African Studies Centre
Leiden, The Netherlands

Navigating through Times of Scarcity: The Intensification of a Gift-giving Economy after Dollarization in Rural Zimbabwe

Merel van 't Wout & Marleen Dekker
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African Studies Centre
P.O. Box 9555
2300 RB Leiden
The Netherlands

Tel: +31 71 5276602
Fax: +31 71 5273344
Website: www.ascleiden.nl
Email: MDekker@ascleiden.nl
Email: M.van.t.Wout@ascleiden.nl

Introduction

Once the grain basket of Southern Africa, Zimbabwe has scored poorly on economic development indicators since the early 2000s (Muzvidziwa 2010). The country has the doubtful honour of having had the second-highest inflation ever recorded globally and its national currency, the Zimbabwe Dollar, has jokingly been used in Western television shows to signal bad luck on game shows. Behind this façade and the fortunes made by those who have successfully taken advantage of the opportunities provided by the parallel currency markets (Chagonda 2010; Pilossof 2010) lies a day-to-day reality that has not been extensively documented but that has affected many in Zimbabwe. To curb hyperinflation, the Government of Zimbabwe substituted the Zimbabwean dollar with the US dollar in 2009. The dollarization of the economy brought some stability: macro-economic indicators improved and prospects for economic recovery were heralded. Little is yet known, however, about the effects of this dollarization on livelihoods and the economic life in the rural areas. This paper explores the coping mechanisms used by small-scale farmers in the face of the challenging conditions that resulted following the crisis, hyperinflation and the subsequent 'dollarization' in Zimbabwe.

Most existing work on risk-coping strategies documents strategies in 'normal' economic contexts where cash is readily available and it is viable for savings or assets to be sold to generate a cash income (Fafchamps & Lund 2003; Dercon 2002; Dercon *et al*. 2005).[1] Hyperinflation and the subsequent dollarization in Zimbabwe made savings worthless and resulted in a shortage of cash, especially in rural communities. This provided a challenging situation for small-scale farmers who were fully integrated in the cash economy before the economic downturn started in the late 1990s and early 2000s. Jones (2010) describes how hyperinflation led to the rise of the *Kukiya-kiya* economy in which people do whatever they can to put a deal together, in line with the informalization documented by, for example, Hammar *et al*. (2010). Jones's research was, however, carried out in an urban context where seasonality and cash constraints are less prevalent and it deals with the period of hyperinflation before dollarization occurred.[2] This paper considers how farmers obtain cash in a period when 'normal' solutions are not possible, selling possessions is difficult because nobody has cash to buy assets, and relatives in town or abroad, who might have normally been expected to send remittances, are themselves strapped for cash too. Standard economic thinking suggests that people revert to barter when cash is scarce/unavailable but such practices have not been well documented.[3]

Based on transaction diaries compiled by 20 farmers in two different communities over a period of three weeks in 2010, this paper explores the sources, circulation and importance of cash among smallholder farmers in a cash-scarce society. The diaries show the very limited inflow of cash and that many households did not have any cash at their disposal. In addition, remittances from family members in the city or overseas were not as important a source of income as had been expected. In cases where the availability of money is limited, it is often assumed that barter would be the most important financial tool to sustain livelihoods. Surprisingly, 'on the spot' barter was insignificant here. Instead, a gift-giving economy has emerged based on the principle of delayed reciprocity.

[1] With the possible exception of remote areas where cash is always scarce.

[2] For work on dollarization in urban settings in Zimbabwe, see Gukurume (2011) on dollarization and service delivery; Munanga (2013) on dollarization and SMEs; Chagonda (2010) on dollarization and workers in the education and banking sectors; and Nhodo *et al*. (2013) on dollarization and older people. Guyer *et al*. (2002) documented the effects of dollarization in urban Nigeria.

[3] For an exception, see the report by Solidarity Peace Trust (2009).

The paper is organized as follows: the next section provides background information on the economic and political situation in Zimbabwe at the time of the study to illustrate the constraints farmers were facing in an attempt to sustain their livelihoods. The subsequent section explains the transaction diary method adopted in the study, while the findings are discussed in the following section. The final paragraph summarizes the findings and explores possibilities for future research.

Context

The agrarian structure in Zimbabwe changed significantly in the early 2000s (Cliffe *et al*. 2011; Hammar *et al*. 2010). The dualistic landscape in which large-scale commercial farms coexisted with smallholder farmers changed when the Fast Track Land Reform Program (FTLRP) led to the breaking up of many large-scale farms. This change in landscape also affected the agro-input industries that supplied the large-scale farms and the agro-processing industries that purchased and processed their products. As a result, there was a steep, albeit uneven,[4] decline in output, exports and in the inflow of foreign currency. Agricultural productivity and food production declined, which led to a shortfall of 35% in domestic food production (Moyo 2011: 952). In addition, more than 400,000 people who used to work on commercial farms lost their jobs when they were broken up. (Rural Poverty Portal Zimbabwe n.d.).

