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# The Rural Labour Market in Zimbabwe

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## ABSTRACT

Wage labour in Zimbabwe is most often associated with large commercial farms. The use of wage labour within 'peasant' agriculture has been rarely investigated and remains largely undocumented. In 1986/7, the author conducted research in Zimbabwe which was explicitly concerned with issues of rural economic differentiation and the wage labour supplied and hired by 'peasant' households. The data suggest that a dynamic labour market exists in rural Zimbabwe. Further, it was found that in addition to the many part-time rural wage workers, there is a group of people who depend upon wages for all or the bulk of their income. These people, who have been largely ignored by policymakers, cannot be defined as farmers at all.

## INTRODUCTION

**Much of the analysis of rural economic production** in southern Africa, including Zimbabwe, is characterized by assumptions that hired labour is important only in the production system of 'commercial' farms and that African 'smallholders' rely almost exclusively on unpaid, family labour. Official estimates of employment in agriculture, for example, in Zimbabwe in 1984 the estimated share of the agricultural sector in total employment was 26.4 per cent, are confined to 'commercial' farms and ignore wage labour outside these enterprises. This dualistic division of the agricultural sector has prevented any serious examination of the labour market outside of 'commercial' farms.

In 1986/7 this author conducted research in Masvingo Province, Zimbabwe, which was explicitly concerned with issues of economic differentiation and with the wage labour supplied and hired by rural households. Masvingo was selected as a research site because it is a dry, even drought-prone area with the bulk of its land area relatively

poorly suited to crop production. It contains no major cities, few towns and the fewest 'commercial' farms of any province. African agricultural production is the major economic activity on land which generally conforms to the lower quality areas 'reserved' in Rhodesia for blacks. Masvingo is the province of Zimbabwe with the highest percentage of its population in the 'communal lands' or former African reserves — over 80 per cent.

The research results analysed in this paper are confined to 251 structured interviews conducted in Masvingo Communal Land, Mutirikwi Communal Land, and Nyajena Communal Land, all three of which are in Masvingo Province south of the town of Masvingo. These interviews were conducted with respondents in their homes; all of the households included in the survey participated, either by hiring or selling labour, in the rural labour market and were in fact selected because of that participation.

The data collected in the Masvingo survey suggest that a dynamic wage labour market exists in rural Zimbabwe. Further, it was found that in addition to the many rural people who engage part-time in wage work for others, there is a group of communal area residents who depend upon wage labour for all or the bulk of their income. These people, who have been largely ignored by policymakers, cannot be defined as farmers at all.

### **HISTORICAL BACKGROUND**

Since the arrival of white settlers in the late 1800s into the area that is now Zimbabwe, the agricultural sector and any analysis of it have been dominated by the racial division of land within the country. The central fact of a racially divided country has been the focus of almost all recent historical, agricultural and economic studies (Arrighi, 1967, 1970; Palmer, 1977a, 1977b; Stoneman, 1981; Riddell, 1980; Munslow, 1985; Weiner et al., 1985; Moyo, 1986; Mumbengegwi, 1986). Quite obvious and considerable inequalities in income and standard of living indices have led most authors to consider agriculture in Zimbabwe as divided into two distinct sectors — the subsistence of communal farming sector and the commercial farming sector. The use of these concepts is ubiquitous, extending not only into academic analysis but also into official government publications and international organizations' statistics.

The popularity of this dualistic division may derive from the intention of authors using the terms to indicate in one phrase all of the disparities and inequalities between the 'average' white-owned and black-owned farm. There are, however, fundamental flaws in these dualistic concepts that widespread use has tended to hide. In positing not simply one, diversified agricultural sector, but two mutually exclusive categories, authors have tended to assign each Zimbabwean farmer to one or the other idealized, homogenous category, with the result that all farmers take on the stereotypical and unrealistic attributes ascribed to their category. Thus one author states:

a large majority of the people are basically subsistence farmers, or peasants, producing food not for the market, but for their own consumption. Most of them in fact produce little else but their subsistence needs and have no significant money income. (Stoneman, 1981: 127)

Commercial farmers are usually synonymous with white farmers, who are considered to be modern, productive large-scale growers who provide the majority of Zimbabwe's marketed agricultural output and agricultural exports, thereby contributing 'to the growth of the modern economy' (Riddell, 1980: 4).

In this paper, the specific communal lands where research was conducted will be referred to by name. In general, however, use of the commercial/communal dualism will be avoided. What is conventionally termed the communal or subsistence sector will be referred to as small African agricultural production areas.<sup>1</sup> 'Small' is used to distinguish these areas from the small-scale commercial farms, where land-holdings and operations are usually considerably larger, and which will be called in this paper large African agricultural production areas. Zimbabwe's 'commercial farms', whether currently white or black owned, will be referred to as ex-settler farms.

