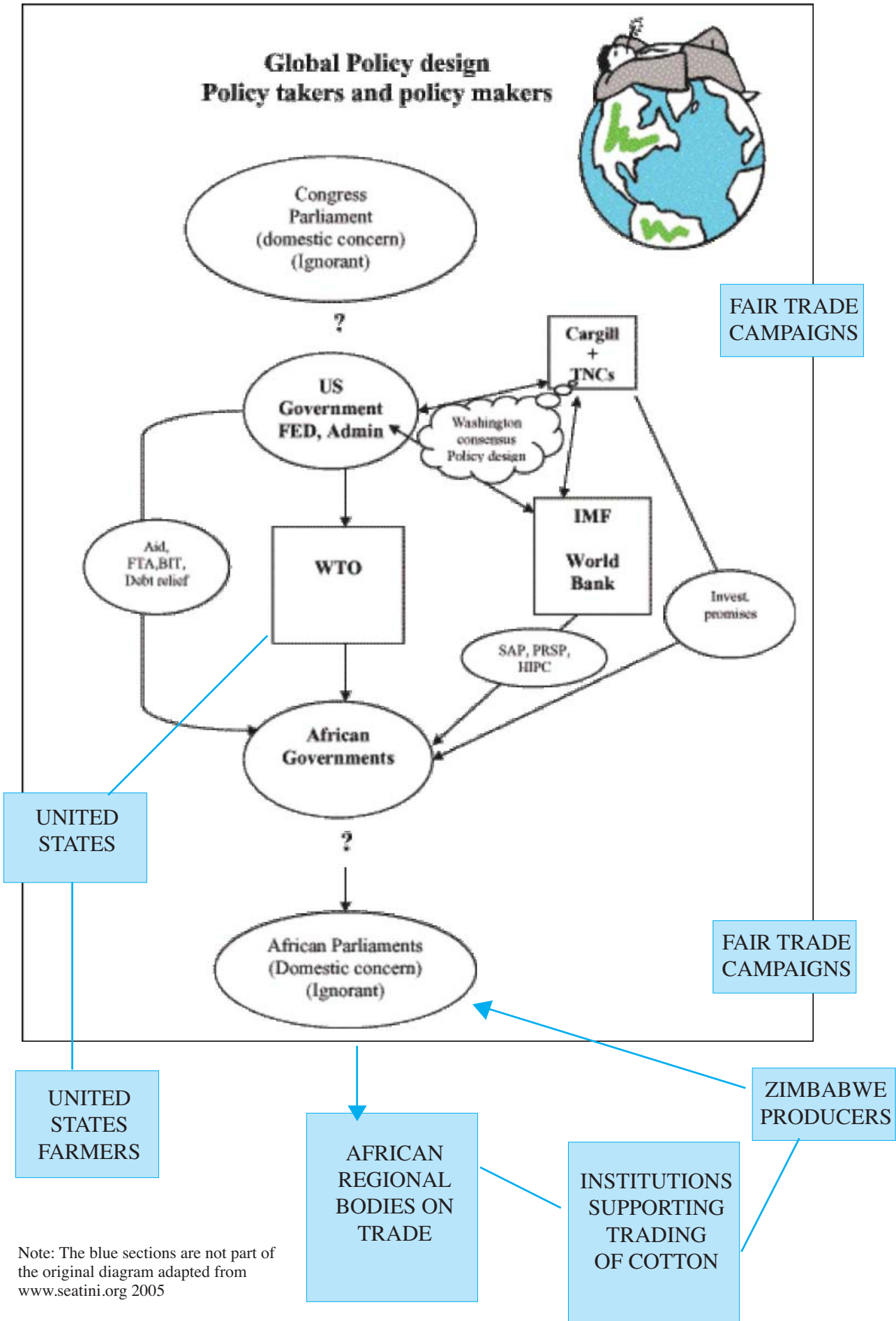
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General Law Amendment Act section 15, Zimbabwe

International

Protocol to the African Charter on Human and People's Rights on the rights of Women in Africa

Appendix: The global design: Policy takers and policy makers



Note: The blue sections are not part of the original diagram adapted from www.seatini.org 2005