The transition from large-scale farms to a multitude of smallholder farms has not been easy and has been extensively discussed in the literature (Cliffe *et al*. (2011); Moyo (2011); Matondi (2012); Scoones *et al*. (2010); Hanlon *et al*. (2012). Several interrelated developments resulted in severe constraints for small-scale farmers. First, farmers began to experience resource constraints that prevented them from financing inputs and tools, which was exacerbated by the fact that many private institutions withdrew their support after the FTLRP. Even though the state still provided some financing schemes, which were limited to newly resettled farmers, most of the farmers had no choice other than to finance production through their own savings (Moyo *et al*. 2009). Second, even if farmers were able to afford inputs, there was a shortage of them due to the collapse of the agricultural market (Moyo, 2011). As a result, farmers reduced the acreage they had under maize and started planting other crops that required fewer or no inputs. Famers also started to barter seed with their neighbours instead of buying it at the market. The number of farmers using modern inputs (hybrid seeds, fertilizer and pesticides) has decreased over the last decade (Dekker & Kinsey 2011a). Third, farmers who had crops to sell despite these circumstances derived almost no income from them due to hyperinflation combined with delayed payments and a shortage of money (Dekker & Kinsey 2011b: 8), or could not buy the goods they needed when money became available, which affected their ability to provide for other household needs. In search of greener pastures and in an attempt to protect themselves from various forms of violence, an estimated 1-3 million Zimbabweans (more than 20% of the population) left the country after the start of the crisis in the early 2000s. This has created transnational family networks (Hammar *et al*. 2010).

Hyperinflation and Dollarization

During this tumultuous decade, the Zimbabwean dollar experienced continuous inflation. From a 56.09% inflation rate in 1999, inflation rose to 585.84% in 2005 and then to a staggering 231,150,888.87% in July 2008. It took until mid-November 2008, when inflation had reached approximately 89,700,000,000,000,000,000,000%, before the government permitted the use of foreign currency and the hyperinflation was halted. Noko (2011) reports that non-cash transactions became the predominant form of transaction in the Zimbabwean economy in this period.

[4] Contraction has not been even across the country and smallholders have proved to be remarkably resilient (Scoones *et al*. 2010).

To curb inflation and restore stability, Zimbabwe adopted a multi-currency financial system in April 2009, using the US Dollar (US$), the South African Rand and the Botswana Pula. The Zimbabwe Dollar (Z$), which had been pegged to the US$ since 1999, was abandoned (Noko 2011). Various sources reported on the consequences of the dollarization and the macro-economic changes that resulted from this. First, cash was in short supply, especially small-denomination US$ banknotes and coins (Kramarenko *et al*. 2010; Munanga 2013). In rural communities, the situation was even more acute due to a lack of formal employment, the absence of financial institutions and the seasonality of cash incomes from agriculture (Solidarity Peace Trust 2009). Farmers reported going 'for several months without setting … sight on a mere coin' (IRIN 2013). Instead, the return of a 'cashless society' and the practice of using barter to meet household needs were frequently reported in the popular press (*Ibid*.) and retailers started using small items such as sweets, biscuits and matches or credit slips to provide 'change' for customers (Noko 2011). Secondly, with the collapse of agricultural markets, cash constraints, vanishing savings and the non-availability of inputs, farming activities came under pressure and earnings became marginal. Given that incomes from crops and livestock normally constitute about 80% of farmers' total incomes in the study sites (Deininger & Hoogeveen 2004: 1702), it was expected that they would be forced to develop different economic activities to sustain their livelihoods. However, Dekker & Kinsey (2011b) documented how farmers were undertaking fewer non-agricultural activities in 2009/2010 compared to a decade before, but gardening, gold panning and casual employment provided alternative sources of income or goods. Labour for building was, for example, offered in exchange for maize or other food items.

It has been argued that the cautious improvement in the economy from 2010 onwards may have resulted in an increase in remittances (IRIN 2013) and that more job opportunities in the city or abroad have allowed migrants to save money to send to family in the rural areas. These remittances have been of critical importance for many rural households and have been made easier by the emergence of telephonic cash transfer initiatives. Econet Wireless, for example, has been described as 'a bless' and 'a lifeline', particularly for rural people (*Ibid*.). The transaction data presented here will be used to examine how important remittances can be in cash-strapped rural sites and what other types of transactions small-scale farmers use to get by in an environment where cash availability is severely limited.

As Hammar *et al*. (2010) and Nhodo *et al*. (2013) demonstrated, this has required agency and resilience. A great deal of time, energy, discussion, flexibility and sometimes despair went into answering this survey's questions about what people could get where and for how much,[5] as is illustrated by the account of one farmer in the study area who received a good income for his 2008 crop.

> After I got paid for my harvest, I went to the shops in Bindura. Goods were now scarce in the shops. All I could do was buy exercise books with the money. I bought them and brought the exercise books home. People came to exchange almost anything – chickens, mealie meal, etc. – for exercise books.

[5] Despair could result from, for example, sudden changes in terms of trade, such as when a bed of tobacco seedlings was exchanged for two bags of fertilizer rather than just one bag. Solidarity Peace Trust (2009) reports how these terms of trade became exploitative in Matabeleland, especially in more isolated rural communities and when bartering with people from outside who had arrived with truckloads of goods from town.

With this experience and a wider availability of goods after dollarization, this farmer sold his tobacco and bought six head of cattle and groceries to last his family for a year after the 2009 harvest. He gave the groceries to a shop owner at Madziva Mine and his wives withdrew them as they needed them.

Methodology

Transaction Diaries Analysis

The primary objective of this study was to understand the channels through which farmers obtain the means to access essential expenditures, such as food and inputs for their farming activities. In short, it aims to understand the cash flows and transaction patterns of farmers in a cash-scarce economy. It uses transaction diaries as advanced by Mazzucato & Niemeyer (2000) and later developed in more detail by Collins *et al*. (2009) in their study of the portfolios of the poor.

