

**Reflections on Zimbabwe's Past as
Building Blocks for its Future**

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

1 Introduction	1
2. Post-Independence Policy Agenda and Consequences	1
3. The Politics of Redressing the Imbalances and Consequences	3
4. Reconstructing and Developing Zimbabwe	6
5. CONCLUSION	10
8. REFERENCES	11

1 INTRODUCTION

In February 2009, Zimbabwe's Government of National Unity (GNU) was installed. The GNU consisting of Representatives from the Zimbabwe African National Union (Patriotic Front), Movement for Democratic Change- Tsvangirai and Movement for Democratic Change-Mutambara aimed at stabilising the volatile situation in the country. The country has gone from prosperity to unprecedented collapse in the twenty-eight years since it attained Independence. Ironically, the only thing which has been increasing in Zimbabwe is inflation for which the country holds a world record. More recently and tragically, cholera-related deaths have also been escalating. This paper seeks to reflect on the situation in Zimbabwe through the last two decades and to conclude by suggesting some policy directions for the way forward. The reflection focuses largely on local government, land, health and education sectors. In order to map out the future of the country, it is important to revisit the last 28 years. The events described in the first section are important for framing the reflections on the country's past and as a foundation for rebuilding Zimbabwe. The second section reflects on a possible agenda for the way forward for Zimbabwe.

2. POST-INDEPENDENCE POLICY AGENDA AND CONSEQUENCES

Zimbabwe attained political Independence in 1980. Until then, Zimbabwean local government was like the rest of the former colonial territories based on racial land division systems between black and white people and urban and rural areas. The urban areas, which were reserved for white occupation, had autonomous local government. Any African living in a municipal area had to be employed and registered and municipalities had power to evict all illegal residents. Such powers were enshrined in the Vagrancy Act and the Urban Areas Accommodation Act (Wekwete, 1991). Rural areas were reserved for the African people and white commercial farmers. The white commercial farmers occupied commercial farms which were located on relatively fertile land and had access to advanced infrastructure like electricity, roads and irrigation systems. Africans were located in areas formerly known as African Tribal Reserves. The name of the African areas was later changed to communal farming areas. The areas were located to land that was marginal, densely populated, had poor infrastructure and whose main purpose was to provide labour and markets.

Zimbabwe was ravaged by a civil war between 1969 and 1981 which disrupted livelihoods of ordinary citizens by disturbing food production and inducing displacement of people (Lan 1985, Potts 1995). Some of the communal farming area inhabitants escaped to the urban areas while others moved to more fertile communal farming areas. As a result of the population displacement, there was a significant increase in the urban population. The increase in the urban population was accompanied by an increase in informal activities.

Once the war ended in 1980, the government pursued a number of policy programmes to deal with the legacy of colonial rule. These included increased investment in communal farming areas agricultural support services and infrastructure; relaxed restrictions on movement and a reorganised local government system. Also, the newly installed post-colonial government of Zimbabwe had inherited an advanced economy in 1980, although the economy was heavily dependent on South African subsidies and underpinned by agriculture. Financially the country had a fiscal deficit, high unemployment and an economy dominated by price controls (UN, 2005). Despite the vulnerability of its economy, the government went on to implement some programmes that further undermined the country's fragile economy. For instance, the government extended support to formerly disadvantaged communities in the rural areas. This included increased access to commercial credit; initially heavily subsidised and eventually free government agricultural inputs and equipment hire; agricultural extension irrigation services and veterinary services in the first decade of Independence (Bratton 1987, Breslin, 1994 Alderson 1998). The Zimbabwe government established growth points to create towns in rural areas, to promote employment and halt rural-urban migration (Wekwete 1991). Growth points received state support to invest in energy; communications; water supply and; social and administrative infrastructure. The costs of improved services outweighed the benefits by a factor of about six to one (Bratton, 1987, Breslin, 1994). All these policy actions reflected the serious conflicts of priorities and the tension between the populist impulses of political leaders to pursue popular social expenditure on the one hand, while recognizing the need for prudent macroeconomic policy management and fiscal rectitude.