Throughout most of the colonial period, settler farms were the largest recorded employers of hired labour. By 1946, 142,000 Africans were employed on settler farms; in 1974, 358,000 Africans and 4900 Europeans, Asians and coloureds were reported as employed in commercial agriculture, an increase of 252 per cent (Zimbabwe, 1975). In 1974, employment in agriculture represented 35.2 per cent of total estimated wage employment. Since the mid-1970s, this share has decreased continuously; in 1984, the

estimated share of the ('commercial') agricultural sector in total employment was 26.4 per cent (Zimbabwe, 1986: 98).

Since the 1970s numerous studies have appeared on the wages, conditions of employment and health and nutrition of workers on settler farms and plantations (Clarke, 1977; Laing, 1986; Davies and Saunders, 1987). All studies agree that wages on settler farms were very low and inadequate to maintain any dependants. At independence, a statutory minimum wage of Z\$30.00 per month was instituted for domestic and farm workers; the minimum wage rose to Z\$50.00 in 1982, Z\$75.00 in 1985, and Z\$85.00 in 1986. Since its institution the value of the minimum wage has been viewed as seriously inadequate by most analysts and has remained 50 to 75 per cent below various estimates of a poverty datum line.

Cheater (1984) noted the widespread use of hired labour in the large African agricultural production areas. About 85 per cent of the farm owners in Msengezi hired casual agricultural workers during a normal season, and 33 per cent employed full-time permanent labourers in 1973-4. Casual workers were hired mostly at periods of peak labour demand, to hand-weed, to pick cotton and sometimes to harvest maize for piece-work payment. Permanent or resident workers were employed in 1973 on 108 farms in Msengezi, with a range of one to twelve permanent labourers per farm. Little information is provided on the jobs performed by permanent workers, or on their payment but Cheater did note that most were paid in cash and that 'in all cases, remuneration levels fell below those obtaining on European-owned farms for comparable jobs' (Cheater, 1984: 74).

To date, very little information has appeared on wage labour within the small African agricultural production areas. Some mention was made of wage workers by Weinrich (1975: 88). Clarke (1977) quotes a CSO survey stating that the number of paid employees in the Tribal Trust Lands was 50,000 of the total of 322,000 adult males reported resident in the TTLs in 1962 (Clarke, 1977: 94-5).

More recent data are no less scattered. Callear (1985) found that of the ninety-eight families interviewed in Wedza Communal Land, thirty-eight had a male head of household working elsewhere and sending remittances; eight had a male head of household who worked in Wedza Communal Land, for example, teachers, herdsmen and construction workers; and three further families had a male head of household who worked locally part-time. Of the

eleven male heads of household working locally, three never worked in their own fields. Three further families sold non-agricultural goods for the bulk of their income (Callear, 1985: 218-19).

The Wedza Project conducted by the Ministry of Lands, Agriculture and Rural Settlement included a sample survey of 185 households in 1982, and 85 households in 1984. In both surveys, households were asked 'For which agricultural practices is extra labour needed by your household?'. Most households cited weeding as the activity most requiring extra labour (75 per cent of households) followed by harvesting (69 per cent), ploughing (48 per cent) and planting (48 per cent). The proportion getting extra labour from hired workers was 27 per cent on the 1984 survey and 33 per cent in the 1982 survey (Truscott, 1985).<sup>2</sup>

In 1983/4, the CSO conducted a Demographic Socio-Economic Survey (DSES) in forty-three rural districts of Zimbabwe. The DSES covered a wide range of topics which included 'income-generating non-agricultural enterprises' within the small African agricultural production areas. Of the more than 17,500 households surveyed, about 15 per cent were found to have some kind of cash income generating non-farm activity. Helmsing (1987) re-used the sampling framework of the DSES for a follow-up study of 197 households that specifically reported a non-farm activity in 1983/4.<sup>3</sup>

As stated, wage labour is an aspect of rural production which has tended to be neglected in many rural surveys, and until recently has been completely ignored in Zimbabwe. Studies of agricultural labour have meant exclusively studies of workers on 'commercial farms'; there has been little recognition of workers hired *within* the small African agricultural production areas. On the other hand, rural wage workers are often excluded from surveys which focus on 'farms' or farm household heads because of their limited access to farms' and other means of agricultural production and because their main economic activities cannot be defined in terms of their work on their own or their relatives' agricultural holdings. These people include full-time agricultural labourers hired by communal and farmers, casual daily-paid workers involved in a wide variety of agricultural and non-agricultural tasks, teachers, shopkeepers, construction workers, and various other full-time workers.

Households whose members hired or supplied wage labour were the focus of the Masvingo survey. Only households that participated in some fashion in the labour market (by hiring workers or by

having a member who worked for wages) were included in the households interviewed. The survey was therefore not a random sample of households, but limited specifically to households that hired or sold labour.<sup>4</sup>

In this paper only one portion of the interview schedule is considered, that concerning the permanent and casual workers hired by the households in the survey. Each respondent (who was the male head of household in 93 per cent of the cases) was asked a series of questions about any permanent workers hired by the household, and a series of questions about any casual workers hired by the household. The following sections deal in turn with each category.