Data Collection

Transaction diaries were kept as part of an ongoing project on social networks and risk-coping strategies in rural Zimbabwe. Data was collected in two different resettlement areas in Zimbabwe that had been established in the early 1980s; Mupfurudzi in Mashonaland Central and Sengezi in Mashonaland East. They are both 'Old Resettlement Schemes' as opposed to more the recent schemes that were set up under the FTLRP. In both these areas, 10 men and 10 women were asked to keep a transaction diary for 21 days in November and December 2010, a period when farmers were expected to buy inputs for crop production. It would then be possible to trace their transactions by analyzing the entries in their diaries. As family members in the city and overseas are aware of the need to invest at this time of the year, it was deliberately decided to include a month-end, the time that remittances are usually sent (after salaries have been paid).

The data was collected by field researchers who were familiar with the communities. Due to budgetary and organizational constraints, the period of the transaction study was limited to 21 days. This means that the data presented here may lack irregular transactions and the depth and breadth of the data collected by, for example, Collins *et al*. (2009). The economic and political situation at that time (November 2010) in Zimbabwe made it difficult to conduct longer-term research and the unique opportunity to collect data on transactions in a cash-scarce economy had to be weighed against the working conditions and safety of the field researchers.

The field researchers trained and monitored participants in how to keep a transaction diary in which they wrote down the date, the description of the transaction (money received, bills paid), the reason for the transaction (i.e. gift, loan), the amount (1 kg maize, 7 onions etc.), the value (in US$), the location where the transaction took place (the village, Harare) and the relationship with the other party in the transaction (i.e. friend, neighbour, shopkeeper). After collecting the diaries, the data were entered into a statistical program and household identification numbers, the name and sex of the participants and the number of transactions per person were recorded. The original dataset consisted of 811 transactions and to ensure consistency, several variables were recoded and others were added. Transactions with missing information were removed from the dataset and the monetary rewards that participants received at the end of the diary period to compensate them for their time were not included.

Distinguishing Transactions

The remaining 798 transactions were examined in various ways. First, the type of transaction was identified. Such a distinction provides insight into the most common kinds of transactions and shows whether people are more likely to buy their food or receive it from family or neighbours, and whether people sell the produce from their land or barter it. Second, it was noted whether transactions were ‘on the spot’ or ‘delayed’. ‘On the spot’ transactions involve an immediate transfer of money, product or labour, while ‘delayed’ transactions are those where one can expect a future counter obligation. Buying and selling products or bartering belongs to the category of ‘on the spot’ transactions’ while gift-giving, receiving gifts and neighbourly assistance fall in the ‘delayed’ transactions category. Third, the transactions were divided into incoming and outgoing transactions. Incoming transactions are where the participant obtained goods and services. Buying food, receiving assistance, gifts, a loan or a remittance are examples of incoming transactions. In this case, because they are interpreted as a way of obtaining cash, sales and paid labour are also classified as incoming transactions. On the other hand, the giving of gifts, assistance or money are seen as outgoing transactions. Here, purchases were classified as outgoing transactions because the participant pays cash to obtain a product. Fourth, the items that were bought, bartered of given away were also categorized with the content of the transactions being assessed as either material, such as food, or in kind, such as assistance with land tillage. Classifying transactions in this way sheds light on the items people buy and the activities they undertake in times of crisis. Do people assist each other on the farm or are they more likely to help out by giving food gifts? And do they, for example, spend money on healthcare?

Apart from the content and the number of transactions that took place, it was important to consider the relative value of these transactions. The number of transactions in a specific category could be considerable while their relative value might be limited. For this reason, the value of transactions are given in US$ as well.