The post-independent government introduced a set of policies aimed at enabling Africans to own immovable property in urban areas. The "Home Ownership Policy" involved the selling of 90 % of all housing units in African townships to sitting tenants (Schlyter 1989). Low income social groups in the urban areas benefited from the establishment of a variety of institutions which participated in housing delivery. The housing delivery options were diverse and included delivery of complete units, core housing and site and service schemes. The housing delivery institutions included the government; local authorities; private sector; the international community; the corporate sector and; co-operatives (Rakodi and Withers, 1995, Kamete, 2001). The diversification of housing delivery institutions was crucial in that it reduced the extent to which government was responsible for the burden of providing shelter to its low income citizens, while enabling the housing sector to mobilise resources from various institutions. It also went against the tendency of post-liberation political leaders who tend to conceptualise the state as the sole provider of social expenditure programmes.

Similarly in the land sector, the post colonial government embarked on a land redistribution programme to alleviate population pressure in the communal areas, increase peasants' access to fertile soils; improve livelihoods of the poor and to bring abandoned or under-utilised land to full production (Zimbabwe, Resettlement Policies and Procedures, Harare Ministry of Lands, Resettlement and Rural Development 1980 cited in Kinsey, 1999). However, the programme was abandoned before it had achieved its goals with less than

seven percent of the communal area population resettled (Cousins 1993:31). This was because the legislation restricted government to acquire land willingly sold by the white farmers. The plan was too ambitious, lacked funding and commercial farmers offered only marginal unproductive land for sale to the government and corruption was also a problem (Riddel 1984, Palmer 1990, Cousins 1993, Goebel 2005). Despite these problems some models of this initiative have been positively evaluated in the long term by extensive studies carried out by Kinsey and published in 1999. The experiences with the previous land redistribution initiatives is an important lesson for future attempts to address the land question.

3. THE POLITICS OF REDRESSING THE IMBALANCES AND CONSEQUENCES

In the 1990s, the Zimbabwe government adopted the Economic Structural Adjustment Policies (ESAP). The policies consisted of a package of individual reform measures for some developing countries worked out with international agencies and tied to foreign loans. The policies involved the adoption of a series of macroeconomic measures including deregulation of the domestic economy; trade policies and reductions in public spending. After the adoption of the policies, prices of maize seed, social services, fertilisers; agricultural and dipping equipment increased significantly (Bird and Shepherd, 2003; UN, 2005). The urban poor suffered as the loss of wages was coupled with increases in costs of urban services as subsidies were removed (Alderson 1998, Bryceson 1999, Potts 2000). The removal of subsidies had a negative impact on infrastructure; health service delivery and rural and urban livelihoods.

Between 1980 and 1994, the government of Zimbabwe was focusing on redressing imbalances in local government. Until then, Zimbabwe had a dual local government system for the urban and rural areas. The urban local governments had surplus funding and were relatively autonomous. Rural local government had two institutions to serve the European farmers and peasants respectively. These were Rural Council and District Councils respectively. The former had more resources and autonomy comparable to Urban Local Government. This included financial resources; sources of revenue; road maintenance machinery and access to loans. The district councils which represented the peasants in communal areas were entirely reliant on government for funding and administration. The 1984, Prime Minister's Directive reorganised and decentralised local government in an attempt to encourage grassroots participation in planning. However, the new decentralised participatory structures were not funded which undermined them.

At the same time, government institutions became highly politicised as the ruling party Zanu-Pf increased its grip on power and dominated the decision-making processes. The centre-local relations in Zimbabwe reflected this trend with politically motivated decisions increasingly undermining the integrity of local governance. For instance, the office of the Provincial Governor was introduced to co-ordinate the interface between rural and urban government. While more reforms followed to deracialise local authorities, at the same time these reforms had the effect of consolidating the ruling party's grip on power over the state

structures. For instance, in 1993 the two racially divided rural local authorities were amalgamated into Rural District Councils (RDCs). The government also revised the Urban Councils Act 29:15 which gave the Ministry of Local Government and National Housing the power to limit Urban Councils' autonomy. The consequence of this was that it centralised power leading to increased red-tape and political interference in the running of local authorities. As a result, local authorities had to apply to central government before they could charge tariffs. This centralisation of power was not accompanied by increased allocation of resources to municipalities. Coupled with government's declining resources; the centralisation of power undermined local authorities' capacity to raise revenue, deliver services effectively and be accountable to their communities.