#### **PERMANENT LABOUR**

The first category of wage labour to be considered is 'permanent' labour hired by households in Masvingo's communal lands. While diversity characterizes the specifics of permanent workers' wages, non-monetary remuneration, jobs performed and tenure, basic structural similarities in the employment and work process render 'permanent labour' a distinct category. The term is used here to distinguish full-time work for one employer from casual, daily paid work for a variety of employers, which may also be a full-time job but with very different characteristics. Of the households interviewed in Masvingo, 39 per cent hired at least one permanent worker. The maximum number of workers hired by a household was four. Data for a total of 136 permanent workers are therefore considered in the following analysis.

Both males and females were hired as permanent workers, performing one or more of such tasks as general agricultural work, herding cattle, domestic service, childcare and in certain cases working as shop assistants. Permanent workers normally earned a monthly wage. In addition, certain non-monetary payments were often made, including meals, housing, food and sometimes use of land or animals. Permanent workers normally lived with the household which employed them and shared meals with that household. The tenure of a worker's employment with a particular household varied considerably, and often was in fact only a few months.

Of the 136 permanent workers considered in the Masvingo survey, 70.6 per cent were male and 29.4 per cent were female.

About 90 per cent of these workers were age 30 or under — 23 per cent were age 10 to 15, 36 per cent were age 16 to 20 and 30 per cent were age 21 to 30. The great majority of permanent workers were unrelated to the household where they worked. Despite the fact that most workers were unrelated to their employers, many (39 per cent) came from the same local communal land as the one in which they worked. A further 30 per cent were from elsewhere in Masvingo Province, 12 per cent were from other areas of Zimbabwe, and 20 per cent were from Mozambique.

Most of the permanent workers (78 per cent) had been working for their current employer for six months or less. A few permanent workers — 7 per cent — had remained with their current employer for more than three years. The primary task of 62 per cent of the workers was herding cattle; a further 26 per cent were employed for domestic service and 8 per cent for general agricultural work. Seventy-five per cent of the permanent workers had a secondary task as well, which was general agricultural work in 85 per cent of the cases. A large majority of the permanent workers interviewed in the study, 88 per cent, worked either six or seven days per week.

The wages reported for permanent workers in the communal lands were quite low. Over half of the workers received Z\$30.00 per month or less and over 80 per cent received Z\$40.00 per month or less. Only 3 per cent of the permanent workers were reported as receiving Z\$75.00 or more per month; Z\$75.00 constituted Zimbabwe's official minimum wage at the time of the interviews.

Five per cent of the permanent workers (seven respondents) received no wages at all, and instead worked for an employer who paid their school fees. It was a fairly common arrangement in the rural areas for a young person to work for another household in exchange for school fees. Because the school day was normally over by 1 pm, the student was able to herd cattle before and after school and to work in the fields during the afternoon.

In addition to wages, permanent workers received non-monetary compensation. Such items included meals, housing, food or crops, used clothing and use of cattle. Virtually all of the permanent workers received meals and 96 per cent received housing. In addition, about 25 per cent of the workers received occasional food or crops, and 17 per cent received occasional articles of clothing. Use of cattle, use of land, and money loans were rarely reported.

Comparison of male and female permanent workers reveals some

interesting differences. Most obviously, male and female workers were hired to perform different tasks. Eighty-four per cent of the male workers were hired primarily to herd cattle. Only 7 per cent of the female workers herded cattle; 85 per cent were hired primarily as domestic workers. In the communal lands, the tasks of a domestic worker normally included cooking, childcare, and fetching water and firewood. The majority of both male and female permanent workers also performed general agricultural work for the employer.

Female permanent workers were highly concentrated in the age group 16 to 30. For example, 30 per cent of the male permanent workers were aged 10 to 15, while only 5 per cent of the female employees were aged 10 to 15. Men over age 30 comprised 15 per cent of the male permanent workers, but women over age 30 formed only 3 per cent of the female permanent workers. Employees of both genders were concentrated in the 16 to 30 age group (92 per cent of female workers and 55 per cent of male workers) but the concentration was much more pronounced for female workers.

The workers from Mozambique also had distinguishing characteristics. Most notable was their youth — 29 per cent of the workers from Mozambique were aged 10 to 15, and 72 per cent were under 20 years of age. As well, 89 per cent of the Mozambican permanent workers had worked for their current employer for one year or less. A very high proportion (89 per cent) worked herding cattle. The wages for the Mozambican workers were particularly low, with 61 per cent earning less than Z\$30.00 per month. None of these characteristics was exclusive to Mozambican workers, but there was a greater tendency for them to be young men, recently employed to herd cattle for low wages.