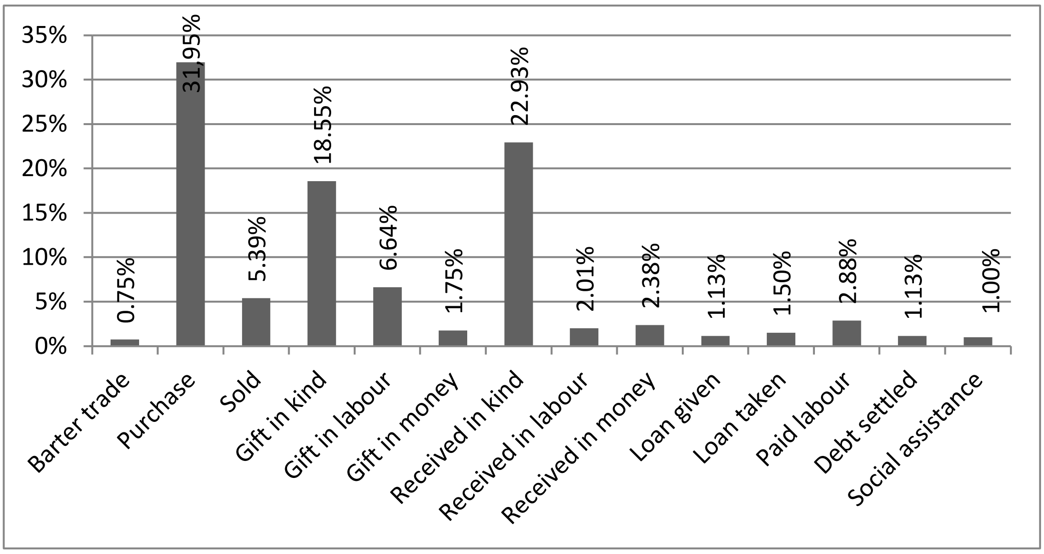
Categories of Transactions

Category 1: Type of Transaction

Figure 1 presents the type of transactions that were recorded. Of the 798 transactions, ‘purchases’, which includes buying groceries, kitchen supplies, a chicken or fertilizer, forms the largest category (31.9%). This is followed by the categories of ‘received in kind’ (22.9%) and ‘gift in kind’ (18.5%). Receiving or giving gifts, such as onions, a piece of cloth or bread, belong to this category. Selling a chicken or maize grain belongs to the ‘sales’ category, which constitutes 5.4% of all the transactions. ‘Gifts in money’, usually exchanges of small amounts of cash between family, friends and neighbours, accounted for 1.7% of total transactions, while ‘received in money’, including remittances, made up 2.3% of all transactions.

The data suggest that, according to frequency, the exchange of gifts is relatively more important than buying and selling products. The categories of ‘purchases’ and ‘sales’ make up 37.3% of the total number of transactions, while the categories of ‘gift in kind’ and ‘received in kind’ account for 41.5% of transactions. However, the total value of the categories ‘purchases’ and ‘sales’ is US$ 2037.80, with an average of US$ 6.91 per exchange, while the total value of the categories ‘gift in kind’ and ‘received in kind’ was US$ 850.95, with an average of US$ 2.83. ‘On the spot’ barter (0.75%) is the smallest category, with a total value of US$ 10.50 and an average of US$ 3.5 per transaction.

Figure 1: Transaction types

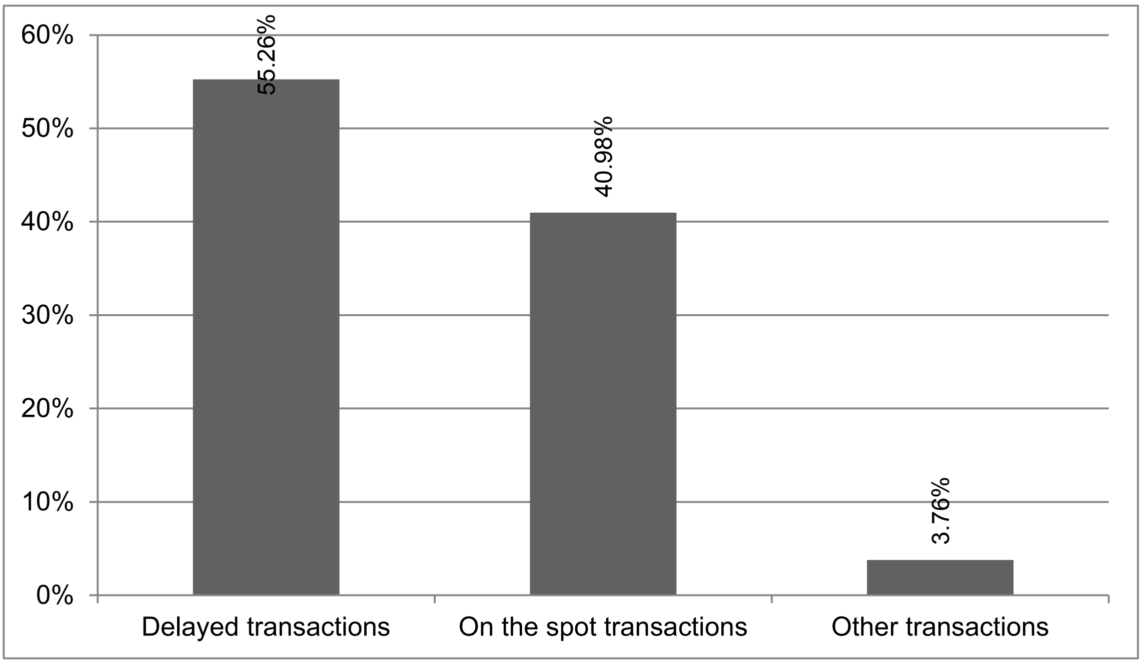


Source: Transaction diaries

Category 2: On the Spot Transactions and Delayed Transactions

Transactions involving a direct exchange of money or products (purchases, 'on the spot' sales, barter and paid labour) account for 41% of the total number of transactions (see Figure 2), while transactions based on an expected future reciprocation (the exchange of gifts in kind, money, labour and social assistance) constitute more than half (55.3%) of the total number of transactions. Loans taken out, loans granted and the settling of debts involve elements of both categories and are categorized as 'other transactions'. The obligation to pay back might be greater than any involved in giving money away, but it also contains an element of future reciprocity.