While the government went about centralising political power and authority in the context of declining resources, some key responsibilities were nonetheless decentralised to the local authorities increasing their burdens. The capacity of local authorities to engage in land-use planning was enhanced through investment in the training of planning experts. As a result of this, at some stage, virtually all local authorities in Zimbabwe employed the services of a planning professional. This improved land-use and economic planning as all local authorities produced strategic, development and master-plans to guide development. One benefit of this decentralization of planning services was that it enabled individual local authorities to produce plans according to their specific local needs and resources.

In an effort to rescue the ailing urban authorities, the government with assistance from donors introduced Urban I and II initiatives (Musandu-Nyamayaro 1991) and Rural District Councils Capacity Building Programmes (RDCCBP) to build the capacities of local authorities. The programmes were intended to achieve a number of objectives such as urban infrastructure provisioning; strengthening the technical capacity of local authorities; provision of urban housing as well as strengthening the institutional capacity of central and local governments for the following activities: planning; budgeting; implementation; management; reducing government funding of urban services and allowing service charges to be levied by local authorities as well as the private sector provision of services. The main elements of these programmes were manpower and institutional development which included the provision of block grants to fund Rural District Council development programmes. The grants were supported by the deployment of external facilitators to all RDCs. The facilitators were trained to identify RDC weaknesses and assist in the formulation of solutions (Katiza, 1998). While these initiatives did briefly improve the provision of local services and finances, the two programmes were too heavily dependent on donor funding and could not be sustained on withdrawal of donor funding. As a result, they fell victim to the deteriorating Zimbabwe Government-donor relations and corruption. Over time both rural and urban local authorities' capacity to deliver services rapidly deteriorated and in some cases ground to a halt as municipalities failed to provide water, waste removal, security, health and infrastructure and maintenance. The collapse of donor funding left the Zimbabwe government solely responsible for funding the local authorities. The government assumed 100 percent responsibility of funding for public health. This replaced a structure where

previously the state, local authorities and service users had contributed a third of running costs. In the context of dwindling public funds, this structure experienced operating difficulties. When the government inevitably failed to provide funding, the standard of service declined dramatically, exacerbated by the HIV/AIDS pandemic for which Zimbabwe has one of the highest infection rates in the region (UN, 2005).

At Independence, the Government extended heavily subsidised university education to all Zimbabweans who qualified to go to University. This was through the extension of grants to students who qualified to go to the University of Zimbabwe, (Zimbabwe's only University), irrespective of the students' capacity to pay. As the government realised that it could not sustain the system, grants were replaced by an increasing loan share. From about 2003, students were forced to meet 100% of their University fees, a situation that marginalised the poor. With respect to the schooling system, the government moved away from a system whereby the local authorities; parents and the state shared running costs of schools. Under the new system, local authorities assumed full responsibility for the running of the schools. The government also interfered with pricing structures in the privately run schools by controlling the fees charged. The standard of education declined rapidly. Teacher strikes and a brain drain increased and the country's education system once the pride of the continent, crumbled.

