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From Sunflower to Sovereignty: A Comparative Analysis of Import Substitution Industrialization (ISI) Strategies in Edible Oils – Lessons from Russia for Zimbabwe

Carlean Chingovo ✉
Financial University under the Government of the Russian Federation, Moscow, Russia
✉ carleanchingovo@gmail.com

Abstract

Introduction. The article presents the results of a critical analysis of the Russian strategic model of import substitution in the agro-processing industry on the example of the vegetable oil production industry, based on which an assessment of prospects for Zimbabwe is made.

Materials and Methods. The study employs comparative policy analysis to identify specific mechanisms targeted tariffs, production subsidies, and vertical integration incentives that facilitated Russia's transformation from a net importer to a global exporter. A formal feasibility analysis determines the extent to which this policy framework can be applied to Zimbabwe. By comparing differences in scale, institutional capacity, and market structure, the study identifies the most important aspects of the Russian model for the Zimbabwean context.

Results. Based on an analysis of South-South policy transfer, a practical method is proposed for enhancing food sovereignty in developing countries through strategic industrial policy. The analysis shows that successful transfer depends less on replicating instruments and more on adapting strategic logic to local institutional constraints – a process termed "constrained adaptation." The author concludes that edible oils represent a strategic entry point for rebuilding industrial policy credibility and achieving incremental food sovereignty in Zimbabwe.

Discussion. Comparison of this study's results with the work of other authors confirms key conclusions. The effectiveness of the Russian import substitution model is conditioned by pre-existing bureaucratic capacity, which aligns with this study's finding on institutional thickness as a binding constraint. The role of strategic planning and sequential policy implementation in achieving food security correlates with the study's identified principles of sectoral selectivity and temporal sequencing. Research on the political economy of agro-holding development is complemented by this study, which shows that for countries with lower institutional capacity, direct transfer of the large agro-holding model is not feasible, and an adapted phased strategy is more realistic. This study confirms that fiscal space is a determining factor for the availability of industrial policy instruments and successful import substitution.

Conclusion. This article will be useful for analysts in industrial policy, specialists in the ministries of agriculture and industry of developing countries, as well as researchers studying import substitution, policy transfer, and agro-industrial value chain development in the context of South-South cooperation.

Keywords: Import Substitution Industrialization (ISI); Russia; Zimbabwe; Agri-processing; Edible Oils; Food Sovereignty; Policy Transfer; Industrial Policy; Value Chain Development; South-South Cooperation

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От подсолнечника к суверенитету: сравнительный анализ стратегий импортозамещающей индустриализации (ISI) в производстве растительных масел (уроки России для Зимбабве)

Чингово Карлин ✉
Финансовый университет при Правительстве Российской Федерации, Москва, Россия
✉ carleanchingovo@gmail.com

Аннотация

Введение. В статье представлены результаты критического анализа российской стратегической модели внедрения импортозамещения в агроперерабатывающей промышленности на примере отрасли производства растительных масел, на основании которого дана оценка перспектив для Зимбабве.

Материалы и методы. Используется сравнительный анализ политики для выявления конкретных механизмов, таких как целевые тарифы, субсидии на производство и стимулы вертикальной интеграции, которые способствовали превращению России из нетто-импортера в мирового экспортера. С помощью формального анализа определено, в какой степени такая политическая модель может быть применена в Зимбабве. Путем сравнения различий в масштабе, институциональном потенциале и структуре рынка исследование определяет наиболее важные аспекты российской модели, которые следует применить в контексте Зимбабве.

Результаты. На основе анализа трансфера политики «Юг-Юг» предлагается практический способ повышения продовольственного суверенитета в развивающихся странах с помощью стратегической промышленной политики. Анализ показывает, что успешный трансфер в меньшей степени зависит от тиражирования инструментов и в большей степени от адаптации стратегической логики к местным институциональным ограничениям процесс, называемый «ограниченной адаптацией». Автор приходит к выводу, что пищевые масла представляют собой стратегическую отправную точку для восстановления доверия к промышленной политике и достижения постепенного повышения продовольственного суверенитета в Зимбабве.

Обсуждение. Сравнение результатов данного исследования с работами других авторов подтверждает ключевые выводы. Эффективность российской модели импортозамещения обусловлена существовавшим бюрократическим потенциалом, что согласуется с выявленным в настоящем исследовании значением институциональной толщины как связывающего ограничения. Роль стратегического планирования и последовательной реализации политики в достижении продовольственной безопасности коррелирует с выделенными автором принципами секторальной селективности и темпоральной последовательности. Исследования по политической экономии развития агрохолдингов дополняются настоящим исследованием, которое показывает, что для стран с более низким институциональным потенциалом прямая передача модели крупных агрохолдингов невозможна, а адаптированная поэтапная стратегия является более реалистичной. В настоящей работе подтверждается, что фискальное пространство является определяющим фактором доступности инструментов промышленной политики и успешного импортозамещения.

Заключение. Статья будет полезна для аналитиков в области промышленной политики, специалистов министерств сельского хозяйства и промышленности развивающихся стран, а также для исследователей, изучающих вопросы импортозамещения, трансфера политики и развития агропромышленных цепочек создания стоимости в контексте сотрудничества «Юг-Юг».

Ключевые слова: импортозамещающая индустриализация; агропереработка; растительные масла; продовольственный суверенитет; промышленная политика; развитие цепочек создания стоимости; сотрудничество Юг-Юг; Россия; Зимбабве

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Introduction

Edible oils are at a strategic point of food security, industrial development, and stability of balance of payment. Being a category of essential consumer goods that have high backward linkages to the oilseed sector, storage, transportation, and processing, the demand of edible oils has a disproportionate impact on the processes of inflation, rural incomes, and foreign exchange demands. However, in most parts of the developing world this has come to symbolize the continued reliance on imports and has left domestic food systems dependent on global price shocks and limited further agro-industrial modernization.

The mainstream development economics has largely viewed this as a manifestation of structural constraints of import substitution industrialization (ISI), especially in the agricultural and the agro-processing sectors. The prevailing works of literature claim that ISI creates allocative inefficiencies, entrenched rent-seeking, and fiscal burden, and developing economies are better off with liberalized regimes of trade and integration along the global value chain [1]. Simultaneously, the agricultural development literature has been biased in favor of productivity enhancing interventions at the farm level and has perceived downstream processing as an outcome of a market that is neutral or a field that is ill adapted to an active industrial policy [2]. These views have collectively led to the relegation of sector specific, state-based industrial strategies to agri-processing.