Figure 2: 'On the spot' and 'delayed' transactions



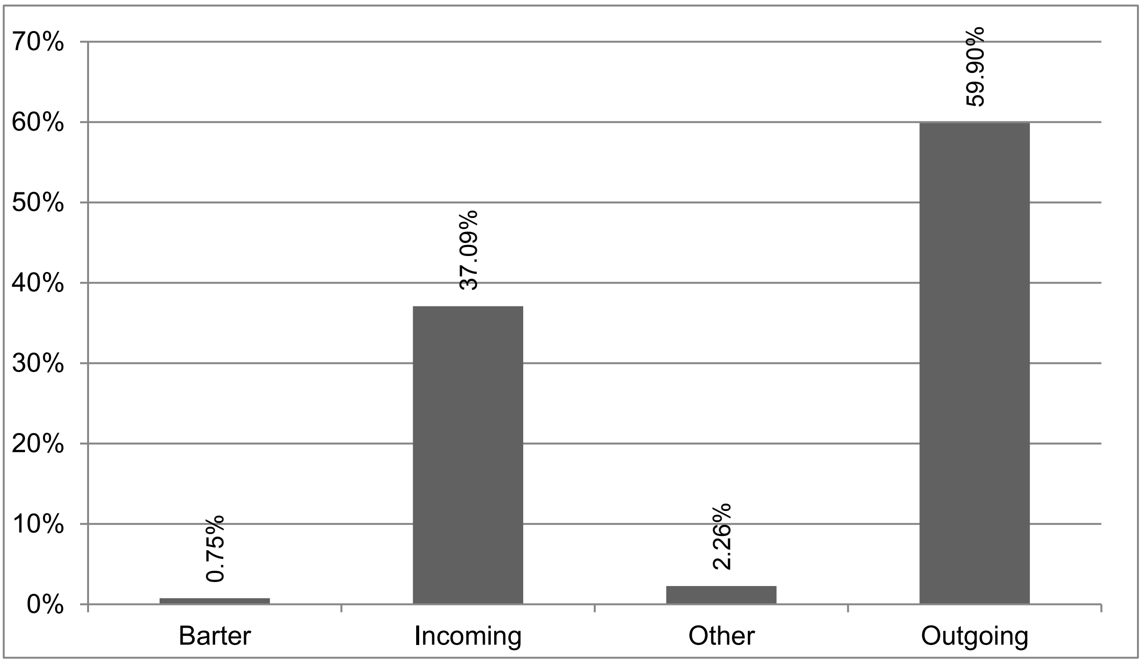
Source: Transaction diaries

The total value of 'on the spot' transactions is US$ 2228.30, with an average of US$ 6.99, while the value of 'delayed' transactions amounts to US$ 1467.55, with an average of US$ 3.83 per transaction. This highlights the relative importance of 'on the spot' transactions even though they are less frequent.

Category 3: Incoming and Outgoing Transactions

When transactions are divided between 'incoming' and 'outgoing' transactions, as in Figure 3, it can be seen that 59.9% of the total number of transactions are for outgoing transactions, while only 37% are incoming transactions. This means that there were more transactions involving participants giving away or buying something, while there were fewer transactions in which the participant received a gift, assistance or money from sales.

Figure 3: Incoming and Outgoing Transactions



Source: Transaction diaries.

The total value of incoming transactions is US$ 1778.25, with an average of US$ 6.44. This is also lower than the total value of US$ 2189.10 on outgoing transactions, while the average outgoing transaction is lower at US$ 5.03. The difference was, however, largely driven by one of the participants who spent US$ 280 on a cow that he purchased from a neighbour.

Category 4: Content of Transactions

The transactions relate to food and groceries (53.7%); work (12%); money (10.3%); household utensils (4.7%); inputs (4.3%) and other expenditures (11.7%). More than half of all the transactions involved food and groceries. Transactions in this category are evenly divided among business contacts, neighbours, close relations and family members. Many of these were purchases (38.9%) but the exchange of food gifts is also important factor here. Food gifts include, for example, giving away groundnuts, cooking oil, maize or mealie meal to friends, neighbours and relatives. Giving and receiving food gifts (27.3% and 32.4% of transactions in this category) are therefore an important way of accessing food. The value of most of the transactions here (89.2%) did not exceed US$ 5.

Work is the second largest category. Work as an outgoing transaction (11.98%) means that the participant provides assistance with ploughing, building, weeding, cutting firewood and/or fetching water. The majority of these (86.2%) transactions were categorized as 'gifts in labour', which means that there was no direct payment involved. In only one instance did a participant hire someone else to do work for him/her. Work as an incoming transaction (12.88%) means that the participant either received (unpaid) assistance with building, land tillage or another related activity (42.1%) or that the participant was hired to work for someone else (57.9%) and received compensation in kind, for example building a tobacco barn in exchange for fertilizer. These incoming transactions were made with neighbours (43.6%), close relations (30.8%) and family members (20.5%).

