

Making knowledge needs visible through agricultural markets

One of the biggest challenges besetting African smallholder agriculture is the fact that agricultural knowledge is invisible. By looking at a farmer or a trader, you cannot tell what knowledge these people possess or need. Two farmers can pass each other in the market, one possessing the solution to a problem that is taxing the other and they may not know it because their agricultural knowledge needs are invisible. On the other hand, most efforts to improve knowledge sharing in the agriculture sector are too sporadic to be sustainable. For farmers supported by NGOs, once a project phases out, that is the end of associated information sharing efforts.



Unless farmers and traders talk to each other, their knowledge needs remain invisible

If knowledge were a visible commodity like baskets of tomatoes, crates of eggs, portions of beef or bags of maize, it would be easier to manage. We would construct market stalls for knowledge and see the knowledge gaps in the market the way shortages of fruits or vegetables can be easily seen in the market. Farmers, traders, transporters and consumers would simply buy the knowledge they need. Since that is not the case, there is too much judging of the book by its cover. People may not see how knowledgeable someone is by looking at them. Some of the knowledge becomes visible when someone is asked and starts answering a question. That's when you can discover, "Oh my, this farmer is a Professor!"

Making knowledge needs visible through a knowledge market

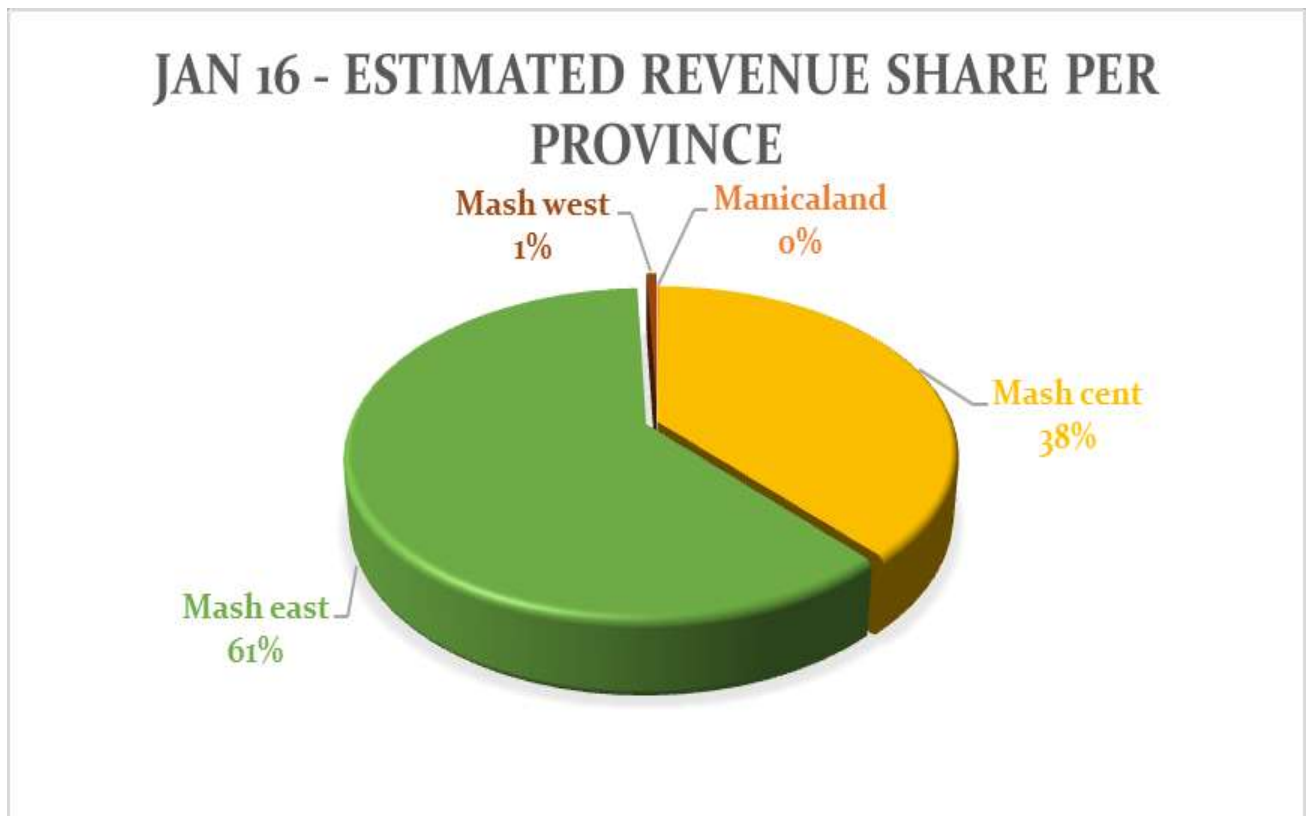
Making knowledge needs visible is the heart of eMKambo activities. A critical activity in this direction is tracking and monitoring the supply and demand of knowledge in commodities that flow into particular markets regularly. Informal agriculture markets are not just for agricultural commodities but they have also evolved into knowledge markets where the demand and supply of knowledge can be tracked back to production along the whole value chain, informed by feedback from the market. When farmers bring commodities to the market, a wide range of knowledge