But the recent experiences in the field of empiricism are challenging these orthodoxies. The Russian Federation has conducted one of the most successful agro-industrial import substitution cases in the world economy over the last twenty years. Having been a net importer of edible oils, Russia has become one of the largest exporters of sunflower oil in the world as it has grown at a high rate in the cultivation of oilseeds, modernized the crushing and refining capacity and integrated vertical value chains. More importantly, it is important to note that this transformation did not occur solely through the forces of the market, but through a planned state policy of combination of specific tariffs, production subsidies, and easy finance and scale and coordination incentives along the agri-processing chain [3]. The experience in Russia thus poses an analytically significant question, namely, under what circumstances can ISI in agri-processing be successful, and what aspects of success are specific to contexts, but not universal and can be implemented elsewhere?

The present paper puts forward one major thesis, which is that successful import substitution in the case of edible oils in Russia was not due to protectionism as such, but a highly coordinated policy mix, and that this policy mix cannot be wholesale imported into Zimbabwe, but partially implemented with some modification to the local specifics of scale, institutional capacity, and market structure. This assertion is deliberately confined: the article

does not posit that ISI is optimal everywhere, or that Russia provides the kind of generalizable experience that can be applied to other countries in need of re-establishing agro-processing capacity in constraint settings, but instead it argues that it does have analytically separable mechanisms of applicability to the economies of other countries.

The research uses a comparative policy analysis, based on three complementary methods, methodologically. First, the process-tracing is employed to rework the sequencing of policy interventions in the edible oil industry of Russia and their connection to manifest structural consequences. Second, the congruence analysis determines how policy objectives are aligned with the sectoral performance indicators. Third, Zimbabwean case is considered in terms of a feasibility matrix to assess the institutional, fiscal, and market environment in which certain policy instruments would be viable, adjustable or inappropriate. This mixture enables the analysis to shift out descriptive comparison to causal and practical inference.

A rather contrasting yet analytically instructive case study is Zimbabwe. Although the country has appropriate agro-ecological conditions and a traditional edible oil sector, it has undergone prolonged deindustrialization, underutilized processing resources, and has had a high reliance on imports. The policy responses have been identified to be inconsistent; there has been limited coordination between the agricultural and industrial institutions and access to long-term industrial finance has been constrained. These attributes render Zimbabwe a good study subject to test not whether ISI needs to be sought in the abstract but rather what elements of a successful agri-industrial policy can possibly operate within a smaller and economically crippled economy.

The value of this article is thus purposeful but tangible. Instead of offering a new industrial policy framework, the paper provides background information and falsifiable speculations in the circumstances that selective import substitution in agri-processing can be a beneficial activity to increase food sovereignty and productive potential in the developing economies. The study attempts to inform South-South policy learning by basing such insights on thorough sectoral comparison of Russia and Zimbabwe and the approach avoids the uncritical adoption of policy and simplifying dismissal of the state-led industrial strategies.

Literature Review and Conceptual Framework

This research will start its analytical work by critically evaluating Import Substitution Industrialization (ISI) in a manner that transcends its status as a historically outlived and uniformly ineffective paradigm of development. Instead of assessing ISI as an undifferentiated policy regime, this part idealizes it as a sector-specific, time-limited, and institutionally contingent policy whose performance is sensitive to the interplay between the policy instruments and value-chain structure. Combining the updated industrial policy theory and the political economy of agro-processing, the framework develops the criteria on which the strategy of edible oil in Russia is assessed and its relevance to Zimbabwe is examined.

In popular development economics, the concept of ISI is often equated with the phenomenon of the 1960s–1970s, when the long-term, economy-wide protection contributed to the inefficiency, financial overload, and domestically-based monopolies [4; 5]. Although these criticisms were based on actual empirical failures, they have long since been stereotyped to imply an out and out dismissal of state-directed industrialization, which camouflaged later theoretical and empirical progress. Modern scholarly work on industrial policy focuses rather on strategic form of the ISI, which is marked not by protection but

rather by sector selectivity, temporal restrictions and performance discipline [6; 7]. In this formula, the purpose of import substitution is not autarky but to establish a productive potential that will be able to compete both internally and, in the long run, on an international level. Protection and subsidy seen as a conditional tool- it is withdrawn by companies that do not meet the standards of productivity, investment or export.

There are three fundamental concepts that make strategic ISI different in comparison with its classical counterpart. To begin with, the coordination of the value-chain is key. Markets in agro-processing industries are not coordinated to do the simultaneous investments in farming, processing, logistics, and distribution. The strategic ISI attributes coordinating role to the state, with these interdependencies being tackled by means of pricing policies, procurement guarantees, and infrastructure provision as opposed to trying to displace the private enterprise [6; 8]. Second, ISI needs a state-capital collaboration under the provision of embedded autonomy. Developmental results, according to Evans, require a form of bureaucratic capacity and high degrees of thin ties coupled with dense yet disciplined ties to productive capital which enables the policy makers to access information, verify compliance as well as re-intermediate rewards [9]. In the absence of this relational infrastructure, the industrial policy will degenerate as a form of unproductive distribution of rent. Third, export discipline is used as a protection against permanent protection. Effective late industrializers have always utilized the availability of state support as an incentive to manipulate firms to modernize technologically and where size allows them compete in export markets [10]. This science limits rent-seeking and turns ISI into a vigorous process of industrial deepening.

In this new understanding of ISI, agro-processing and edible oils in particular becomes a position of strategic advantage of late-developing economies. This is based on an intersection of technical possibility, economic spillovers and political economy. The processing of edible oils has high and direct backward linkages with oil seed farming that provide predictable demand to the farmer and multiplies the impact of the micro-level income in rural regions. These impacts become realized quickly unlike capital-intensive manufacturing, a factor that improves economic effect and policy credibility [11]. The industry also has modular and scalable technologies including small mechanical presses up to the large solvent-extract and refining plants. This enables capacity to be increased at regular steps with the availability of feedstock to minimize the risks of large irreversible investments [12]. Economically, in macroeconomic terms the edible oils provide high visibility import substitution. Since they are universally consumed staples, whose import volumes are high, any decline in imports of edible oil will be directly reflected in the balance of trade and foreign exchange, which makes the acting of industrial policies more politically legitimate. Additionally, development of the sector harmonizes the interests of the farmers, processors and the consumers and this has enabled the formation of a comparatively stable political alliance around agro-industrial upgrading. These are some of the features that set edible oils apart in the more technologically advanced manufacturing industries and make them a common lead industry in working agri-industrialization initiatives. Nonetheless, they do not exclude the concept of the necessity of strategic organization, degree of achievement, and institutional implementation, which are decisive in their results.