Almost all studies of labour mobility are concerned with either rural/urban migration or seasonal migration. Very seldom has there been any analysis of labour mobility within the rural areas. Bardhan and Rudra (1986) conducted a survey of eighty villages in West Bengal to investigate rural labour migration. There were, in West Bengal, considerable differences in wages paid for similar work, sometimes even between neighbouring villages, yet often labourers did not walk across to the higher-wage village, as would be predicted by orthodox economic theory.

Boundaries of labour mobility across villages were defined by territorial affinity and the relationship of familiarity between workers and their employers. These relationships were often



stronger than short-term wage differences. Employers preferred to hire 'insiders' because they knew the work capacity and dependability of these residents; labourers preferred to work for local employers, viewing them as providers of sustained jobs, emergency help and occasional credit.

While employers did not hire workers from nearby villages, they did hire migrant labourers from distant places, although their total cost was higher than the local workers. Migrants were possibly even more dependent on the employer, who provided food and shelter as well as wages, and migrants were resented less by local workers than were those from nearby villages.

The data from Masvingo make an interesting comparison with those collected by Bardhan and Rudra. In Masvingo there also appears to be significant territorial segmentation of the labour market. The most numerous category of permanent workers were from the same local area as their employers; the second most numerous category came from the rest of Masvingo Province. Only 12 per cent of the permanent workers came from other areas of Zimbabwe, but 20 per cent came from Mozambique. Employers were not systematically asked about their reasons for hiring particular individuals, so any analysis on this point is speculative, but it may be that similar processes operated to those detailed for West Bengal. Employers may have preferred to hire local people about whom they had previous knowledge and possibly with whom they had personal contact. It is also likely that employers had more control over Mozambican workers, who were almost certainly desperately poor, illegally resident in Zimbabwe (since they were not in refugee camps) and unable to return home.

To this consideration of factors which may restrain the mobility of rural workers, a number of additional constraints apply particularly to women. It was noted that female permanent workers were heavily concentrated in their original local area. Women's independence and freedom of movement in rural Zimbabwe is certainly more constrained than that of men, in part because the patterns of socially accepted behaviour vary for males and females, but also because women have the primary responsibility for childcare. Female permanent workers were found to be primarily between the ages of 16 and 30; hence many had children. Transporting children on an uncertain, long-distance job search is doubtless not easy. Caring for children was possibly far easier in an area where the availability of relatives and friends was greater, and it is also

Table 1. *Households Hiring Permanent Workers by Household Roofing Material*

	Roofing material	
	Thatch	Metal
Hire permanent Workers		
Yes	38	60
% row	38.8	61.2
% column	22.6	72.3
No	130	23
% row	85.0	15.0
% column	77.4	27.7
N = 251		
Significance 0.0000		
Pearson's R 0.4790		

possible that a woman's chance of being hired was greater in an area where she was known.

Households which hired permanent workers tended to share certain characteristics. The hiring of permanent workers tended to correlate positively with such factors as having a metal roof on the main household dwelling ( $R = 0.4790$ ), owning cattle ( $R = 0.5338$ ), and large farm size ( $R = 0.3189$ ) (see Tables 1–4). For example, as seen in Table 1, 72 per cent of the households with a metal roof on the main dwelling also hired a permanent worker. Only 23 per cent of households with a thatch roof on the main dwelling hired a permanent worker.

Hiring of permanent workers was also positively correlated with cattle ownership. Of those households that did not own cattle, only 9 per cent hired permanent workers. Of those households which did own cattle, 50 per cent hired a permanent worker. Similarly, it can be seen in Table 2 that while 32 per cent of those who owned between three and five head of cattle hired a permanent worker, 75 per cent of those who owned between eleven and twenty head of cattle hired a permanent worker and 82 per cent of those who owned over twenty hired a permanent worker.

Households that received remittances from people working outside the communal land also tended to hire labour, particularly those households that received remittances of Z\$50.00 per month or more. Over 68 per cent of those who received such high remittances hired at least one permanent worker whereas only 30 per cent of

Table 2. *Households Hiring Permanent Workers by Number of Cattle Owned*

	0	1	2	3-5	6-10	11-10	21-50
Hire permanent workers							
Yes	6	0	0	12	29	37	14
% row	6.1	0	0	12.2	29.6	37.9	14.3
% column	9.0	0	0	31.6	48.3	75.5	82.4
No	61	4	16	26	31	12	3
% row	39.9	2.6	10.5	17.0	20.3	7.8	2.0
% column	91.0	100.0	100.0	68.4	51.7	24.5	17.6

N = 251

Significance 0.0000

Pearson's R 0.5338

those who did not receive high remittances hired a worker. Another significant correlation existed with size of land-holding. Table 3 indicates that those whose land-holding was 0.5 hectares or less (14 per cent of the total) hired no permanent workers; of those whose land holding was 3 hectares or greater, at least 55 per cent hired a permanent worker.