pathways are made visible and these include: farmer to farmer, farmer to trader, trader to trader, trader to farmer, farmer to consumer, consumer to farmer, farmer to consumer, consumer to trader, transporter to farmer, farmer to transporter, consumer to transporter, transporter to consumer, etc. Both existing knowledge and knowledge gaps are made visible.

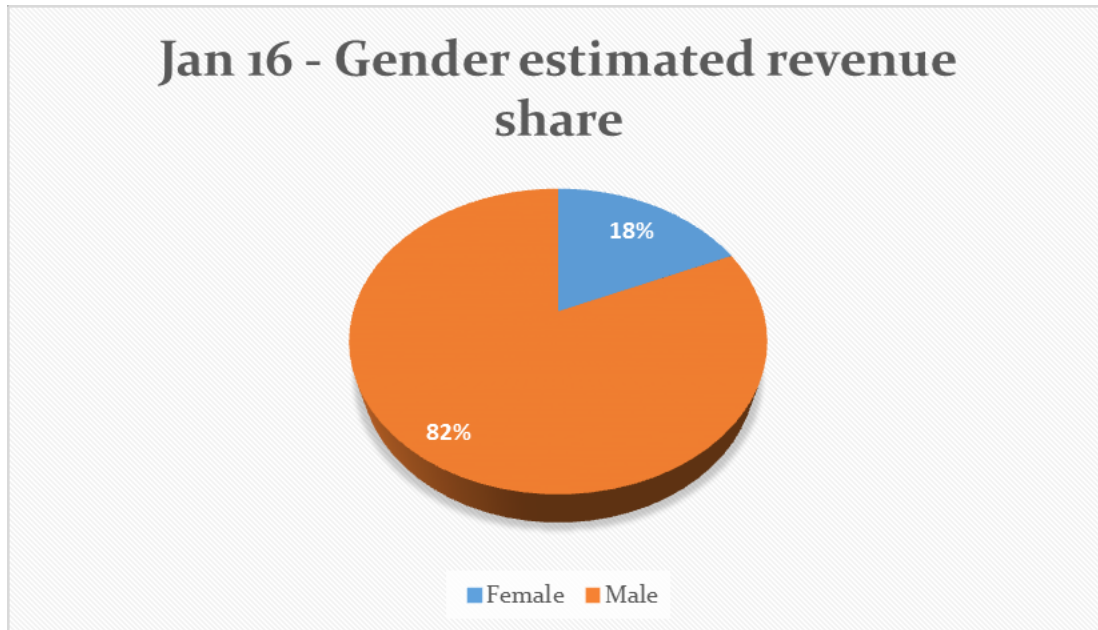
The commodity in the market is enough advertisement for the quality of knowledge possessed by the producer. Most farmers do not need a poster listing their knowledge but the knowledge can be seen through the quality of commodities which consumers and traders can actually see or touch and decide to buy. By making knowledge supply and demand visible, agricultural markets promote interactions between farmers, traders, consumers and other actors. Ultimately every participant's worldview is enriched. It is unlike in agricultural training workshops where the trainer pretends every participant requires the same knowledge, provided the same way.

The benefit of using the agricultural market as a knowledge market is that it makes knowledge demand and supply visible and public. This ensures opportunities for knowledge sharing are identified for follow-up. Every agricultural value chain actor can make sense of the whole agriculture sector through the market. Based on activities in Lusaka-Highfield market of Harare, *eMKambo* recently processed market intelligence into the following charts depicting the power of data and evidence. The charts show information such as types of commodities, revenue per given period and the gender dimension of agriculture markets.

