

# Wither Zimbabwe?: Post-election Dialogue



***Sunnyside Park Hotel Johannesburg, South Africa, 1 November 2018***

## Introduction

*On the 1<sup>st</sup> November 2018, the Southern Africa Liaison Office (SALO) held a regional multi-stakeholder workshop on Post-Election in Zimbabwe. The workshop aimed to focus on the kind of political and economic reforms needed in re-building the state by the new administration elected. Moreover, the workshop sought to provide perspective on the role the Southern African region can play in the promotion of a new transformed Zimbabwe.*

The task of the new regime is not a small one in rebuilding the nation. From restricting an almost collapsed economy to the regaining trust of citizens in the new democratic dispensation as well as entrenching good governance systems by the new administration. The discussion panel entailed persons from various sectors in civil society, academia and activist who is well informed on the

historical context and the post-election era of Zimbabwe. The following insights were shared by panellists and attendants<sup>1</sup>.

## **Discussion and the key issue raised.**

### **Political and institutional transformation**

The recent elections in Zimbabwe are regarded as a significant milestone in the history of the country. It marked the end of an era of former President Robert Mugabe and hope of ushering into a revitalised democratic dispensation. In his address, Professor Brian Raftopoulos expressed that in spite of the new era that is Zimbabwe is overshadowed by a major political and institutional crisis. He focussed much more in the deep crisis among the main political parties, the ruling party Zimbabwe African National Union-Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF) and the official opposition the Movement for Democratic Change Party (MDC). The new regime is responsible for addressing some of the criticism received in the legitimacy of the election process in light of the post-election crisis. These issues have reinforced the political divisions that continue to exist even though the Constitutional Court judgment in August 2018 that dismissed the challenge by the MDC of declaring President Mnangagwa as the elected president. Such disputes are a reflection of the political decay that has shaped Zimbabwe today. This has all come at the expense of the people and constituencies whom they ought to serve. At the height of the political squabbles, there have been issues within the security sector of the party. The avenue of revisiting and establishing a government of national unity has not been welcomed on either side of the opposition and the ruling parties.

The new regime stands accused of assimilating the behaviours of the past regime in their rule. The rationale of ZANU- PF's stay in power is that they stand to continue drawing from state resources but also this is detrimental to the accumulation of the state's debt as well. Thus, it begs the question of whether President Emerson Mnangagwa's administration will be able to advance their macroeconomic stabilisation policies that would mean mainly cutting down state resources. This would mostly affect the public sector which has been the most viable and stable formal employer in Zimbabwe.

With such a stalemate between the main political actors occurring in Zimbabwe, seeking intervention from a third party does not seem far-fetched, perhaps quite necessary. The governing party owes it to their constituency and ultimately the country. The Southern African Development Community's (SADC) stance on Zimbabwe has not attracted a sense of urgency for the matter to be dealt with wilfully in the post-conflict context. It is Prof. Raftopolous' view that perhaps it will catch the attention

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<sup>1</sup> Note: The presentations of Prof Brian Raftopoulos and Dr Godfrey Kanyenze makes references from their new book *Building from the Rubble: the labour movement in Zimbabwe since 2000*. (2018).

of SADC when Zimbabwe is embroiled in another crisis which would then be too late. There is an immediate need for the new government to implement policies that will turn around the state of the country. The opportunity to transform in the present day is ripe subsequent to the elections. However, there is also an opportunity for the Zimbabwean neighbours to help facilitate this process and create a conducive environment not just for the people of Zimbabwe but for the benefit of the region.

## **Economic Crisis**

In the post-colonial context, Zimbabwe was one of the very few countries that had one of the most diversified economies in Sub-Saharan Africa in the late 1980s. Yet, it has been met with one economic downward spiral after another which has been exacerbated by what Dr Kanyenze has described as the “lost decade of the development of Zimbabwe 1999-2008”. The fiscal deficit was an estimated 10.7% of GDP in 2018<sup>i</sup>. The current debt is neck in neck with the GDP growth, such an economic outlook hinders the development and ultimately the ability to reduce poverty conditions.

According to Dr Godfrey Kanyenze, Zimbabwe is a broken state that needs its fundamental institutions to be reformed in order to get out of the economic slump that the country has endured. Dr Kanyenze gave a brief historical scope of how the economic situation had deteriorated. Between 1999-2008, Zimbabwe lost 52% of its GDP. Approximately 94.5% of the population was employed in the informal sector in 2014. Dr Kanyenze highlighted the negative factors and subsequent effects that contribute to the economic imbalances. For instance, this has impaired the ability of young people to participate in and contribute towards the formal economy with 98% of the youth being employed in the informal economy. Therefore, this leaves young people with a 2% chance of being formally employed and obtaining sustainable job security.