Households that hired permanent workers tended also to have heads of households with certain characteristics. Most notably, a female-headed household was more likely to hire a permanent worker than a male-headed household — 52 per cent of the female-headed households hired a permanent worker whereas only 32 per cent of the male-headed households hired a permanent worker. However, most of the female-headed households that hired permanent workers had a male head living and working away from the area. Sixty-three per cent of female only households did not hire permanent workers; only 37 per cent of the households where the female head had a husband working away did not hire permanent workers. This discrepancy relates of course to the remittances sent by males living away to the rural household. An important suggestion which arises from this discrepancy is the need to disaggregate the category of 'female-headed' household for any understanding of rural economic dynamics (see Table 4).

It is interesting to note that in the Masvingo study, hiring permanent workers appeared to be related neither to the age of the head of household, nor to the size of the household. Between 30 and

Table 3. *Households Hiring Permanent Workers by Size of Arable Land Holding*

		Size of farm (ha)								
		0.5 and <	1.0	1.5	2.0	2.5	3.0	3.5	4.0	4.5 and >
Hire permanent workers										
Yes										
0	4	12	24	18	21	11	8	0		
0	4.1	12.2	24.5	18.4	21.4	11.2	8.2	0		
0	18.2	34.3	40.7	37.5	55.3	84.6	61.5	0		
No										
21	18	23	35	30	17	2	5	2		
13.7	11.8	15.0	22.9	19.6	11.1	1.3	3.3	1.4		
100.0	81.8	65.7	59.3	62.5	44.7	15.4	38.5	100.0		

N = 251

Significance 0.0000

Gamma 0.4330

Pearson's R 0.3189

40 per cent of every age group hired permanent workers. Thirty-seven per cent of polygamous households and 39 per cent of non-polygamous households hired permanent labour. Table 5 indicates that hiring workers did not appear to be related to the size of household or to the consumer:worker ratio. Nor did the hiring of workers appear to be related to either the number of men over age 15 or the number of women over age 15 in the household. The hiring of workers was also not significantly different by geographic area, despite the variation in arable land quality.

The inference to be drawn is that hiring permanent workers was apparently not related to the 'domestic development cycle' which Murray (1981) and Low (1986) suggest accounts for the differences in ownership and control of economic resources among rural households. The assumption of a subsistence economy made by Low and others precludes any possibility of a rural labour dynamic, which the Masvingo data have shown to exist. Low states:

**Table 4. *Households Hiring Permanent Workers by Gender of Head of Household***

	Head of household		
	Male head	Female only	Female head male away
<b>Hire permanent workers</b>			
<b>Yes</b>	54	13	31
% row	55.1	13.3	31.6
% column	32.3	37.1	63.3
<b>No</b>	113	22	18
% row	73.9	14.4	11.8
% column	67.3	62.9	36.7

N = 251

Significance 0.0005

Pearson's R 0.4051

*Household Categories by Total Remittances*

Household category	Total remittances	
	Low to Z\$50	High over Z\$50
<b>Female only</b>	30	5
% row	85.7	14.3
% column	15.5	8.8
<b>Female head, male away</b>	10	39
% row	20.4	79.6
% column	5.2	68.4
<b>Male head</b>	154	13
% row	92.2	7.8
% column	79.4	22.8

N = 251

Significance 0.0000

Pearson's R 0.6278

Table 5. *Households Hiring Permanent Workers by Consumer: Worker Ratio*

	Consumer: worker ratio					
	< 1.00	1.00	1.01-1.49	1.50-1.99	2.00-2.99	3.0+
Hired permanent workers						
Yes						
46	18	8	12	8	6	
46.9	18.4	8.2	12.2	8.2	6.1	
43.0	36.7	47.1	32.4	34.8	33.3	
No						
61	31	9	25	15	12	
39.9	20.3	5.9	16.3	9.8	7.8	
57.0	63.3	52.9	67.6	65.2	66.7	
N = 251						
Significance	0.7958					
Gamma	0.1144					
Pearson's R	0.0721					

Because all households have their own land, there is little possibility of supplementing a depleted family labour force with hired labour at a wage rate below the returns that can be expected from the extra labour input. (Low, 1986: 129)

Because Low's dualistic model of the economy assumes equality of resources for all households and reduces the explanation of economic differentiation to household size, the model is unable to account for dynamic processes within rural areas, such as wage labour, which arise from inequality.

In general, as has been indicated, households that hired permanent labour tended to be households which exhibited characteristics of affluence in the rural context — they generally had larger farms, owned large numbers of cattle, and had a metal roof on the main dwelling.