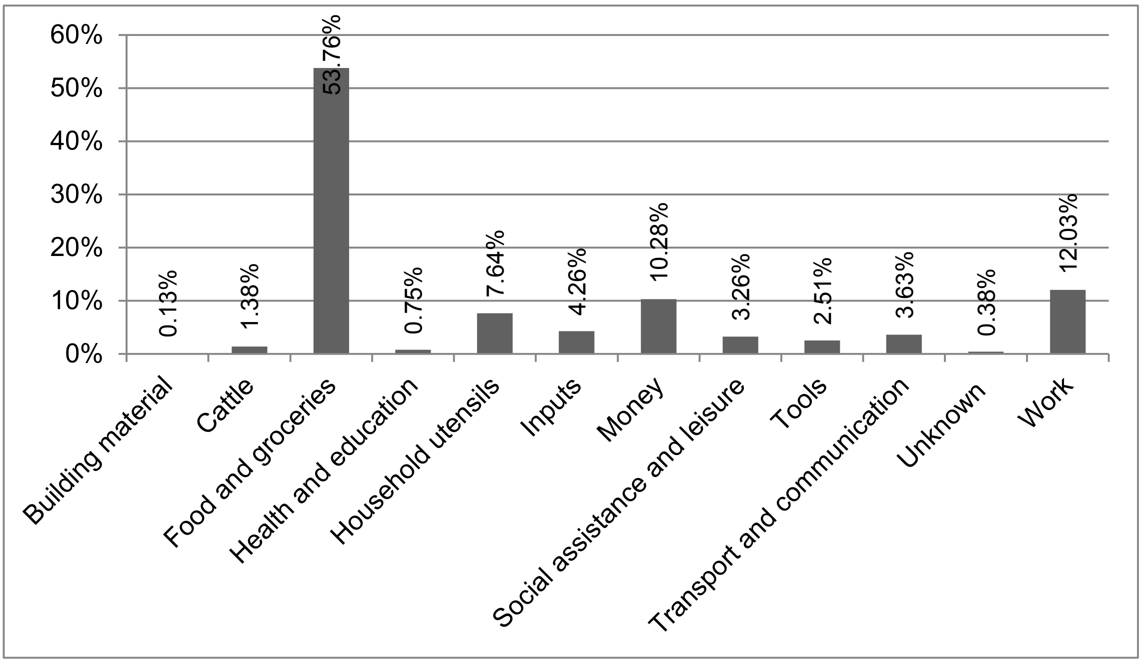
Money was added as a separate category. Money as an outgoing transaction (3.48% of the total of all outgoing transactions) includes transactions in which the participant gave away money, for example to a church or a loan to a friend. The total value of outgoing money transactions is US$ 77.50, with an average of US$ 8.61 per transaction. Money as an incoming transaction (18.98% of incoming transactions) includes remittances, other gifts in money and income derived from the sale of products such as milk, eggs, maize or chickens. These incoming money transactions come from family members (37.5%), close relations (33.9%) and neighbours (26.8%). The total value of incoming money transactions is US$ 465.60, with an average of US$ 8.31.

Household utensils, such as soap, matches, hair products, a stove, towels, clothes and sandals, constitute 7.64% of all transactions. More than half (57.4%) of these goods were bought but a significant share were obtained through gift giving (18%) and receiving gifts (16.4%). The majority of the transactions in this category (79.7%) did not exceed US$ 5. The total amount of money spent on household utensils was US$ 249.35, with an average of US$ 4.23.

Of all the transactions, 4.2% were categorized as inputs. Most transactions in this category were with family (32.4%), business contacts (26.5%), close relations (20.6%) and neighbours (14.7%). A total of 29.4% of all inputs were purchased, while 35.3% were received as a gift. A small number of participants indicated that they also gave away inputs and bartered to obtain inputs. The value of input transactions was less than US$ 5 in more than half of the cases (56.3%). The total value of transactions in the inputs category was US$ 518.70 with an average of US$ 16.21 per transaction.

‘Other expenditures’ includes all the remaining minor categories that are categorized as ‘transport and communication’ (3.6% of the total number of transactions), ‘social assistance and leisure’ (3.3%), ‘tools’ (2.5%), ‘cattle’ (1.4%), ‘building material’ (0.1%) and ‘health and education’ (0.8%).

Figure 4: Content of transactions



Source: Transaction diaries

Main Findings

Looking at the data in this way highlights three main points concerning household exchanges in a cash-constrained economy: the (in)flow of cash in the villages is limited; the frequency of remittances and barter is low; and gift giving has intensified.

Limited Inflow of Cash

The first observation is that the inflow of cash in the villages studied is limited. This is not unexpected given the fact that people were facing severe cash constraints after the dollarization of the economy. It is, therefore, noteworthy that about half of all transactions still involve cash. Purchases, sales, the exchange of gifts in money and paid labour belong to this category. The value of these cash transactions is US$ 2952.90, with an average of US$ 7.80 per transaction. The value of the total number of transactions (in cash and in kind) is US$ 4106.85, with an average of US$ 5.61, which shows that cash transactions are for relatively higher amounts.

Incoming transactions in cash (income from sales, loans taken out, paid labour and money received), however, account for only 12.2% of all transactions. The total value of these cash transactions is US$ 1176.10, with an average of US$ 12.38. The majority (67%) of these incoming cash transactions took place in the village or in nearby villages (21%), which suggests that instead of a steady inflow of cash from abroad or the cities, transactions are being made with cash that is circulating around the villages and in the immediate surroundings. However, the average value of transactions in this area (US$ 5.10) is significantly lower than the average value of transactions with network members in the cities and abroad (US$ 9.92).

The Role of Remittances

The importance of remittances in these villages is far less than was expected. As a result of the decline in production, inadequate farm incomes and rising food shortages in rural areas, it was assumed that an increasing number of rural households would be relying on remittances and emergency aid (Rural Poverty Portal Zimbabwe n.d.). For other rural areas in Zimbabwe, it has been argued that remittances are 'mostly crucial for the sustenance of the households involved, even before the onset of the economic crisis of the 2000s' (Harts-Broekhuis & Huisman 2001: 290). Reporting on urban households, Bracking & Sachikonye (2006) claim that 'it is difficult to see how some of these households could even survive without these informal remittance transfers'. A similar argument is made by Nhodo *et al*. (2013) concerning the importance of remittances for pensioners in Masvingo.