The agro-industrial transformation of the country has been studied in the Russian scholarship vastly. Uzun, Shagaida and Lerman show that the processing of sunflower oil is especially characterized by good import substitution opportunities since the investment

cycles are short, and the potential of raw materials is confirmed [13; 14]. Serova presents her authoritative history of the development of the agricultural policy, which includes the transition to strategic development planning since 2005 and the need to manage the crisis in the 1990s [15; 16; 17]. Wegren, Nikulin and Trotsuk study the political economy of the development of agro-holdings, stating that the concentration of the processing capacity to the large vertically-integrated firms was the result of intentional policy decisions regarding credit concentration and incentives to invest [18; 19]. The productivity benefits of structural transformation are quantified by Shagaida and Uzun, who demonstrate that the efficiency of the crushing in large agro-holdings was on the same level as the international standards [13; 14]. Rylko and Jolly report on the way in which a vertical integration in Russian oilseed processing lowered the transaction costs, as well as the technological upgrade that would have been impossible in isolated enterprises [20]. Simachev, Kuzyk and Fedyunina examine the development of the Russian industrial policy with a distinction between horizontal and selective vertical interventions based on the selection of a particular value chain [21; 22; 23]. Idrisov and Sinelnikov-Murylev discuss macroeconomic preconditions of successful import substitution, which presupposes the maintenance of the real exchange rate stability [24; 25; 26]. According to Klinova and Sidorova, Russian agro-industrial import substitution is a unique model that integrates state coordination with mobilization of capital at the level of the private capital, which they refer to it as state-capitalist developmentalism [27; 28]. Davydova and Franks are skeptical about the possibility of the Russian model being applied in the situation where the institutional capacity is lower and points out that the effectiveness of state support was conditional upon the bureaucratic capacity that was already present [29].

Indifferent to a technocratic replication of policies, transnationalism of industrial policy is a discriminated accommodation process, which is shaped by political-economic limitations. The transfer literature on policy shows that even institutional set ups that were effective in one country will continue to fail in another country or even lead to perverse outcomes on the basis of the underlying conditions not being the same. Along these lines, the paper is an analytically different but related review of the transferability of the edible oil ISI strategy in Russia upon four dimensions. To begin with, there is the institutional thickening which is the presence of enablement public agencies that may possess the capacity to plan, instigate, observe and implement intricate policy instruments such as tariffs, subsidies, and performance terms. Second, fiscal and monetary space determines the likelihood of the state to finance essential state goods and short-term support programs without compromising macroeconomic performance. Third, the minimum efficient scale and market structure has been used to determine the viability of continuing with vertical processing capacity within a specific domestic market or region. Finally, the policies can be implemented credibly or not depending on the capacity of the state to implement its policies in the face of smuggling, import lobby and other interests. These dimensions are not given as binary thresholds but are variables interacting and can be partially substituted with policy sequencing. One way in which weaknesses may necessitate institutional simplification is by encouraging the formation of a regional market or by creating a gradual fulfilment of industrial ambition rather than an absolute denial of it. Since Russia operates under contingent, sequenced and selective approach in the edible oil industry, it is within this context of contingency and selection that the edible oil strategy of Russia is considered applicable to the Zimbabwean context.

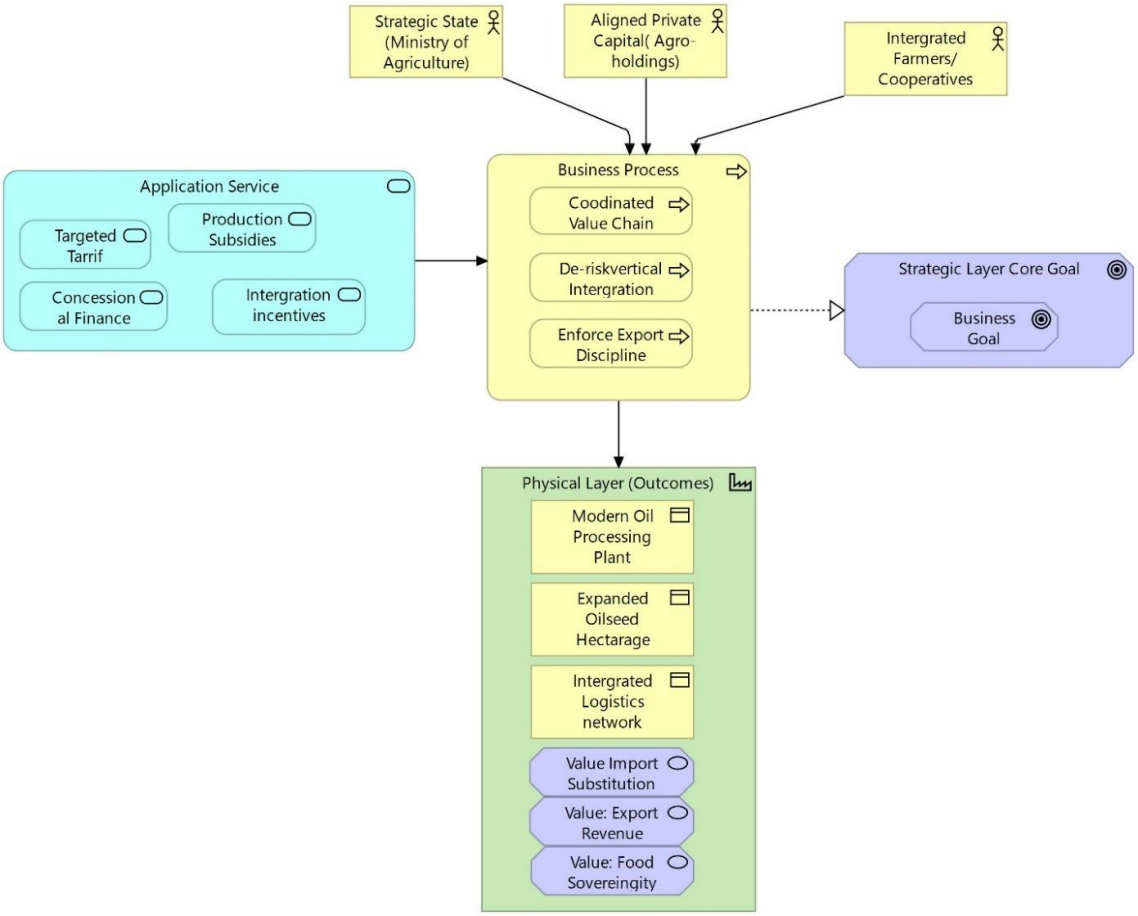

Fig. 1. An ArchiMate model of the Strategic ISI Framework for Agro-Processing
Рис. 1. Модель ArchiMate стратегической структуры ИМИ для агропереработки
Source: composed by the author

This integrated model synthesizes the components of a strategic import substitution program into a coherent architecture, spanning from core goals to material outcomes (Fig. 1). It provides the formal reference model against which the Russian case will be deconstructed and its policy instruments assessed for contingent transfer to Zimbabwe. The following section details the methodological approach for this comparative analysis.