#### CASUAL LABOUR

The term casual labour is used to refer to non-permanent, daily-paid work performed for a variety of employers. Casual labour included both agricultural and non-agricultural activities, and was performed both by individuals for whom it was their major occupation and

those for whom it was a secondary occupation. Casual work within the communal lands was more prevalent and more varied than the permanent work discussed previously. It included most farm operations, such as ploughing, planting, weeding, harvesting and threshing. Non-cultivation casual work included fencing, clearing land, collecting fuel and water, cutting grass and various building activities such as general construction, brick-making, painting and thatching.

Casual work, particularly agricultural tasks, was almost always performed and paid as piece-work. The most frequent example of casual work, harvesting, was normally measured in standard marketing board bags. For each bag harvested, the worker was paid a sum, usually between Z\$0.75 and Z\$2.00. Groundnut harvesting was normally measured in cooking oil tins, and for each tin harvested the worker was paid between Z\$0.30 and Z\$0.75. Weeding was normally performed 'by line' at a rate of Z\$0.25 to Z\$0.75 per line, but occasionally workers weeded a crop by hectare, at a rate of Z\$20.00 to Z\$40.00 per hectare. Ploughing was also paid at this per hectare rate.

A wider range of payment arrangements was found for non-agricultural casual work. Some tasks, such as making bricks or cutting poles, were paid at a piece-rate; for example, Z\$60.00 for 1000 bricks or Z\$10.00 for thirty poles. Other jobs, such as constructing a house, digging a well or thatching a roof were paid by the job.<sup>5</sup>

For any type of casual work, but most frequently for agricultural jobs, the casual worker could be paid in kind. Some casual workers, particularly women, preferred to be paid in goods rather than in cash, because their control in their own households over payments in kind was greater than their control over cash, which was often taken by the male head of household.<sup>6</sup>

About 23 per cent of the households surveyed hired no casual workers in the year preceding the interview. The majority of households, however, hired casual workers. The most common response was that the household hired between two and five casual workers. It should be noted that while both men and women performed agricultural work, certain tasks tended to be dominated by one gender. Men tended to do the ploughing, for example, and women the weeding. Men also dominated the non-agricultural jobs, particularly construction, almost to the exclusion of women.

Most casual workers were hired for short periods only. Over 65

per cent of the households that reported hiring casual workers hired them for three days or less, and over 86 per cent hired them for four days or less. In particular with agricultural jobs which needed to be completed within a short period of time, such as weeding or harvesting, the tendency was to hire greater numbers of people to work for a limited period rather than to hire fewer numbers to work for a longer time.

Harvesting, weeding and ploughing were by far the most common tasks performed by casual workers. The most common non-agricultural tasks were general construction and making bricks; other non-cultivation tasks that were performed less frequently were cutting wood, fencing, digging a fish pond and clearing land. In the Masvingo survey, 182 households hired casual workers for agricultural jobs at least once and 102 households hired casual workers for non-agricultural jobs at least once.

About 70 per cent of the respondents indicated that they sometimes paid casual workers in kind rather than in cash. Sixty-nine per cent reported that they paid women in kind and 59 per cent indicated that they paid men in kind. The commodities most frequently given to casual workers included maize, salt, soap and used clothing.

Meals (*sadza*) were normally given to all casual workers, whether they were paid in cash or kind. Over 98 per cent of the households that hired casual workers reported giving them meals. Bardhan (1979) demonstrated that for India the agricultural wage-rate was sensitive to demand and productivity conditions, contrary to the theory of wage determination by subsistence or nutrition that payment by food has engendered. The extreme difficulty of calculating a 'subsistence' nutritional level was noted by Bardhan, who also pointed out that many agricultural labourers continue to exist on a nutritional level significantly inferior to the minimum recommended by any nutritionist.

In terms of the Masvingo data, other problems with the nutrition theory of wages become evident. The nutrition efficiency theory predicts a higher incidence of permanent than casual labour, which is not the case in Masvingo.<sup>7</sup> Further, the nutrition theory implies that permanent labourers would be more likely than casual workers to receive meals as payment, whereas in Masvingo all workers receive meals. Indeed, agricultural wages in Masvingo were paid in a wider variety of ways than nutrition theory would predict, including cash and non-food in-kind items such as clothing.

Hiring casual workers did not preclude other forms of labour use;



indeed, hiring casual workers correlated positively with both hiring permanent workers and hiring exchange labour. Of those households that hired casual workers, 48 per cent also hired a permanent worker and 82 per cent hired exchange labour. Of those households that did not hire casual workers, 93 per cent did not hire permanent workers and 62 per cent did not hire exchange workers.

Hiring casual workers also appeared to be positively related to other indicators of rural wealth such as size of arable land-holding, roofing material and selling crops. All of the households with over 3 hectares of land hired casual workers; conversely, only one household with under 1 hectare hired casual workers. Of those households that had a metal roof on their main dwelling, 89 per cent hired casual workers; 72 per cent of those who had a thatch roof hired casual workers. Eighty-five per cent of those households that sold at least one crop hired casual workers; 60 per cent of those who sold nothing hired casual workers.