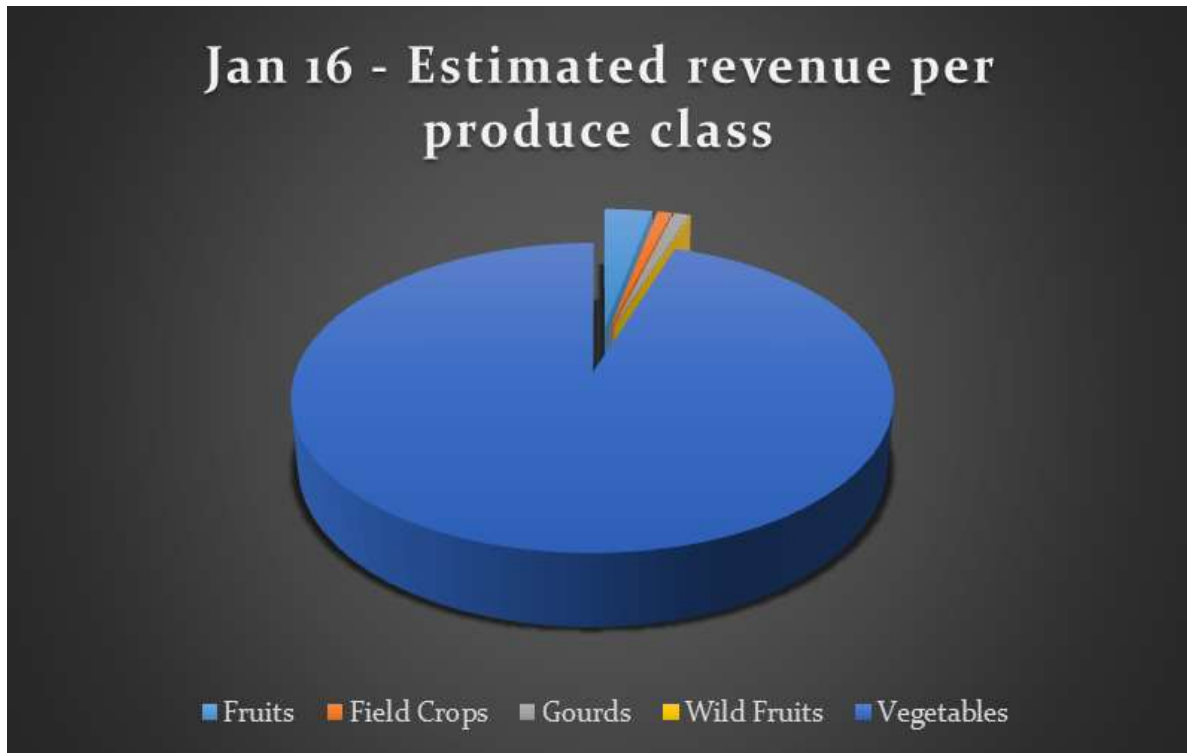
Revenue share by Province – January 2016



Revenue share by gender (farmers and traders)