Methodology and Case Selection

The study is founded on a qualitative comparative case study model in accordance with the structured, focused comparison method created by George and Bennett [12]. This is a particularly good method to the analysis of complex policy processes in which outcomes are not defined by individual but by arrangements of equipment, institutions and chronology. It permits a systematic comparison between cases, though again it remains context-sensitive and thus it is possible to determine causal mechanisms and not superficial correlations. Its methodological intent is to de-estimate the notion of import substitution industrialization (ISI) as a single policy paradigm, and to de-aggregate the process and to track how specific policy instruments work in a sectoral value chain; and to assess their conditional transposability to divergent national contexts.

Russia and Zimbabwe are selected as the most dissimilar instances which are examined in the comparable analysis framework. The fact that core policy mechanisms can

be disaggregated and contextual peculiarities can be separated enhances the causal inference which is based on the selection of cases in this case selection. There is at least an analytical ground between the two cases which makes it worth comparing them even when there is immense structural difference between them. They are both agricultural producers which had high oilseed potential; both faced severe deindustrialization and rising dependency on imports in agro-processing with liberalization in the 1990s; and they both subsequently characterized explicit policy purpose through food security, import substitution and domestic value addition. All these attributes show that ISI is a similar policy problem when compared to edible oils. At the same time, the lack of similarity of the findings is dramatic. Russia has been able to transform its edible oil business into a net exporter and Zimbabwe has continued to be structurally dependent on imports despite having historical processing plants. With such a variance, analytical leverage is gained: with the sector and overall policy held constant, the comparison predicts policy design, sequencing, enforcement and institutional capacity as the influential factors. The confounding noise is not addressed to the differences in scale, geopolitical location, fiscal ability and historical institutional construction. They instead constitute the experimental field of policy transfer, thereby allowing the scrutiny to distinguish critical, conditional and non-transferable mechanisms.

The study uses three complementary modes of analysis so as to cross the threshold of descriptive comparison and make practical and causal inferences. To begin with, process-tracing of the edible oil ISI trajectory in Russia recreates the causal pathway between the state intervention and the transformation of the sector. It follows four analytically different phases: catalysts (macroeconomic shocks, food security problems, external trade negotiations); core policy interventions (Food Security Doctrine, production and investment subsidies, concessional credit, tariff and export duties regime); intermediate mechanisms (response to privately owned investment, consolidation and vertical integration, technological upgrading, inter-farm and processing coordination); and measured outcomes (sustained excess production, increase in processing capacity, export competitiveness). Second, congruence and feasibility analysis of the Zimbabwe cases exposes the policy mechanisms identified by Russians to a feasibility test within the Zimbabwean context, the systematic verification of the fit between the policy instruments and the capabilities within the local context on four dimensions of institutional thickness, fiscal and monetary space, minimum efficient scale and market structure, and state enforcement capacity. The result of this is a diagnostic classification that states whether a certain instrument may be used directly, with modification, or cannot be used because of structural incompatibility. The method evades mechanical copying of policy as well as general rejection and underlies itself with conditional plausibility and sequencing.

Primary sources to be used in data triangulation include federal Russian laws, national development plans, and decrees of the Ministry of Agriculture, policy documents of Zimbabwe including National Development Strategy 1 (2021–2025) and reviews of the agricultural sector. Food and Agriculture Organization Corporate Statistical Database and Federal State Statistics Service of the Russian Federation give quantitative data to put into perspective trends in production, trade and capacity. Peer-reviewed literature on agro-industrial policy and political economy in Russia, international and industry association reports are the examples of secondary sources. There are several weaknesses identified. It is

challenging to measure it precisely because of the transparency of the data, particularly where there exists informal trade and capacity utilization in Zimbabwe. The geopolitical and sanctions language is radically different: Russia presented ISI with broad access to the state funding as well as technology, compared to Zimbabwe who faces external financial constraints directly affecting fiscal space and institutional capabilities. The constraints are addressed through prioritizing policy logic, institutional preconditions and relative viability over and against quantitative replication.

Table 1 contains a comparative assessment of the core ISI tools in systematic comparison of design and functional outcome of every policy mechanism in the Russian context and the current institutional and economic reality in Zimbabwe. This matrix functions as the empirical bridge between the Russian case and the Zimbabwean feasibility assessment and directly informs the policy roadmap developed in subsequent sections.

Table 1 / Таблица 1

Comparative Assessment of ISI Policy Instruments in the Edible Oil Sector
Сравнительная оценка инструментов политики импортозамещения в секторе производства растительных масел

Policy Instrument	Russia: Design & Outcome	Zimbabwe: Current Conditions	Transferability Assessment
Targeted tariffs on edible oil imports	Variable, enforced, coordinated with domestic capacity expansion	Inconsistent, porous borders, smuggling	Applicable with adaptation
Oilseed production subsidies	Large-scale, fiscally supported, tied to output	Limited, fragmented, fiscally constrained	Partially applicable
Concessional agro-industrial finance	State banks, long-term, scale-oriented	Weak development finance, short tenors	Requires major adaptation
Vertical integration incentives	Favored large agro-holdings, consolidation	Fragmented producers, SME-dominated	Adaptation required
Export discipline mechanisms	Explicit, enforceable, scale-enabled	Limited export capacity	Not immediately applicable
State enforcement capacity	High administrative and fiscal power	Uneven enforcement	Binding constraint

Results

Russia's Edible Oil ISI Strategy

One of the most successful modern instances of sector-specific import substitution in Agriculture-processing is the process of Russian reorganization of its edible oil industry. This part restages the transformation, in the line of structural collapse and reliance on imports, on the one hand, and coordinated policy action and export competitiveness, on the other.