There is no strong evidence of remittances in the transaction diaries of the participants. Table 1 reports 19 instances in which households reported receiving money (only 2% of all transactions reported). Two participants received money from different sources on multiple occasions in the month under review, while two participants received money twice and five participants received money once. The majority of the sums were relatively small and came from family members, neighbours and friends in the same village, and do therefore not qualify as a remittance. In only one instance was an amount of Rand 500 (approx. US$ 70) received by one of the households from a family member living in South Africa. In the context of cash scarcity, remittances may have come in kind. However, Table 1 shows only 14 instances (7%) of gifts being received from a local or regional town, Harare, a new farm or abroad.

Although the data only cover a period of one month, it was originally expected that more households would receive remittances from family members living in an urban area or abroad. This was partly because the data covered the end of a month and also because households usually buy seed and other agricultural inputs in November/December and therefore need extra cash at this time. If family members have money to spare or if they are used to sending remittances home on a regular basis, they would probably have supported family members financially at this particular time. In addition, findings from a study in Harare point to the fact that almost half of the households were receiving remittances from abroad and that most of them reported receipt of such a remittance a month prior to the interview (Bracking & Sachikonye 2006). They do note, however, that households in affluent suburbs receive larger amounts than those living in high-density suburbs.

Table 1: Receipts in kind and money

Received in kind and money		Received in kind		Received in money		Total	
		Count	Table N%	Count	Table N%	Count	Table N%
Location	Village	138	69.0%	6	3.0%	144	72.0%
	Village RA	18	9.0%	3	1.5%	21	10.5%
	Village CA	11	5.5%	1	0.5%	12	6.0%
	Regional town	6	3.0%	3	1.5%	9	4.5%
	Local town	3	1.5%	2	1.0%	5	2.5%
	Harare	3	1.5%	2	1.0%	5	2.5%
	New farm	1	0.5%	1	0.5%	2	1.0%
	Abroad	1	0.5%	1	0.5%	2	1.0%
	Total	181	90.5%	19	9.5%	200	100.0%

Source: Transaction diaries

The low level of remittances raises the question as to whether households have family members elsewhere on whom they can rely. Historically, labour migration to cities and abroad was a common household strategy and many of the diary households had migrants in their networks. These migrant networks have become ever more dispersed as a result of the FTLRP, which attracted the younger generation particularly in the old resettlement areas to seek greener pastures (Dekker & Kinsey 2011b). Previous research based on the ZRHDS indicated that in the early 2000s before the economic downturn, farmers in old resettlement areas derived 3.7% of their income from remittances and the figure was 18.5% among farmers in communal areas (Deininger & Hoogeveen 2004: 1702).

An alternative explanation for the low level of remittances might be that remittances are sent irregularly and were therefore not picked up in this study or that family members are not able or willing to send money home. The latter would be in line with the observations made by the Solidarity Peace Trust, namely that remittances from relatives living abroad are never guaranteed. Worby (2010) also illustrates how migrants may (deliberately) disconnect from their relatives back home, especially at times of material distress and ongoing uncertainty.

The Role of Barter and the Intensification of Gift-giving

The third finding is that 'instantaneous' barter is rare. Fafchamps (2004) distinguished three kinds of trust-based exchange mechanisms as alternatives for cash transactions. First, 'instantaneous barter', where no contractual obligations of exchange are carried forward in time. Second, 'delayed barter', when one part of the exchange is conducted instantaneously and the other is delayed. And lastly, gift exchange, where there is no explicit link to a corresponding payment. In his view, 'instantaneous' barter and gift-giving are two points on a continuum, differing only in the degree of the counter obligation (Thomas & Worrall 2002) In other words, gift-giving can be regarded as a gesture in which a future reciprocal counter gift is expected (Mauss 1967). However, this exchange can be carried forward in time and no specific agreement is made as to the content and value of the counter gift.

The findings from the transaction data show that the first category of barter, 'instantaneous' barter, is rare.[6] The assumption that if there is no cash available, either from crop sales or from remittances, people revert to 'instantaneous barter' to sustain their livelihoods is thus not supported. In the households under review, fewer than 1% of transactions can be categorized as 'instantaneous barter' trade. Two of these were food transactions, in one a plough share was exchanged and in the other a cow was exchanged for six bags of maize and nine bags of fertilizer, while the remaining two transactions involved agricultural seeds.[7] Almost all of these barter transactions occurred in the village where the participant lived and were with neighbours, family members or friends. No barter transaction was registered between household and business relations.

Although advanced as an alternative to cash transactions, trade flows of 'instantaneous barter' can be regarded as complex and disadvantageous because there is no guarantee that there is a match of needs at any point (Fafchamps 2004). This can easily result in disadvantageous transactions in which participants deplete livestock, for example, in return for household needs. The low frequency of 'instantaneous barter' in the data suggests this may not be a problem in the present context, potentially because it was not the goods themselves that were scarce but the means to support their exchange.

In contrast with the relative absence of 'instantaneous barter', gift-giving was a prominent feature in the data. The total value of the exchange of small gifts is the equivalent of US$ 850.95, which is 20.72% of the total value of transactions, with an average of US$ 2.83 per gift. Small gifts are exchanged between family members, neighbours and other close relations. The value of most of these does not exceed US$ 5 and half were worth US$ 0.50 or US$ 1 per gift. Examples of such gifts are assisting neighbours and family members with a plate of mealie meal, a cup of sugar, 4 tomatoes or 3 cups of beans. In the food and groceries category, 60% of the transactions were exchanges of gifts in kind, suggesting that exchanging small gifts is an important way of meeting daily food needs. This was much more important than barter trade, which accounted for only 0.47% of the food and grocery transactions.