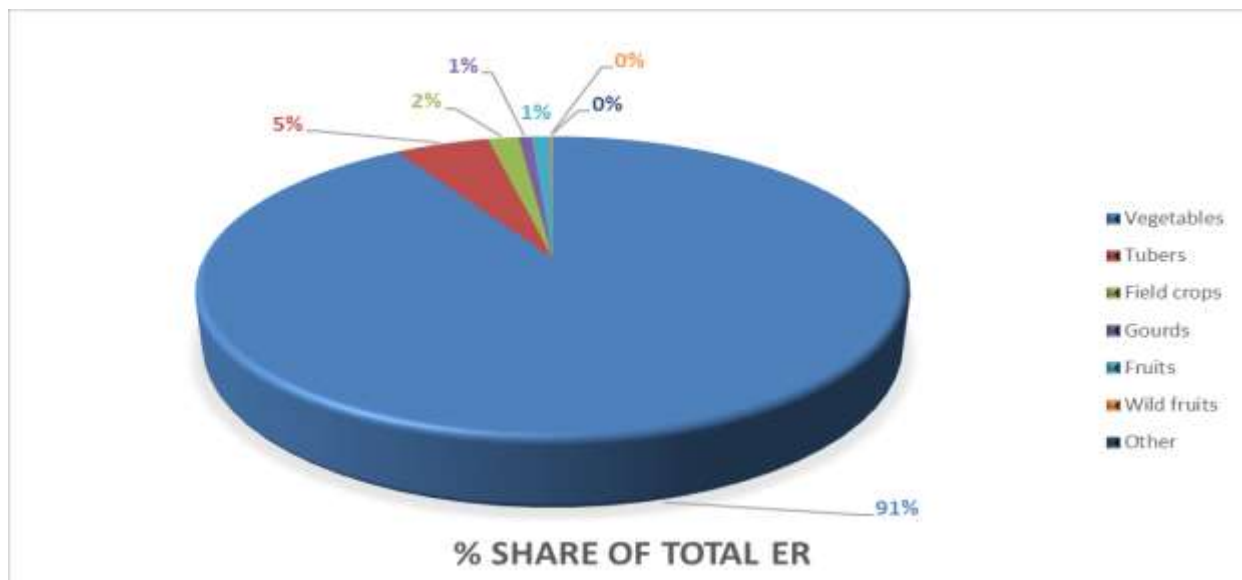
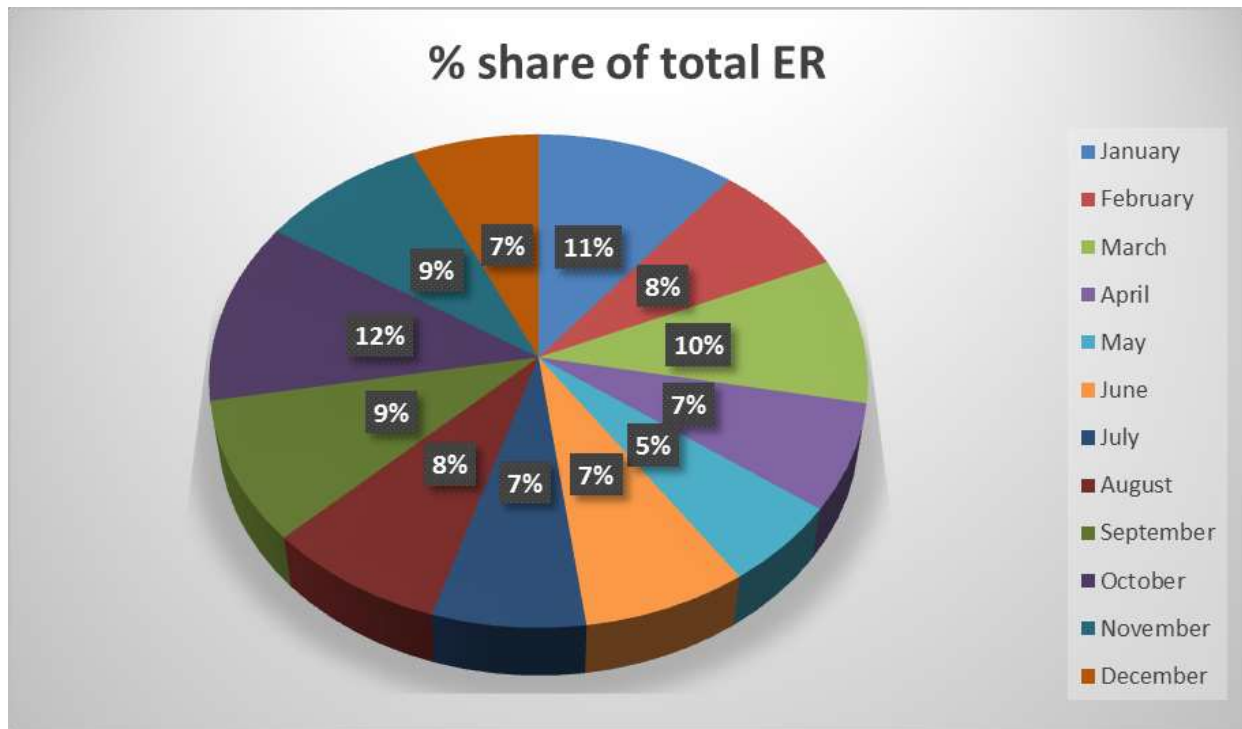


Revenue by produce class



Lusaka- Highfield Market Analysis - January to December 2015

A total of 45 produce types were supplied into the market from January to December 2015.



Besides making knowledge needs visible, data from agriculture markets can reveal the impact of investment in agriculture production. Agricultural shows should function as knowledge markets towards addressing sporadic information sharing by many organisations, all targeting the same farmer.

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