The collapse of the Soviet Union contributed to the fact that there was a sharp decline in the agriculture-processing potential in Russia. Central planning had relied on the support of vertical supply chains between collective farms, processing facilities and state procurement to produce edible oils, particularly sunflower oil. This set of coordination

devices was eliminated in the early years of the 1990s in an effort to open markets without providing any meaningful alternatives in the market. The immediate implication was massive use of withdrawal of investment in oil seed production and processing plant. The refining and crushing plants became obsolete, the volumes of their processes decreased, and soon the local manufacturers were forced out of the market by imports of processed food products and vegetable oils. The importation of structurally was practiced by the end of 1990s to meet the local demand of edible oils, which exposed the sector to fluctuations of both exchange rates and imported price shocks.

The financial crisis took place in 1998 and was a turning point. The short-term positive effect of the acute devaluation of the ruble was on the competitiveness of the local producers, and the manifestation of the latent comparative advantage in the production of oilseeds. However, policymakers found out that the impact on the exchange rates was not sufficient in order to maintain recovery. Without a concerted investment, access to credit and market stabilization, domestic production would continue to be fragmented and undercapitalized. It is based on this recognition that a strategically planned state strategy was developed in the 2000s.

This was an aligned set of complementary policy tools that Russia used in a chronological manner in order to create the ISI approach in the edible oils business. Such instruments addressed the trade exposure, capital limits and upstream farm provision in a combined manner. The catalytic and disciplined role was to be played by trade policy. Russia applied selectable duties to imported edible oils so as to favour Russian domestic processors but not to protect them forever against competition. Unlike blanket protection, tariff rates might be occasionally adjusted both concerning national supply and formation of investments. This was founded on trade actions by the Russian Federation through the legal framework of the Food Security Doctrine of the Russian Federation (2010) which established binding self-sufficiency of 80 percent of vegetable oils (Government of the Russian Federation, 2010)[1]. In 2020, it was revised to increase the export orientation of the doctrine (Government of the Russian Federation, 2020). In the meantime, whenever there was domestic scarcity, exportation of oilseeds and crude oils was prohibited and tariffs imposed, to bring about evenness in the supply of local material to the processors and to make consumer prices less volatility. Though they have been controversial, these export controls acted as a coordination measure whereby, upstream producers did not change the supply in a way that would disrupt the capacity of the domestic processing.

The aggression in the use of investment incentives mediated by the state was one of the primary features of the edible oil ISI in Russia. The price of capital investments was reduced through providing concessional credit by the state-owned and state-aligned banks. The subsidy of interest rates and long-term loan tenors made it possible to make profit out of investment in modern crushing and refining plants despite the high initial investment. These financial arrangements were working as a part of the State Program of Agricultural Development 2013–2020 (Government of the Russian Federation, 2012) according to which

[1] Food Security Doctrine of the Russian Federation // President of Russia: [site]. URL: http://en.kremlin.ru/catalog/glossary/37 (accessed: 01.04.2026).

there were certain budget funds on the modernization of agriculture-processing[2]. The successor of the program, the Strategy of the Development of the Agro-Industrial Complex up to 2030 (Government of the Russian Federation, 2018) defined the vision of export competitiveness in the long term[3]. The focus on the upgrade of the processing technology was made stronger by the Concept of Technological Development through to 2030 (Government of the Russian Federation, 2023)[4]. These financial instruments were matched with capital equipment subsidies of the processing machinery and storage facilities, and tax incentives aimed at lowering the effective tax rate of agro-processors in the expansion stages. Taken together, these measures induced speedy modernization of capacity, and encouraged the consolidation to efficient plants at minimum efficient scale.

Downstream investment was possible through parallel intervention upstream. The state assisted the oilseed farmers through the provision of some procurement prices that reduced the uncertainty about income and encouraged the growth of acreages. The cost of production was diminished with better seeds, fertilizers and fuel being supplied with subsidies increasing the yields. The post-harvest losses were also reduced to the minimum through government investment in storage, transportation, and logistics infrastructure, which led to better reliability of the supply. These measures solved the issue of poor communication between farmers and processors, whereby more capacity was achieved in crushing against stable supply of feedstock.

These policies, combined with each other, formed a distinctive industry, made up of large vertically-integrated agroholdings. These firms integrated a few stages of the value chain linking oil production, oil crushing, refining, storage and export logistic. Vertical integration reduced transaction cost and stabilized supplier relationship and improved technological upgrading in the chain. Large domestic companies acquired major scale achievement and export orientation characteristic to them as opposed to small and medium-sized enterprises. In as much as this consolidation was considered to be a source of market power, it was able to achieve market power in what had been considered a bane of the industry in the liberalization period, that of fragmentation and underinvestment. The state policy tacitly backed up this structure as it distributed finance and incentives to those firms that would be able to scale and perform to levels of standardization.

Table 2 involves the quantitative transformation of the crushing capacity in Russia. The edible oil ISI strategy had fast and sustainable outcomes. The acreage of sunflower was very high due to high yields and farm income. The processing capacity was highly modernized and new plants were up to the international standards of efficiency and quality. By the mid-2010s Russia had become a significant exporter of sunflower oil, and its products were sold to the European region, the Middle East and Asia. There was more

[2] Agricultural Development and Regulation of Agricultural Products, Commodities and Food Markets, 2013–2020 // Official site of the Government of Russia: [site]. URL: http://government.ru/en/docs/ (accessed: 03.04.2026).

[3] Стратегия развития агропромышленного и рыбохозяйственного комплексов до 2030 года. 12.09.2022 // Официальный сайт Правительства России: [сайт]. URL: http://government.ru/docs/46497/ (дата обращения: 03.04.2026).

[4] Концепцию технологического развития до 2030 года. 25.05.2023 // Официальный сайт Правительства России: [сайт]. URL: http://government.ru/news/48570/ (дата обращения: 28.07.2026).

supply domestically and the exposure to international price shocks was partially alleviated through more self-sufficiency and stabilization policies. These outcomes were not realized by permanent protection, but by a spaced-out strategy in which interim protection, subsidies targeted and coordinated investment produced a competitive domestic sector able to compete in the international market.

Table 2 / Таблца 2

Russian Oilseed Crushing Capacity Indicators, 2000-2020
Показатели производственных мощностей по переработке масличных культур в России, 2000-2020 гг.