Another question is whether gift-giving has intensified in comparison with the period prior to hyperinflation and dollarization. To answer this, ZRHDS data from 2000 was reviewed, in which households were asked to list assistance in cash and kind that they had received and given over the previous year. This resulted in a dataset with 783 transactions, including medical expenses, education costs, farming expenses, food and grocery expenditures, farm and agricultural investments, non-farm business investments and other assistance. The data suggest that 40% of these transactions were in cash and 60% were in kind. When these figures are compared with transactions in kind and money in the current dataset, it is clear that gifts in kind have become much more important. Gifts in kind and labour constitute 92.4% of the total gifts, while gifts in money constitute 7.6% of the total. This suggests that there has been an intensification of gift-giving in kind in response to the shortage of cash.

Conclusions and Further Research

This paper has explored the coping mechanisms of small-scale farmers in the face of the economic crisis, hyperinflation and the subsequent dollarization in rural Zimbabwe. It has aimed to shed light on the effects of the dollarization on the economic life in rural areas through an analysis of transaction diaries that provided details of expenditures in a three-week

[6] The exploitative barter trade reported on by the Solidarity Peace Trust (2009), where external agents go to rural areas with food and barter this food for productive assets, was not reported in this study area.

[7] From the transaction diaries, it was not clear what kinds of products were being bartered in exchange.

period in November/December 2010.

Three main conclusions emerged from the data. First, the inflow of cash from surrounding areas, cities, Harare and abroad was severely limited. Half of the households did not report having received any cash transfers in the month under review. Since transactions in cash (purchases and sales) constituted 37.3% of the total number of transactions, the data suggest that a limited amount of cash was circulating in the villages and was being exchanged in small transactions but that this was barely being supplemented by new cash flows from town or abroad.

The second finding was that the importance of remittances is far less important than has often been assumed. There was no indication that remittances were a steady component of the incomes of farmers, which contradicts the view that a considerable number of rural households in Zimbabwe rely on remittances to sustain their livelihoods.

Thirdly, and in contrast with conventional wisdom about transactions in cash-scarce societies, 'instantaneous' barter was rare. Fewer than 1% of the transactions can be categorized as 'on the spot' barter. This might be considered positive as it means that participants were not being forced to deplete their assets to meet their daily household needs through unfavourable barter transactions. Instead, the shortage of cash has resulted in an intensification of gift-giving in kind and small gifts, mostly of food and groceries, were being exchanged between family members, neighbours and other close relations.

This study's findings highlight the coping mechanisms employed by small-scale farmers in cash-scarce economies. Additional research is needed to confirm these findings and the related underlying mechanisms as it remains unclear why remittances are not a steady component of the transactions of farmers, as indicated by previous research. Remittances no longer appear to constitute an important element of rural households' incomes even though many of these households have migrant workers in their networks. Investigating the capacity of migrant workers to respond to potential requests from rural family members and whether the demands and/or number of family members who made demands have increased could provide insight into the relationship between rural households and their family members in urban areas and abroad.

It would also be interesting to investigate the freedom of choice that participants have when deciding on the type of transaction they will make. Are participants in a position to be able to choose between specific transaction types or are certain options not (any longer) available to them? Do participants, for example, actively select gift-giving in kind as a form of 'delayed barter' over 'instantaneous barter'? Which transaction type do farmers prefer? And are they able to obtain the products they need using the transactions types available to them?

And finally, a more qualitative investigation into gift-giving in kind, which this paper understands as a variant of 'delayed barter', might reveal the underlying assumptions among farmers about the degree of counter obligation that is expected of the receiving party and whether such assumptions change in times of crisis. Are farmers more or less willing to engage in gift-giving? Do their networks widen or contract in times of crisis? Is there a one-directional flow from people who can (still) engage in gift-giving and people who can no longer counter the gifts? And if so, is this going to affect the social fabric of a community in the future?

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Appendix 1. Recoding the Data

The variable 'object' was recoded to distinguish different type of transactions: 'barter trade', 'debt settled', 'gift in kind', 'gift in labour', 'gift in money', 'loan taken', 'loan given', 'paid labour', 'purchase', 'received in kind', 'received in labour', 'received in money', 'social assistance' and 'sales'. The variable 'relationship' has been categorized as 'business relations', 'neighbours', 'family', 'close relations' (kin, friends, family by respect) and 'other'.

Transactions were also classified as either 'incoming transactions' (received in kind, in money, in labour, sales, loan taken and paid labour), in which money, goods or services are received by the participant, or as 'outgoing transactions' (gift in kind, labour, money, purchase, loan given and social assistance), in which money goods or services are given by the participant. Barter and debt settled were put in the 'other' category.

The locations where transactions took place were recorded in the following categories: 'this village', 'this resettlement area', 'communal area bordering this RA', 'regional town', 'local town', 'Harare', 'new farms' and 'abroad'.

The description of transactions was recoded in the following 'subject' categories: 'building material', 'cattle', 'food and groceries', 'health and education', 'household utensils', 'inputs', 'money', 'social assistance and leisure', 'tools', 'transport and communication' and 'work'. 'Work' was then split into 'building activities', 'planting', 'ploughing' and 'other and unspecified work'.

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