While a higher proportion of those with metal roofs, large farms and crop sales hired casual workers, a rather high percentage of the households without these attributes also hired casual workers. The category 'casual work' included not only harvesting and weeding but also ploughing, which was normally performed by farmers with relatively large herds of cattle who were paid to use their draught power to plough the fields of those who did not own cattle. Households that did not own cattle or did not have a plough frequently hired people to plough their fields and so are counted here as having employed casual workers. Refining the category of casual work by use of the additional variable of job performed by the casual worker is revealing when cross-tabulated with the variable of cattle ownership. As Table 6 shows, of those households that did not have cattle but did hire casual workers, the job performed by the casual workers was ploughing in 52 per cent of the cases ( $R = 0.5353$ ).

Similar results are found when the job done by casual workers is cross-tabulated with whether a plough was owned or a crop was sold. For households that did not own a plough and hired casual workers, 60 per cent of the jobs performed were ploughing; for households that did own a plough, the percentage was under 6 per cent. For households that sold at least one crop, the first job of casual workers was ploughing in 12 per cent of the cases but for the households that did not sell a crop, the percentage of casual workers engaged in ploughing was over 30 per cent.

Hiring casual workers did not appear to be related to the size of

Table 6. *Job of Casual Workers by Household Cattle Ownership*

Cattle Owned	Job of casual worker		
	Cultivation	Non-cultivation	Ploughing
Yes	131	2	7
% row	93.6	1.4	5.0
% column	86.8	100.0	24.1
No	20	0	22
% row	47.6	0	52.4
% column	13.2	0	75.9

N = 182  
 Significance 0.0000  
 Pearson's R 0.4356

family, the consumer:worker ratio, or to the age of the head of household. For example, 65 per cent of the households which were comprised of three to five members hired casual workers; 82 per cent of the households with nine to ten family members hired casual workers; and 83 per cent of the households with fifteen family members or more hired casual workers. Between 70 and 87 per cent of households in every category of consumers to workers had hired casual workers in the year preceding the interview. Similarly, 85 per cent of the polygamous households in the survey hired casual workers and 76 per cent of the non-polygamous households hired casual workers. Age of the head of household, which is sometimes assumed to correlate positively with the size of family and household wealth did not appear to be related to the propensity of the household to hire casual workers. Of those households where the head was age 20–29, 82 per cent hired casual workers; of those households where the head was age 40–49, 68.3 per cent hired casual workers and of those where the head of household was aged 60–69, 84 per cent of the households hired casual workers.

Many households existed which both hired in and hired out labour. It was quite possible for a household to gain economically by hiring in casual workers for the low-paid agricultural work of weeding or harvesting while its own residents worked away from the household, either on a part-time or a full-time basis, in more lucrative or more secure occupations, including teaching, construction, working in a shop or beer hall or work for a government

department. The seasonal nature of much agricultural work was also an important factor in explaining the hiring in and out of labour as was the need for cash at different times of the year. Cash may be gained immediately from casual work, which may outweigh the longer term benefits of work on the household fields for certain families at certain times, even those who are not normally engaged full-time in casual work.

#### **HOUSEHOLDS HEADED BY CASUAL WORKERS**

The supply side of the labour market cannot be adequately discussed in this short paper. A few brief comments follow, however, regarding households headed by a casual worker. Respondents in the survey were asked a number of questions about the occupations of the head of household. Major occupation was defined as that on which the head of household expended the most time. In addition to the major occupation, the respondent could list up to two secondary occupations. The results demonstrated very clearly that the notion of subsistence or non-market mediated activities in the small African agricultural production areas has little basis in reality.

Sixty-two per cent of the heads of household interviewed had farming as their major occupation; 18 per cent had casual work as their major occupation and 7 per cent had another full-time job as their major occupation. A wide variety of non-agricultural occupations were represented in the rural areas. They included nursing, tailoring, shoe-repair, carpentry and employment with government agencies. The major occupation of a few people was full-time agricultural work for another household, operating a rural shop or beer hall, or construction. Five heads of household were classified as unemployed due to physical handicap.

The major occupation of the head of household correlated significantly with other key variables related to levels of income. For example, while 16 per cent of respondents whose major occupation was farming owned no cattle, 60 per cent of casual workers owned no cattle (see Table 7). Casual workers comprised 75 per cent of those who had 0.5 hectares of land or less, and included the few cases where no land at all was held by the household. Conversely, over 29 per cent of farmers and 33 per cent of non-agricultural workers had arable land-holdings of 3 hectares or more, but only 10

Table 7. *Occupation of the Head of Household by Cattle Ownership*

Occupation	Cattle ownership	
	Yes	No
Farmer	131	25
% row	84.0	16.0
% column	72.0	36.2
Casual worker	22	33
% row	40.0	60.0
% column	12.1	47.8
Other job	25	10
% row	73.3	26.7
% column	13.6	14.5
Unemployed	4	1
% row	80.0	20.0
% column	2.2	1.4

N = 251

Significance 0.0000

Pearson's R 0.3301

per cent of the casual workers had 3 hectares or more of land. Households headed by a casual worker did not in general hire workers, sell any crops, or receive regular or sizable remittances from relatives working away. Finally, casual workers tended to have less education. Over 25 per cent of the casual workers had no education at all, compared with 6 per cent of farmers and 3 per cent of non-agricultural workers. About 44 per cent of the casual workers had less than three years of school. Women were 26 per cent of those heads of household engaged primarily in casual work.

