

## What is Nigeria attempting to learn from Zimbabwe's agriculture?

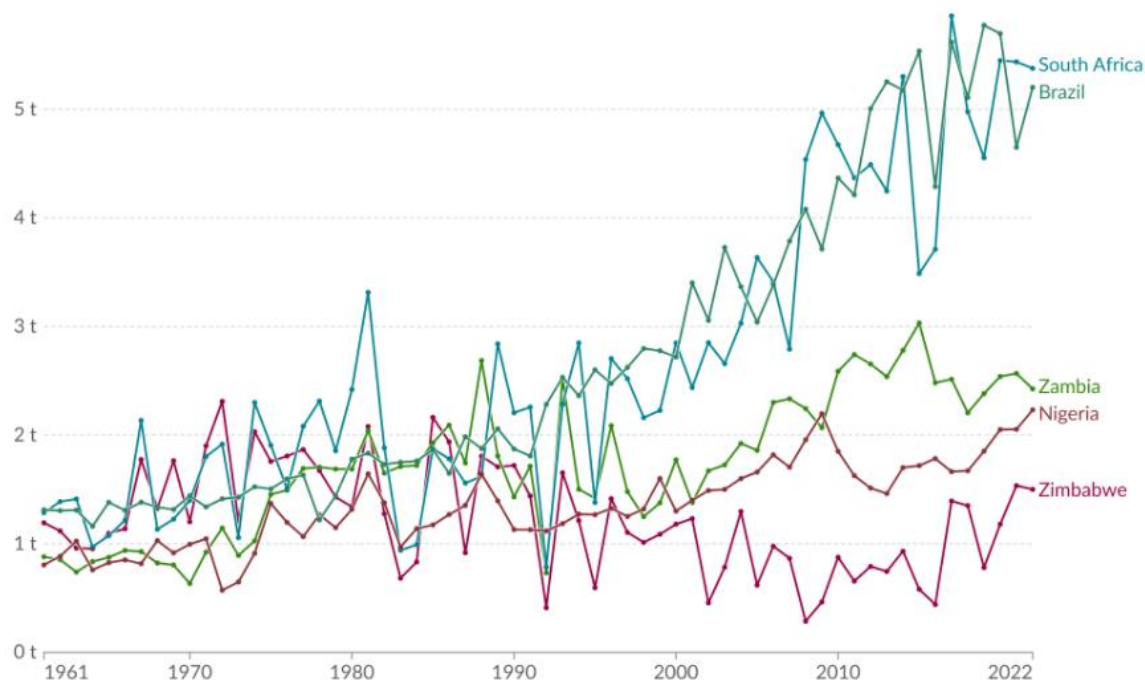
Agricultural Economics Today by Wandile Sihlobo

Jan 22, 2025 | Africa Focus

### Corn: Yield

Corn (maize) yields are measured in tonnes per hectare.

Our World  
in Data



Data source: Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations; USDA National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS)

CC BY

It is good to see African countries trying to learn from each other's experiences. In December, Business Insider published an interesting piece titled "Nigeria turns to Zimbabwe for agricultural tips."

During the visit, Nigeria's agricultural minister, Abubakar Shaib Kyari, stated that the country wanted to "study Zimbabwe's agricultural revolution and noted that Nigeria is interested in learning more about Zimbabwe's mechanization strategy."

Zimbabwe is undoubtedly an interesting case study for agriculture, demonstrating farmers' resilience in a fragile policy environment. Engaging with farmers and officials there can teach us many stories, especially from the early 2000s, when the country embarked on its (failed) land reform programme. But it's unclear whether Zimbabwe offers valuable lessons on agricultural growth. I am not trying to be reductionist here—I am seriously puzzled.

What follows is my thought process on how I would have thought the Nigerian government should approach its agricultural learnings.

Considering the staple grain maize, Nigeria has achieved far better yields than what we see in Zimbabwe. So, perhaps Zimbabwe should learn from Nigeria.

It is also worth noting that Zimbabwe is a net importer of maize. Between May 2024 and the first week of January 2025, South Africa exported 907,318 tonnes of maize to Zimbabwe. This is about half Zimbabwe's annual maize consumption of two million tonnes.

If we add South Africa, Brazil, and Zambia to the maize production picture, we see a different picture—higher crop yields. Therefore, an argument could be made that Nigeria should attempt to learn more from these higher-yielding agricultural countries to boost its agricultural sector — see the featured chart.

So, one can ask: What can Nigeria learn from this South African higher-yielding maize industry? Five broad lessons are relevant not only to the maize industry but also to Nigeria's wider agricultural sector.

Embracing technological advancements in seeds, genetics, and agrochemicals can boost productivity. South Africa and Brazil have long embraced genetically modified seeds. Nigeria should consider following this path and permit the commercial cultivation of genetically modified seeds in staple grains.

**Better seeds are not enough; Nigeria must also consider extending title deeds or tradable leases to farmers and agribusinesses as vital for attracting investment for the sector's long-term growth.**

Nigeria must also consider increasing investments in infrastructure, which is critical for improving the functioning of the agricultural value chains.

Nigeria must ensure limited trade and commodity price interventions in commodity markets. In countries such as Zambia, where the government occasionally bans exports during droughts or places price caps, this has proven challenging for agribusiness and arguably weighs negatively on investments.

Notably, Nigeria must also ensure the government supports commercial farming, which will be essential for the growth of the agro-processing part of the various countries' food systems and a source of employment, which is a critical step for agricultural progress in Africa.

I will be the first to admit that South Africa is not a perfect country. We have our unique challenges, such as rising crime, failing municipalities, deteriorating roads, problems at the ports, and a slow inclusivity journey, among other things.

Still, judging from its broad national agricultural sector performance, South Africa offers many lessons for Nigeria and the broader African continent. Thanks to its agricultural progress, South Africa is now the only African country in the top 40 global agricultural exporters, ranked 32nd, with exports valued at US\$12.8 billion in 2023.

South Africa is also the most food-secure country in the sub-Saharan region, notwithstanding the household food insecurity that needs to be addressed.

It is good to see more African countries paying attention to each other's efforts, but the study visits should not be ideological. We should learn from what is working and what would be key to boosting food security.

From a broad judgment, I am not convinced that Zimbabwe would be a model of agricultural development and mechanization.

Indeed, Nigeria can visit Zimbabwe, but that experience must be merged with learnings from elsewhere. To be clear, I am not arguing for all countries to come and learn from South Africa; Brazil, Argentina, China, the US, and Australia are amongst the countries whose agricultural sectors offer more valuable lessons for the African governments that are serious about boosting food security.

**Wandile Sihlobo** is the Chief Economist of the Agricultural Business Chamber of South Africa (Agbiz) and the author of two books, "[A Country of Two Agricultures: The Disparities, The Challenges, The Solutions](#)" and "[Finding Common Ground: Land, Equity and Agriculture](#)".

<https://wandilesihlobo.com/2025/01/22/what-is-nigeria-attempting-to-learn-from-zimbabwes-agriculture/>