

MORGAN TSVANGIRAI LEGACY SEMINAR



Introduction

The Morgan Tsvangirai Legacy workshop held on 10 July 2018 sought to provide an insightful overview of Zimbabwean opposition leader Morgan Tsvangirai's political life as well as his contribution towards democratisation in Zimbabwe. A number of perceptive and important concerns relating to the impact of Tsvangirai's legacy on contemporary Zimbabwean politics were raised by both the speakers and participants at the workshop.

Key Issues:

Morgan Tsvangirai's contribution towards the establishment of Zimbabwe's modern opposition

It was highlighted that Tsvangirai was the figurehead of a progressive political movement in Zimbabwe, a movement that resulted in a number of notable and far reaching outcomes. One of these key outcomes was the revitalisation and formalisation of Zimbabwe's post-independence opposition. Tsvangirai's greatest success was his ability to become the overarching and popular figurehead of a diverse albeit united opposition movement. The aforementioned movement was cemented together by a commitment to democratization and the transformation of the Zimbabwean political milieu. This allowed for a new and potent political narrative that resonated with millions of Zimbabweans, as evidenced by the enduring popularity of Tsvangirai's political party, the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC). Tsvangirai's effectiveness in communicating and embodying an alternative political narrative centered on democratic reform was succinctly captured by Professor Raftopoulos: "as a force of change, there is no other figure that can surpass Tsvangirai in terms of the history of Zimbabwe in the postcolonial period".

Zimbabwe's opposition grew out of a commitment to Constitutionalism

The MDC's direct roots lie in the constitutionalism movement and advocacy that was birthed in the late 1990's, especially through the work and campaigns of the National Constitutional Assembly (NCA). The NCA provided an important framework for the establishment of an umbrella movement focused on democratic reform via constitutionalism and greater political participation, which was comprised of trade unions, academia, gender groupings and the youth among others. One of the most impressive aspects of the NCA movement was the bridging of the rural-urban divide in Zimbabwe, thereby garnering broad and representative support for democratic reform throughout the country. In this sense the NCA supported a "national discourse" on political renewal that had the buy-in of millions of Zimbabweans.

Morgan Tsvangirai initiated and embodied a politics of broad-based representation and participation

As a central leadership figure of the NCA constitutional movement and subsequently the MDC, Tsvangirai - through his organisational and political skills - championed a highly representative democratic movement that was open to all Zimbabweans. This meant a mobilisation effort underpinned by the participation of all key sectors of Zimbabwean society. Through his firm roots in the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions (ZCTU), Tsvangirai was able to form an alliance with urban youth, thereby allowing for student leaders such as Brian Kagoro and Nkululeko Sibanda to actively take part in the NCA and subsequently the MDC. Along with the youth, Tsvangirai was also able to garner the active support of key Zimbabwean women (including political figures like Priscilla Misihairabwi-Mushonga) as well as appeal to citizens across the racial divide (including ensuring backing by white commercial farmers - *which however cost the MDC in terms of support from the ANC and other African parties/governments*). Kagoro acknowledged Tsvangirai's unifying legacy, when he stated: "[Tsvangirai]...brought cross-class mobilisation into our politics". As a participant at the dialogue noted: "Morgan [Tsvangirai] used the

leverage of the trade union movement and its alliance with other social forces, the students, women and others, to construct a new development or democratic path”.

The ‘internationalisation’ of the Zimbabwean crisis is a key Tsvangirai legacy

Morgan Tsvangirai is largely responsible for giving the Zimbabwe crisis an international profile. Through his leadership and role as a figurehead of the democratic movement, Tsvangirai was able to generate international solidarity around the political and socio-economic crisis unfolding in Zimbabwe. To a great extent he became the public face of the democratic movement within Zimbabwe to the outside world. Moreover, with the active support of a broad array of Zimbabweans (including academics, activists, workers and the private sector), the MDC headed by Tsvangirai was able to locate the Zimbabwe crisis within the wider international context, thereby relating the MDC’s struggle to issues such as the dominance of liberation parties throughout the continent, as well as the adverse effects of neoliberal economic policies on a developing country like Zimbabwe. Mr Kagoro argued:

“Morgan was...responsible for the internationalisation of the Zimbabwean crisis and our politics. What he was able to do was to displace the conversation about Zimbabwe from the confines of a national parochial conversation about Zanu-PF [and legitimacy on the basis of liberation credentials]...into a broader discussion about the structural crisis related to global neoliberal policies and their impact on the working class in any country”



Recommendations

Need to continue advocacy around the Zimbabwe Constitution

Tsvangirai's political approach was underpinned by a solid commitment to constitutionalism. The MDC in its political struggle highlighted the primacy and fundamental importance of constitutional reform as well as ensuring the Zimbabwean Constitution becomes a 'living document'. The contemporary challenge relating to constitutionalism in Zimbabwe, relates to the alignment of the current constitution to the country's present legislation, especially noting that repressive laws such as the Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act (AIPPA) and Public Order and Security Act (POSA) are still in existence. Furthermore, there seems to be no confidence in the Constitutional Court as a supreme judicial body that is separate and independent from the executive. Therefore continued advocacy around constitutionalism in Zimbabwe needs to be premised on promoting the sovereignty of the constitution, the independence of the Constitutional Court, alignment of current laws with constitutional tenets and ensuring the public understands the vital importance of constitutionalism.

The promotion of active Gender participation needs to be sustained

There was unanimous agreement between all the speakers that Tsvangirai had actively supported the greater participation of women in Zimbabwean politics, more so when one considers how Zimbabwe has consistently suffered a lack of parity as well as underwhelming representation of women in political spaces and governance structures. The female speakers at the workshop attested to Tsvangirai's commitment to constructive engagement with women leaders and stakeholders. Given the public outcry that was expressed (primarily by Zimbabwean gender activists and women) at the glaring lack of female ministers or senior advisors in President Mnangagwa's former cabinet (November 2017 to August 2018), and the subsequent inclusion of a record number of women ministers (six in total) in the president's current cabinet, it is clear that the issue of greater gender representation and participation in Zimbabwean politics remains a key concern. The MDC faced a number of critiques and rebukes in terms of its treatment of senior female leaders such as Thokozane Khupe, as well as some of the gender insensitive statements espoused by its presidential candidate, Nelson Chamisa. Therefore it is imperative for the MDC and the broader opposition to truthfully and genuinely engage with their female members as well as civil society in order to begin initiatives that address women's concerns and enhance their direct participation in political processes.

Important to reflect on past mistakes and missed opportunities

Morgan Tsvangirai's great legacy in terms of his crucial and lasting contribution towards democratic reform in Zimbabwe is unquestionable. However, as the speakers noted, Tsvangirai was human and therefore erred on a number of occasions. Unfortunately, given his leadership position, this adversely impacted the MDC and by extension the democratic movement in Zimbabwe. His personal failings dented his moral capital, and detracted from his successive presidential campaigns. His leadership style at times meant that there could be no clear position on key issues such as 'succession' within the party. This was

to contribute to the several splits that the party experienced. Going forward it is therefore important for the MDC to take stock of their performance and approach in the recently held 2018 general elections. Central to this process is an honest reflection on the critiques directed at the opposition party, as well as the constructive feedback from MDC members, fellow opposition parties, the ruling party, civil society and international election observers.

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