In May 2005, the crisis of local governance in Zimbabwe took a new turn when the government carried out "operation restore order". (UNAIDS 2005, Bratton and Masunugure 2006) Officially the operation was driven by government's concern over the chaos and congestion that characterised urban areas. However, the operation also had a number of political motives some of them sinister. Firstly, it sought to effect retribution against urban dwellers who voted for the Movement for Democratic Change in the previous elections. Secondly, it served to disperse selected urban populations to rural areas where Zanu-(PF) could more easily control them. Thirdly it was seen as an attempt to stifle independent economic and political activity in the country's urban areas particularly the foreign currency black market that had become vibrant as the country's economic meltdown took hold. Fourthly, the operation was a pre-emptive strategy to prevent popular uprising in light of the deepening food insecurity in the country. The operation which focused on urban areas and growth points was also carried out to divert attention from growing concern about the underutilisation of land on the commercial farming areas. This 'clean up' operation involved the forceful removal of urban settlements by the army and the police, resulting in the destruction of people's homes, sources of livelihood, shelter, access to services and business premises and property. The UN estimated that some 700 000 people were directly affected. This included the destruction of 92 460 housing structures, as well as 32 538 business premises of informal sector enterprises that are the primary sources of livelihood for 97 614 people. Also, 40 800 families that were affected by this government campaign were headed by women. The operation also indirectly affected other people through the loss of rental income, disruption of networks involved in the supply chain of the informal sector, credit institutions and casual and part-time labour (UNAIDS 2005, Bratton and Masunugure 2006).

After independence, the government had also extended heavily subsidised university education to all Zimbabweans who qualified to go to University. This was done through the extension of grants to students who qualified to go to University. As the government realised that it could not sustain them, grants were replaced by student loans. From 2003 university students had to meet 100 percent of their education costs. This was a situation that marginalised the poor. The government also changed a system whereby local authorities, parents and the state share the burden in the running of schools and forced local authorities to assume full responsibility for the running of municipal schools. The government also interfered with pricing structures in the privately run schools, controlling the fees charged which led to a decline in the standard of education. This resulted in increased teacher strikes; a brain drain and the collapse of the country's education system once the pride of the African continent.

In 1998, international donors met in Zimbabwe to map out a blueprint for the next stage of land reform. However, the plan was scuttled when the Zimbabwean government launched the controversial 2000 Fast Track Land Resettlement Programme. This was characterised by a sometimes violent transfer of land from commercial farmers to African landowners (UN 2005). The consequences were devastating for the Zimbabwean economy. Firstly the programme undermined the country's industrial development which was dependent on agriculture. Secondly it undermined access to food by ordinary people who lost work in agriculture and related sectors. Thirdly, the West responded by imposing targeted sanctions on Zimbabwe. Fourthly the negative publicity resulting from this affected the tourism industry, leading to further negative impacts on and the deterioration of the country's economy. By January 2005, the Zimbabwean economy was characterised by a high inflation rate; a shortage of foreign currency; inadequate investment; a budget deficit and stagnating employment.

All these developments signalled a dramatic decline in the quality of democratic governance in Zimbabwe and an inexorable slide towards the political impasses underpinned by the current socio-economic collapse.

4. RECONSTRUCTING AND DEVELOPING ZIMBABWE

As the country moved into a new era under the GNU, it is important to note that there are many lessons from its past to draw from. The various initiatives which included growth points, decentralisation initiatives and the local government capacity building initiatives are good starting points for the road to recovery. The country has an advantage in that many policy initiatives and programmes have been tried and tested, and valuable knowledge generated. This section specifically addresses the issue of rebuilding Zimbabwe and reviving its economy through a number of crucial sectors such as land, education, health, housing, local governance and others.

Zimbabwe's political history provides ample lessons from which the current or future governments can learn and guide its reconstruction and development. It is imperative

that the country restores the rule of law and investor confidence. This is a pre-condition for the establishment and sustainability of any initiatives aimed at the Zimbabwe recovery process. The three parties which are signatories to the GNU have after protracted negotiations agreed on a Constitutional writing programme. The outcome of this will determine the success on other projects that aim to build the country. The next step is for the GNU to mobilise much needed funding for the reconstruction of Zimbabwe. The funding is necessary to repair and build infrastructure; restoration of the energy sector and resuscitation of the government and local government service delivery mechanisms. This funding can be sourced from donor funding; foreign investment and the country's mineral wealth. The politicisation of the country's institutions and distribution of resources has led to a dearth of reliable demographic data on many sectors of the economy. A useful starting point for the GNU would therefore be to conduct a national census to gather accurate data on the current population; the nature of the country's economy; the labour market and other key policy challenges such as HIV/AIDS. In 2005 the government of Zimbabwe had embarked on a programme to increase the size of the Central Statistics Office (CSO). This institution would be best placed to provide the new government with base-line information which is necessary to inform national planning and other decision-making processes.