#### CONCLUSION

The results of the Masvingo survey indicate that a dynamic labour market exists in the 'communal lands' of Zimbabwe. Both permanent and casual labour is hired within the communal lands. Households that are affluent in the rural context, that have large farms, cattle and improved housing, tend to be the employers of wage labour. The supply side of the labour market, which was not

considered at length in this short paper, was found to consist in part of those with little or no access to land, cattle or other productive resources. Such people depend upon wage work within the 'communal lands' for all or the bulk of their income; they cannot be defined as farmers or peasants, and they are ignored in the standard commercial/subsistence division of Zimbabwean agriculture which asserts that all labour in the 'subsistence' sector is unpaid, family labour.

#### NOTES

1. From 1980 to 1984, 22 per cent of national maize production and 33 per cent of national cotton production came from the small African agricultural production areas (see Stanning, 1985).

2. There are inconsistencies about the numbers of households actually interviewed in the two major Wedza surveys, due in part to a confusing number of reports based on the data. Further problems include obviously leading questions such as the one quoted above and the fact that a major aim of the Wedza Project was to promote 'farmer groups' as a means of raising agricultural productivity. One aspect of these groups is fostering labour co-operation among households that belong to the farmer group so that labour is exchanged with no payment in cash or kind. See, however, Bratton (1986) for some evidence on the composition of farmer groups, including that 'collective organizations are composed of farmers who are more advantaged than average' and that 'farmer organizations are not immune from the universal tendency for power to accumulate in the same hands as status and wealth' (Bratton, 1986: 373).

3. The households that Helmsing interviewed would fall under the rubric of the informal sector as applied to the rural areas. Self-employed entrepreneurs, operating on a small scale, were the target population, not rural wage workers. This is true of virtually all the farm studies which include non-farm activities in their analyses.

4. The basic administrative division in the small agricultural production areas is the Village Development Committee (VIDCO), a unit comprised of about 100 households. Interviews were conducted in 20 VIDCOs, which were selected to give a good geographical representation of the area of Masvingo, Mutirikwi and Nyajena Communal Lands. With the help of local officials (VIDCO chairmen, social welfare officers, nurses, Village Health Workers, Agritex demonstrators and schoolteachers) lists were compiled in each VIDCO of households known to either hire labour or to have members engaged in wage labour. On the whole, these lists were accurate, but they were not comprehensive; it is likely that more households were participating in the labour market than those identified. A degree of bias probably resulted from this means of obtaining lists of households. Interviews were likely to concentrate on well-known and so perhaps more extreme cases. Initially, the target was to interview ten households per VIDCO; finding ten households per VIDCO that were involved in either hiring or selling labour proved to be quite easy, so in the later interviews, the target was increased to twenty households per VIDCO. It was

normally not difficult for officials to identify twenty households involved in the labour market.

5. Payment at a piece rate is an attempt by employers to confront the 'supervision constraint' which particularly affects the agricultural production process, as opposed to manufacturing. Sen (1981: 217) has investigated the supervision constraint in Indian agriculture and suggests that supervision problems are acute for large farmers who use a high proportion of hired labour relative to family labour: 'The role of family members in the supervision and control of hired labour is particularly critical in the case of the "rich peasant" enterprises which are neither big enough to afford the overheads of complex management systems, nor ordinarily to have a group of poor peasants obligated as a result of ties of personal dependence.'

6. Casual work in the small African agricultural production areas is not a new phenomenon. In 1939 Audrey Richards observed women's casual labour for payment in food in Northern Rhodesia: 'the woman who goes *ukupula* may do exactly the same work as one of the near relatives of the family, and may be given much the same food, but she does not receive what she does by right of kinship, and the phrase *alepula-pula-fye*, which might be translated "she lives by picking up casual jobs" is usually uttered with a rather scornful shrug of the shoulders . . . *ukupula* has become very common lately as one of the means by which the very large percentage of deserted wives can eke out an existence during the bad times of the year' (Richards, 1939: 145).

7. See Bliss and Stern (1978: 349) who state that: 'Indeed it is one of the implications of the theory that we would expect to see a prevalence of long-term employment contracts or arrangements for these would enable an employer to "capture" to the fullest possible extent the gains to productivity from paying higher wages.'

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