Indicator	2000	2005	2010	2015	2020
Crushing capacity (million tons/year)	4.2	5.8	8.3	12.1	15.4
Capacity utilization (%)	47	58	71	79	83
Sunflower oil production (million tons)	1.9	2.4	3.0	3.9	5.2
Sunflower oil exports (million tons)	0.2	0.5	1.1	1.7	2.9
Sunflower planted area (million hectares)	4.1	5.2	6.4	7.8	8.6
Self-sufficiency ratio (%)	67	74	82	89	93

Sources: Crushing capacity, capacity utilization, production, exports, planted area, self-sufficiency ratio calculated from Rosstat[5]; UN Comtrade[6]; FAO[7]; Russian Ministry of Agriculture[8]

Zimbabwe's Edible Oil Sector

In this section, the interpretive framework in Section 2 and 3 are used to diagnose the edible oil industry in Zimbabwe. The analysis does not explain the outcomes by the fact of the generalized policy failure but specifies structural constraints, institutional bottlenecks and coordination failures that precondition the viability of strategic import substitution.

In the first part of the 1990s, Zimbabwe possessed a relatively diversified agro-processing base, which included a running edible oil company related to the domestication of oilseeds. There was processing capacity in the soybean and cottonseed value chains with the help of commercial farming system, predictable purchase arrangements and market access in the region. It was a big failure in this organization following the trade liberalization and macroeconomic crisis of the late 1990s and 2000s. Structural adjustment weakened the ability of states to coordinate their efforts and currency crises eliminated long run incentives to make industrial investment. The processors of edible oils were facing growing uncertainty

[5] Production of agricultural products. Sunflower: Sown area, yield, gross harvest // Rosstat: [site]. URL: https://rosstat.gov.ru (accessed: 26.04.2026).

[6] UN Comtrade. Vegetable oil trade statistics: Russian Federation // UN Comtrade Database: [site]. URL: https://comtrade.un.org (accessed: July 30, 2026).

[7] FAOSTAT database: Crops and livestock products // Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations: [site]. URL: https://www.fao.org/faostat (accessed: 27.04.2026).

[8] Agricultural Development and Regulation of Agricultural Products, Commodities and Food Markets, 2013–2020 // Official site of the Government of Russia: [site]. URL: http://government.ru/en/docs/ (accessed: 29.04.2026).

over inputs, reduced usage of capacity and were losing to imports[9]. By the 2010s, the local processing capacity for imported refined and crude edible oils was needed to sustain the structure of Zimbabwe, despite the local facilities lying idle or underused.

Zimbabwe is typified by fragmentation in production of oilseeds between smallholder and medium-scale farmers which have low access to improved seed types, fertilizer and irrigation. The volatility of output is significant owing to a change in climate and low extension services. This is unlike in Russia where predictable availability of feedstock was guaranteed by the set prices and volumes, the Zimbabwean processors are always left in a state of uncertainty in terms of volume, quality, and timing of the availability of oilseeds [6]. Wholesale crushing and refining plants have a very low utilization of capacity. Absence of working capital, short term financing duration and debasing of currencies are barrier to capacity upgradation and preventive maintenance. This has made processors rely intermittently on imported crude oil at the cost of backward linkages whose stabilization is the goal of strategic ISI.

The trade policy has been fluctuating with alternating protection tariffs and random liberalization to deal with shortages and inflationary strain. Even poor implementation of border control and the informal trade weaken the effectiveness of tariffs limiting them to deliver credible investment signals. This change in policy is a marked contrast to the predictability of the Russian trade instruments which are regulated by rules.

National Development Strategy 1 (2021–2025) includes industrialization and value-addition targets however implementation capacity is lopsided[10]. When there is no institutional integration between the agriculture, industry and finance ministries, the intervention would be weak along the value chain. Massive production subsidies or the giving out of concessional industrial finance, are harshly restricted by fiscal constraints. The development finance institutions have low balance sheets, short term loans and have limited exposure to foreign exchange. This makes policy instruments crucial to Russian achievement that is long-term, inexpensive capital, inaccessible in the first case[11]. The political economy of the edible oil industry in Zimbabwe is determined by interest group politics such as the arbitrage gains enjoyed by the importers, producer group divisions, and the financial limitations of the state agencies. Capability of implementation is also biased, especially on border controls and requirements of the state support recipients [30].

Zimbabwe is not experiencing lack of potential but the issue is the wrong fit between the policies and the institutions of implementation. This is precisely the coordination failures between farmers, processors, and finance that strategic ISI focuses on but the instruments at the disposal of the state are less comprehensive as those in Russia. Table 3 shows indicators of diagnoses which measure these constraints.

Table 3 gives the feasibility scorecard that indicates that the trade coordination and value-chain integration incentives are most feasible in the near term, and the large-scale fiscal tools and export discipline mechanisms need to be built up or regional market integration.

[9] Zimbabwe economic update: Industrial recovery constraints // The World Bank: [site]. URL: https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/zimbabwe (accessed: 26.04.2026).

[10] National Development Strategy 1 (2021–2025) // Veritas: [site]. URL: https://www.veritaszim.net/node/4583 (accessed: 01.05.2026).

[11] The East Asian Miracle: Economic Growth and Public Policy // The World Bank: [site]. URL: https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/975081468244550798/pdf/multi-page.pdf (accessed: 03.05.2026).

Table 3 / Таблица 3

Zimbabwe Edible Oil Sector Diagnostic Indicators

Диагностические показатели сектора производства пищевых масел в Зимбабве

Dimension	Indicator	Value	Benchmark (Sub-Saharan Africa)
Production	Oilseed production (thousand tons, 2020)	85	–
	Crushing capacity utilization (%)	38	65–75
	Average yield (tons/hectare)	0.8	1.4
Trade	Import dependence (% of consumption)	72	45
	Import value (USD million, 2020)	145	–
	Informal trade share (%)	35–45	10–15
Institutional	Policy implementation capacity (1–5)	2.1	3.2
	Inter-ministerial coordination	Weak	–
Fiscal	Agricultural support (% GDP)	0.3	1.1
	Development finance tenor (years)	2–3	5–8
Enforcement	Border control effectiveness (1–5)	1.8	3.0

Sources: Oilseed production, crushing capacity utilization, average yield, import dependence, import value from FAO[12], informal trade share from World Bank, policy implementation capacity from author's compilation based on World Bank and Zimbabwe National Statistics Agency [13]; agricultural support (% GDP) from World Bank[14]; development finance tenor from Reserve Bank of Zimbabwe [15], border control effectiveness from World Bank[16]

Table 4 / Таблица 4

ISI Instrument Feasibility Scorecard (Zimbabwe)

Оценка осуществимости инструментария ISI (Зимбабве)

Policy Instrument	Institutional Capacity	Fiscal Space	Market Scale	Enforcement	Overall Feasibility
Targeted import tariffs	Medium	High	Medium	Low	Medium (conditional)
Oilseed price guarantees	Medium	Low	Medium	Medium	Low-Medium
Input subsidies	Medium	Low	Medium	Medium	Low-Medium
Concessional industrial	Low	Low	Medium	Medium	Low
Vertical integration incentives	Medium	Medium	Medium	Medium	Medium (adapted)
Export discipline mechanisms	Low	Low	Low	Low	Not feasible (short term)

[12] FAOSTAT database: Crops and livestock products // Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations: [site]. URL: https://www.fao.org/faostat (accessed: 10.05.2026).