Zimbabwe also has vast agricultural potential which many see as the main vehicle for reviving the economy. In the short-term, it might not be possible to revive the agricultural sector which buttressed Zimbabwe's economy. Attention in the short term should focus on restoring international confidence in the institutions of the state. This in turn will revive the tourism and mining sectors of the economy. These two sectors will be relatively easier to resuscitate in order to bring returns to the economy relatively rapidly. Zimbabwe's agricultural resources have the potential to contribute to the world's food needs and strategic action in this time of the global food crisis will enable the nation to reclaim its place as a food provider and restore the economic viability of the country. The land question has to be preceded by the restoration of property rights. The form this will take is not addressed in this paper. However it is important to ensure that any programme adopted to resolve the land issue is focused on restoring the economic viability of this valuable resource. One way of doing this is by allocating the land to the most efficient users. This varies depending on the type of tenure.

The 1998 Donor Conference produced a framework to guide the funding and organisation of land reform. This framework can be revised and used in conjunction with other land reform lessons to map the way forward. The initial land redistribution and resettlement programmes can provide valuable lessons and mechanisms for resolving the current impasse. These were that targets of land redistribution programmes should be underpinned by a set of achievable goals and have clearly defined funding streams. The new constitution should provide mechanisms to guard against corruption and diversion of resources meant for public benefit to private use by individuals. Another lesson is to have a better co-ordinated mechanism to ensure coherence in the manner in which the state undertakes to redistribute land. The programme should be led by a set of coherent,

measurable goals which should have both long and short term objectives that can be used in the monitoring and evaluation of progress. One criticism of the two phases of land reform in Zimbabwe was that they failed to redistribute land to the masses. The Zimbabwe GNU should clearly assess the land needs of the peasant sector when formulating the next land redistribution strategy. The strategy must take into consideration historical changes in rural-urban connections; changing livelihoods; the impact of climate change and unprecedented human capital loss due to HIV/AIDS to name a few. There is an alternative way of increasing viability of the peasant farming sector. This is through provision of infrastructure that reduces the sector's reliance on rain-fed agriculture. Initiatives include the construction of dams, irrigation schemes and water conservation measures. Coupled with that should be the need to improve labour usage mechanisms in order to address losses to HIV/AIDS. There is also an opportunity for the country to increase people's self sufficiency by capitalising on the initiatives which the rural communities have devised to cope with lack of government support over the last two decades. Some of these initiatives include the use of indigenous seeds for planting and the allocation of land to groups in communal areas should be inventoried and the best practises be scaled up for wide scale adoption. In addition, there are too many institutions that wield control over land and natural resource access in communal areas of Zimbabwe. These institutions include traditional leaders, civil servants, army, the police, political party activists, spirit mediums and war veterans. The government in consultation with all stakeholders should rationalise the legislation and institutions governing resource access in the communal areas as most of the legislation is outdated and perpetuates vulnerability and exploitation of people who live in communal areas.

The growth points can be resuscitated to support livelihood diversification in the communal areas. Growth points can be resuscitated through capital investments into areas with industrial potential to stimulate employment opportunities. These vary between the various growth points as determined by their specific location, resource endowments and the dominant livelihood activities practised in the locality. A departure from the past would be that government does not undertake to fund all capital developments at growth points but rather encourage private sector participation by extending incentives like tax breaks to encourage investments.