The emergence of surrogate currencies since 2009 in order to counteract the skyrocketing inflation rates has not eased the spending power in the economy. The lack and/or absence of physical cash in the country which has led to shortages of basic livelihood products such as food and fuel to being constrained. It is the masses that have had to bear the brunt of these constraints at the failures of proper and good governance by the previous regime.

Zimbabwe is dealing with a massive accumulative debt yet there are talks of opening new line credit in spite of the fiscal deficit. The perception is it is counterintuitive to the progress required. The current rhetoric being propagated that Zimbabwe is opened for business is risky when there are fundamental issues that have not been dealt with historically and the current challenges going forward. Addressing the economic crisis requires the elimination of the parallel economy that has been fostered in the form of false currency, that is the bond notes and more activity in the formal economy. What exists currently is more of an informal economy than formal.

The strategies devised to address the economic stagnation has not bared fruitful results as yet. Dr Kanyeze expressed the concern of relying heavily on technocrats is that it overshadows at the expense of a vacuum of political will. Moreover, technocrats that have an agenda that is the fundamental perpetuating western ideology that does not intertwine with the challenges in Zimbabwe or any finding any African resolutions. The need to have governance structures that foster the ability for the youth to participate in the formal economy is ever more so necessary to kick-start the economy.

The open discussion spoke to an array of issues that sought to question past challenges and prospects that would speak to the future of engagement in Zimbabwe. The most pressing issue was the need for an economic dialogue not only for the government but all sectors of society to tackle together. The turnaround time in which President Mnangwagwa has is a small window to convince the 'Zimbabwe is open for business' rhetoric to foreign investors. The need to reconcile governance and the economic management issues is quite clearly needed instead of treating it as a dichotomous issue nor one superseding the other.

## **Transitional Justice**

The dawn of a new democratic dispensation does not necessarily imply the slate is wiped clean of the past transgressions endured. The fact remains impending issues of people violated under the previous regime past still requires resolution before the country can truly transition and transform into a peaceful state. Transitional justice has become an integral part of modern peacebuilding and it is an effective mechanism of sustainable pace.

Dr Ruth Murambadoro's address sought to bring light to the agenda in which transitional justice in Zimbabwe should work within by giving various accounts of definition and the historical basis of its importance within a broken society. She highlighted the need to address the following in realising a favourable outcome to this process:

- Stand by the work transitional justice commission
- The need to document and publish the transgressions and violations inflicted on people.
- Tackle issues of impunity.
- Allowing for an adequate healing process- i.e. therapy and compensation.

The National Peace Reconciliation Commission (NPRC) 10-year mandate which commenced in August 2013<sup>ii</sup>. Moreover, President Mnagwagwa has signed the NPRC Bill into law on 5 January 2018 to further strengthen the commission and its mandate. This leaves only 5 years left for the mandate to be fulfilled. The challenges this commission has met in operating continues to under the ability for the commission being able to fulfil the mandate it has been given in the timeframe given.

Dr Muramabadoro expresses this is not enough time unless the government relents to the needs to fulfil the purpose of the commission. The framework in which the truth commission has yet to translate into a meaningful outcome that benefits the communities it was meant to work for initially. There have been many factors that have contributed to the credibility of this process is the reach of the commissions to the people especially in the hinterlands is sordidly neglected. The other issue is that those that have been able to come forward and express, the chances of the offenders will not be reprimanded for their actions. There have been fundamental failure to document and publish the findings of the commission that have taken place thus far. Moreover, the issues if documenting the findings, it poses to implicate people that are prominent and close to the current administration. With no clear indication if they will be convicted of their actions gives the perception that is might be a futile exercise. The challenge to the new administration that was even posted in the previous regime is fostering the culture of violence that is in embedded in society shall there be a continuation of the perpetual cycle of violence and inequality in society. Until such h a time where there is an acknowledgement that Zimbabwe is in need of healing but also recourse can human dignity be brought back and the state begins to develop as a unit. To say that transitional justice as a methodical process could not yield the required results. The nation is need of serious spiritual healing in order to emerge cleansed of the past atrocities inflicted on one another. The role of religious actors should form part of the new processes as they once did in documenting the Gukurahundi massacres which resulted in more than 20,000 deaths in the Matabeleland region in the 1980s<sup>iii</sup>. The difference it would make being a part of the holistic with the inclusion of spiritual healing aspect as well as having experience in the expedition of reconciling the people of Zimbabwe.