[13] Zimbabwe economic update: Industrial recovery constraints // The World Bank: [site]. URL: https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/zimbabwe (accessed: 10.05.2026).

[14] Zimbabwe economic update: Industrial recovery constraints // The World Bank: [site]. URL: https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/zimbabwe (accessed: 10.05.2026).

[15] Reserve Bank of Zimbabwe. (various years). Monetary policy statements. Harare. Available from the issuing authority upon request.

[16] Zimbabwe economic update: Industrial recovery constraints // The World Bank: [site]. URL: https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/zimbabwe (accessed: 11.05.2026).

This scorecard shows that incentives to trade coordination and value-chain integration have the greatest near-term feasibility, whereas large-scale fiscal instruments and export discipline mechanisms expect to be done with some capacity-building or regional market integration.

The model in figure 2 explains that constraining limits of a tight fiscal space, poor industrial financing and enforcement loopholes are a filtering mechanism. They reduce the range of feasible policies between first-best, capital-intensive tools (as applied in Russia) and second-best, facilitative ones that is, targeted tariffs, contract farming, and processing clusters. It is not the transformation but the stabilization which can be the realistic result of this limited menu: better utilization, decreased growth of imports. This is the route that outlines the viable level of industrial policy initiation in the industry.

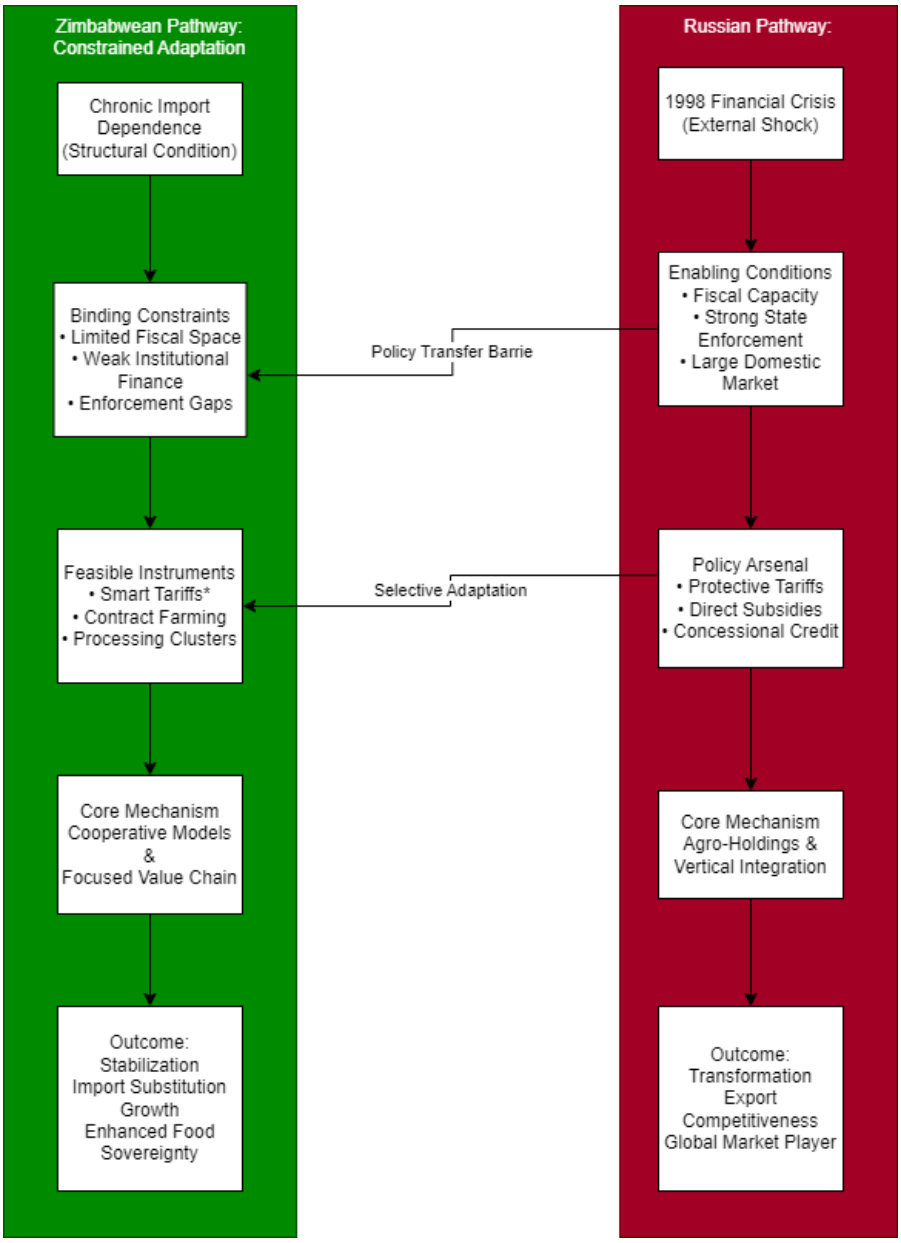

Fig. 2. The Constrained Adaptation Pathway:
Structural Barriers and Feasible Policy Options for Zimbabwe.
Рис. 2. Путь адаптации с ограничениями:
структурные барьеры и осуществимые варианты политики для Зимбабве.

Discussion

The above findings show that there is an inherent asymmetry between the Russian and Zimbabwean cases. Russia was able to attain structural change through a concerted policy package that has been adopted during a twenty years period, whereas Zimbabwe is stuck in dependence on imports despite having the same agro-ecological potential. This section derives meaning out of these findings and evaluates them as to the implications on policy transfer.

Explaining Divergent Outcomes

The congruence analysis produces three explanatory factors. To begin with, the level of institutional thickness is varied. The Russian implementing agencies had technical competence that their counterparts in Zimbabwe did not have. The Russian Ministry of Agriculture had special departments on value chains in oilseeds, the state banks grew up lending skills in agro-processing, and the customs administration also imposed trade restrictions with reasonable efficiency. Policy implementation capacity in Zimbabwe is at 2.1 of the 5 regional averages of 3.2 and the co-ordination between the agriculture, industry and finance ministries is weak.