After independence Zimbabwe had a school funding system that was diverse that included a combination of many sectors of society such as: private companies, churches, trusts, the state and parents. The system ensured that only the poorest people in the economy relied on wholly government funded schools as the rest paid for the service standard they could afford. The government ensured a minimum standard of schooling for all by administering and facilitating examinations. This decentralisation of education provision was a necessary step towards restoring the viability of the sector. The much talked about loss of teachers due to the brain-drain; an ageing labour force and the impact of HIV/AIDS are challenges facing this sector. In the short term, this situation could be rectified by the

government facilitating the use of temporary teachers¹ until such time as the teaching colleges are revived. 'temporary teachers' are people who had reached a certain minimum level of education but not formally trained teachers who were allowed to assume teaching duties in schools. The system drew mostly from University students and people who had completed high school, people that Zimbabwe has in abundance. The system will also go a long way towards tackling the problem of rampant unemployment in the country. The country has an extensive education infrastructure in the form of schools and tertiary education institutions. Where possible, the government should outsource some of this infrastructure to enable other players to contribute to the country's education. This could be through leasing and/or outright sale of infrastructure to other service providers as, in the short term, the government will not have adequate resources to run all its schools. The government should harness and build on the initiatives that local communities had started to ensure the continued education of their children without government support. These included the provision of incentives to teachers by the community and the provision and maintenance of school infrastructure by parent-led institutions. The Zimbabwe government should desist from the urge to assume full responsibility for the running of schools as this has to be proved in the past to be non-sustainable. As far as the non-state school sector is concerned, the state should limit itself to providing an appropriate environment within which schools can deliver a quality education to learners.

In the area of health, Zimbabwe has an extensive health service infrastructure, although much of this is in a state of disrepair. A return to the rule of law, restoration of international relations and decentralisation of governance within health sector institutions will go a long way towards reviving this sector and increasing the flow of medical supplies into the country. The government has to prioritise the revival of the various medical training institutions in the universities and hospitals to restore the country's capacity to provide its own medical professionals. The shortage of teaching staff can be alleviated in the short term through facilitating short term modules focused on teaching visits² to Zimbabwe by the various medical professionals who have left the country and are now based in other countries in Africa or abroad. This will enable the country to benefit from the expertise it lost through the brain drain.

One of the useful lessons that can be drawn from Zimbabwe's experience in delivering housing to the larger populace is the need to diversify the institutions that participate in sectoral programmes. This not only reduces the burden on the central government but facilitates innovation and goes a long way in checking corrupt activities that are so characteristic of state projects.

In terms of reviving local democratic governance, an immediate task for the GNU is to depoliticise local governance institutions, tackle rampant corruption and remove

². This initiative is already in place at the University of Zimbabwe's Parirenyatwa hospital based Godfrey Huggins Medical School. Medical school lecturers who left the country continue to facilitate learning by returning at specific time a year to teach in modules.

functional ambiguity in both rural and urban local government. Some of the ambiguity arises from the overlapping, multiple institutions that were established by the Zanu-PF Government. The institutions have to be audited, streamlined and given clear jurisdictions. The government should also build on the lessons learnt from decentralisation, Urban I and II and Rural District Councils Capacity Building Programmes initiatives. These included the need to avoid the dangers of over reliance on donor funding and the, the importance of building the capacity of local authorities through providing external support. The level of fees for service delivery should be negotiated between the local authorities and the consumers. The government should play a regulatory role and focus on fundraising to finance capital developments. The advantage of decentralisation is that different local authorities will be free to devise different models of governance which are best suited to the local conditions. After some time, best practises will be adapted for the benefit of all.

5.CONCLUSION

While the GNU faces a formidable challenge of restoring the country's economic viability, the challenge is not necessarily insurmountable. The lessons that Zimbabwe can learn from its past as well as the promising initiatives that were abandoned in the past for political expediency should provide a firm foundation upon which the GNU's Strategic Revival Plan should be built. It is important that the GNU does not repeat the mistakes of the previous administrations by marginalising local government and centralising political authority and power, particularly in respect of decision-making in the economy and crucial areas of governance. Government should rather focus on creating an enabling environment for various stakeholders in the country to take part and develop a stake in the country's future development. The preconditions for this include restoration of the rule of law, decentralisation of responsibilities and resources to local government and the creation of an environment conducive to participation by various role players in the reconstruction and development of the country. This in turn will go a long way towards restoring the confidence of the international community in the country and in supporting the GNU.

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