### **Civil Society Organisation and Solidarity with Zimbabwe**

The formation of civil society activism has characterised more of reactionary to the authoritarian regime. The activism within civil society organisation has somewhat depreciated over the years and needs to be revitalised. The democratisation process has yet to realise all the fundamental principles specifically inequality. Ms Matshe expressed how the focus of activism over the years has broken down and become stagnate which is a concern because there is a need for the voice of the people with issues being endured by the people. A participant questioned what is currently being done on the ground in spite of the overall mute activity. On the contrary, the environment that the voice of people to be heard within the existing democratic processes have not been favourable to the civil organisation, to the extent creating fatigue amongst the activist. Another matter that has been a stumbling block in the unity all Zimbabwe is the spread of misinformation on social media platforms. The spread of fake news in a form of propaganda that favours the ruling party and suppressing of information of the serious afflictions on the public in Zimbabwe misdirects the ability for people to stand together with one voice to express their concerns. Ms Matshe expressed that as a person

who has her ear on the ground that in this new era of Zimbabwe the people can only entrust the new government once they re-establish equality and respecting the democratic processes that put them in power.

The transition of Zimbabwe requires first and foremost Zimbabweans at the centre and forefront of their transition and transformation process. It is also the responsibility of their neighbours to support and foster this process. The solidarity movements have a great role now in this transformation process. Moreover, regional institutions such as SADC have not been vocal in support of the new regime post the elections which can be interpreted as outright neglect. Regional institutions and organisation bear the legitimacy and credibility to influence the new government to enforce change necessary for change. COSATU has been a long-standing relationship of Trade Federation in Zimbabwe. The need to re-emphasize the relationship that would foresee the labour movement being a force for the working class voice. The need to restore the fundamental principles that serve the function of trade unions are imperative in the transformation of Zimbabwe's labour sector. Mr Lucian Segame also highlighted the important role that South Africa plays and should continue to do so in Zimbabwe's transformation process. The need to re-establish grassroots activities for the purpose of familiarising those interest in the causes of what is happening on the ground could re-ignite the support with the people of Zimbabwe in their fight for a sustainable livelihood.

### **Recommendations and way forward**

- Motivate and advance and SADC /regional engagement to address the issues of Zimbabwe.
- The need to **strengthen transitional justice as an ongoing process** and not reduced to events. Expedite the documentation of the stories being revealed in the commission that will enable actions to take place. This will ensure that the process has value to the people as their past transgression are addressed.
- Foster rigorous support for and by civil society needs to evaluate the focus of the issues that need to be addressed.
- The regional institution within and outside of Zimbabwe have a significant role in addressing the inequalities that plague the communities and ensure that the fundamental rights of every individual are noticed and realised. The need for civil society organisation to return to be a sphere of influence is ever more so necessary at this time.
- Establishment of an **economic dialogue**: This would address the issue of surrogate currencies, doing away with rent seeking. Restore the systems of checks and balance. The need to have an economic dialogue is a major priority to kick start

- **Institutional reform** in all sectors of the state needs to take place immediately to renew legitimacy and creditability within the state. This, in turn, will require serious intervention from entities like the SADC and South Africa.
- Create policies that are youth driven would catalyse and create an enabling environment for youth to actively participate in the formalised economy and active political participation.
- Re-establish the solidarity movements between Zimbabwe and South Africa civil society movements.
- Strengthen people to people engagement

The new political dispensation has a mammoth task ahead of them to turn around the situation in Zimbabwe. Pressure from all aspects of society, regional institutions and South Africa must hold the current government accountable and offer much-needed support and guidance.

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*The analysis and recommendations included in this Policy Briefing do not necessarily reflect the view of SALO or any of the donors or conference participants, but rather draw upon the major strands of discussion put forward at the event. Participants neither reviewed nor approved this document. The contents of the report are the sole responsibility of SALO, and can under no circumstances be regarded as reflecting the position of the donors who provided financial assistance for this policy dialogue session.*

**About the Southern African Liaison Office:**



The Southern African Liaison Office (SALO) is a South African-based not-for-profit civil society organisation which, through advocacy, dialogue, policy consensus and in-depth research and analysis, influences the current thinking and debates on foreign policy especially regarding African crises and conflicts.

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<sup>i</sup>International Monetary Fund 2018, World Economic Outlook Database-Country/Series-specific Notes (Zimbabwe), April.

<sup>ii</sup> The National Transition Justice Working Group of Zimbabwe (NTJWZ) (2017) *A Guide to Understanding the National Peace and Reconciliation Commission in Zimbabwe*.

<sup>iii</sup> The Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace in Zimbabwe compiled a report on human rights abuses in Matabeleland and the Midlands during the period of 1980-1988 titled *Breaking the Silence, Building True Peace*, March 1997.

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