Second, the conditions of fiscal space instrument choice. Russian agricultural support was highest of 0.8 percent of the GDP which was funded using the hydrocarbon revenues earned between 2000 and 2014. Debt service is draining 35–40 percent of government revenues of Zimbabwe, and agricultural assistance amounts to 0.3 percent of GDP. Such fiscal asymmetry is the reason why Zimbabwe cannot follow the example of Russia to use subsidies extensively.

Third, the capacity to enforce defines the viability of which trade instruments. The centralized customs system of Russia allowed prohibition of exports in the case of domestic inadequacy in supplying. The porous borders and informal trade in Zimbabwe which is estimated to be 35 to 45 percent of consumption implies that such measures would probably enhance smuggling and price volatility.

Transferable Mechanisms

In spite of these asymmetries, some of these mechanisms are transferred. Variable tariff-based targeted import protection would only moderate institutional capacity and can be enforced by the current institutions of Zimbabwe. The pre-announced producer prices can be achieved via the existing structure of Grain Marketing Board, with the need to have the fiscal ring-fencing. Anchor procurement-government institutions as assured purchasers do not necessitate any fiscal transfer, merely coordination of procurement policy.

Some of the mechanisms that need to be adapted are concessional finance. The Russian model relies on the big state banks that have long term liabilities. Zimbabwe can estimate this in the form of blended finance models which involve involving both the public guarantees and commercial lending. In the same way, processing clusters may also be used instead of the large vertically integrated complexes in Russia, where shared infrastructure may be provided without individual firms attaining minimum efficient scale.

Mechanisms considered to be non-transferable are large agro-holding form of mechanisms that assumes a land tenure system, capital market, and political economy

situations that do not exist in Zimbabwe. Export bans which have no capacity of being enforced are also counterproductive since they would tend to increase informality.

A Phased Strategy for Zimbabwe

The financial feasibility analysis encourages a three-stage plan. Phase one, stabilization and signaling between years 0 to two is aimed at tariff rationalization, pre-announced floor prices of sunflower and soybean, and renovation of the processing plants in existence. The second phase, which includes consolidation and coordination of years two to five, focuses on processing clusters development, blended financial instruments, and growth of contract farming. Phase three, export discipline and year five and above aims at regional export orientation, quality upgrading and gradual exposure to competition.

This step-by-step strategy takes into account the institutional limitations of Zimbabwe but establishes a plausible way out of the overreliance on imports and the development of food sovereignty.

Conclusion

In this research, there are five results obtained about the process of import substitution industrialization of the edible oils.

To begin with, Russian success was achieved because of a combination of a policy and not just by protectionism. There were four categories of instruments working in synergy in terms of variable import tariffs, which adjusted to the conditions of domestic supply; long-term concessional credit by the state banks with a tenor of eight to ten years; subsidies on oil seed production tied to the achievement of the productivity index; regulatory undertakings under the Food Security Doctrine of 2010 and 2020. One dealt with failures in coordination over time, another over time with stabilization, then consolidation, then export promotion; the order of accomplishment was cumulative. Russia had reached 93 percent of self-sufficiency in vegetable oils and was also exporting 2.9 million tonnes of vegetable oils per year by 2020.

Second, institutional capacity is the constraint of ISI that is binding. The policy design, monitoring, and adjustive ability had a technical capability in the bureaucratic apparatus of Russia. The Ministry of Agriculture had retained departments related to oilseed value chains; state banks acquired an experience in lending to agro-processing; and customs administration had reasonable enforcement of trade measures. The institutional thickness of Zimbabwe is adequate to the articulation of policies in the National Development Strategy 1, but it cannot be used to support fiscally intensive or enforcement-dependent instruments without capacity-building first. The capacity of implementation of policy is rated at 2.1 out of 5 against regional outlooks of 3.2.

Third, fiscal space can define the instruments at its disposal. The support of Russian agriculture reached the maximum of 0.8 percent of the GDP, which was financed by the hydrocarbon revenues accumulated in 2000–2014. The fiscal space of Zimbabwe is limited by the debt service taking 35 to 40 percent of government revenue and agricultural support of 0.3 percent of GDP. This does not exclude industrial policy but necessitates emphasis on low-fiscal-intensity policies: import tariffs, co-ordination of procurement, and regulatory indicators as opposed to regular subsidy schemes.

Fourth, industry structure is made possible under conditions of market scale. The domestic market in Russia of 144 million individuals served numerous plants with minimum efficient scale of 300 to 500 tons per day crushing capacity. The market of 15 million people in Zimbabwe needs either regionalization via export orientation towards the Southern African Development Community of 350 million consumers or scaled down technologies. This Russian system of large agro-holdings with 58 percent capacity cannot be exported; it is more likely to have a hybrid system with anchor processors and smallholder contract networks.

Fifth, enforcement capacity identifies the viability of which trade instruments. Russia imposed export ban by centralized customs management and border security. The porous borders of Zimbabwe and informal trade of 35 to 45 percent of consumption indicates that exportation bans would probably boost smuggling and unpredictable prices. The tools to be used in policy design should be in favor of enforcing instruments: import tariffs can be effective, but export bans are anti-productive.

The above results imply that strategic ISI can still be applied to late-industrializing economies with institutional constraints, but it should be selective to concentrate on industries with scalable technologies, sequenced, developing capacity in steps, realistic, where instruments match operational institutional capabilities, and regionally-based by using Southern African Development Community markets to overcome domestic scale constraints.

The strategic importance of edible oil industry does not just hinge on the economic importance of saving imports, Zimbabwe presently consumes USD 145 million every year on imports, but it is also the potential to act as an institutional learning lab. The rigid application of industrial policy can be shown successful in this sector, which would create coalition support and bureaucratic capacity to undertake more-far-reaching agroindustry reform.

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Information about authors / Сведения об авторах

Chingovo Carlean – Master's student, Department of Strategic and Innovative Development, Faculty of Higher School of Management; Financial University under the Government of the Russian Federation.
E-mail: carleanchingovo@gmail.com
ORCID: 0009-0001-3265-0214
The author declares that there is no conflict of interest.

Чингово Карлин – магистрант кафедры стратегического и инновационного развития Факультета «Высшая школа управления»; Финансовый университет при Правительстве Российской Федерации.
E-mail: carleanchingovo@gmail.com
ORCID: 0009-0001-3265-0214
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