



# Zimbabwe's Human Security Situation and Covid-19



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# Introduction

The concept of human security refers to a type of security beyond the traditional approach of prioritising the security of the state. In fact, the state is often the actor that creates insecurity for its or other citizens. This can be deliberate as well as an unintended effect.<sup>1</sup> Thus, human security prioritises the welfare of the individual above all else.<sup>2</sup> Zimbabwe's human security situation has been negatively affected by the Covid-19 pandemic, however, even before Covid-19 it was in a precarious position. This article will investigate Zimbabwe's human security situation during the pandemic and the measures taken by the state to curb its spread. The Zimbabwean state has deliberately and unintendedly placed many of its citizens in a human in-secure environment. If Zimbabwe moves its security priorities to a people-centered approach in order to prevent human insecurity, instead of responding to it afterwards, it will be more protected from external shocks, such as a global pandemic.

## Human Security

Human security is best known by the following quote by Kofi Anan: "[f]reedom from want, freedom from fear and the freedom of future generations to inherit a healthy natural environment."<sup>3</sup> Freedom from fear includes the absence of personal and physical violence as well as protection from conflict and the consequences thereof. Freedom from want includes the existence of basic needs and the rights to food, shelter, and development. It also includes factors such as hunger, deprivation, healthcare, and development.<sup>4</sup>

Human Security is categorised in seven subsections: economic security, food security, health security, environmental security, personal security, community security and political security.<sup>5</sup> Most of these categories are relevant when investigating the case of Zimbabwe from a human security perspective. Further, the United Nations has identified four core notions of human security. The first is that it is a universal concern. In this way, national situations of (in)security influence global (in)security. The reverse is also true. Second, the different components are interdependent. Third, the way in which to ensure security is more effective from a preventative approach than an interventionist approach. And lastly, as mentioned above, people are the main referents to be secured.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> United Nations. 2003. Human Security Now: Commission on Human Security. New York. 1-159.

<sup>2</sup> Paris, R. 2001. 'Human Security: Paradigm Shift or Hot Air?', *International Security*, 26(2):87 – 102.

<sup>3</sup> United Nations Development Programme, Human Development Report, 1994 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), p. 22.

<sup>4</sup> Hanlon, R.J and Kenneth, C. 2016. *Freedom from Fear, Freedom from Want: an Introduction to Human Security*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

<sup>5</sup> United Nations Development Programme, Human Development Report, 1994 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), p. 22.

<sup>6</sup> United Nations. 2003. Human Security Now: Commission on Human Security. New York. 1-159.

## Economic and food security

Economic security and food security go hand in hand and are interdependent. An example of economic security is freedom from poverty, and an example of food security is access to adequate food. The novel coronavirus which reached Zimbabwe on 20 March 2020 not only impacted the health factor of human security (see below) but preliminary research has shown that it also had widespread implications for economic and food security.<sup>78</sup>

Economic growth in Zimbabwe had been on the decline for the past decade. This has been exacerbated by the Covid-19 pandemic. Even before the pandemic, Zimbabwe had been largely reliant on its primary sector (agriculture and mineral extraction). This sector became uncompetitive due to the high capital costs involved, especially for labour. Another pre-Covid economic trend is that the official unemployment rate is 11 percent, however, most people who work do so in the informal economy and do temporary, insecure work.<sup>9</sup>

Moreover, Zimbabwe began a national lockdown on 21 March 2020 in an attempt to combat the spread of Covid-19. This included the closure of the informal economy where many Zimbabweans make their income. This has resulted in job losses and a decline in income, which effects people's ability to buy food and essential commodities. Thus, many people's economic and food security are being threatened by the pandemic and the consequences thereof. The economic slowdown will be detrimental to food security as many basic goods are imported from South Africa and elsewhere.<sup>10</sup> Further, hyperinflation is making necessities too expensive for many Zimbabweans to afford - at the beginning of 2020, about 95, 000 children were suffering from malnutrition.<sup>11</sup>

This will only get worse as a result of the measures taken during 2020. The forecast for Zimbabwe's economy is that growth will continue to be negative and will have an adverse inflationary impact. The World Food Programme predicts that by the end of the year, 60% of the population (8,6 million people), will be food

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<sup>78</sup>Zimbabwe COVID-19 infections spike to 132. 2020. Medical Press. 26 May. Available: <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2020-05-zimbabwe-covid-infections-spike.html>

<sup>8</sup> United Nations Development Programme. 2020. Policy Brief. A Preliminary Assessment of the Socio-economic Impact of Coronavirus (COVID -19) on Zimbabwe.

<sup>9</sup> United Nations Development Programme. 2020. Policy Brief. A Preliminary Assessment of the Socio-economic Impact of Coronavirus (COVID -19) on Zimbabwe.

<sup>10</sup> United Nations Development Programme. 2020. Policy Brief. A Preliminary Assessment of the Socio-economic Impact of Coronavirus (COVID -19) on Zimbabwe.

<sup>11</sup> UNICEF. 2020. Zimbabwe Humanitarian Situation Report. Multi-hazard Situation Mid-Year Report: (January-July 2020).

insecure.<sup>12</sup> Economic and food security are thus interdependent. However, these factors of human security will also affect and be affected by the health and environmental aspects of human security.

#### Health and environmental security

Health security includes protection from diseases and access to adequate healthcare.<sup>13</sup> Zimbabwe's healthcare system has been hit hard by the Covid-19 pandemic for which it was not prepared. However, there is an opportunity for Zimbabwe to use its experience with Covid-19 to strengthen the healthcare system to ensure the future health security of its citizens.

In 2015, the Zimbabwe Service Availability and Readiness Assessment Report revealed shortcomings in all the six World Health Organisation health building blocks namely, human resources, medical products, vaccines and technology, health financing, health information, service delivery, leadership and governance. Currently, the healthcare system is under-resourced - financially and in terms of personnel. The UNDP states that " [a]ccording to the Ministry of Health and Child Care, there are 1.6 physicians and 7.2 nurses for every 10,000 people, against WHO recommendations of 4.45 doctors, nurses and midwives (health workers) per 1000 population needed to meet the SDGs." Further, strikes by medical staff have been ongoing, resulting from poor working conditions and low wages.<sup>14</sup>

Despite this, the pandemic has revealed new ways in which the government, private sector and development organisations can come together to mobilise resources for the health sector.<sup>15</sup> In this way, the short term burden for Zimbabwe's health sector will be intense, however cooperation and investment from the private sector and development agencies could stimulate Zimbabwe's health sector in the medium- to long term. The Zimbabwean government has put in place several measures to curb the spread of the virus, such as a lockdown and social distancing regulations and measures to include life-saving interventions for people with HIV.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> World Food Programme. 2020. WFP urgently seeks international support to prevent millions of Zimbabweans plunging deeper into hunger. 30 July. Available: <https://www.wfp.org/news/wfp-urgently-seeks-international-support-prevent-millions-zimbabweans-plunging-deeper-hunger>

<sup>13</sup> Paris, R. 2001. 'Human Security: Paradigm Shift or Hot Air?', *International Security*, 26(2):87 – 102.

<sup>14</sup> United Nations Development Programme. 2020. Policy Brief. A Preliminary Assessment of the Socio-economic Impact of Coronavirus (COVID -19) on Zimbabwe.

<sup>15</sup> United Nations Development Programme. 2020. Policy Brief. A Preliminary Assessment of the Socio-economic Impact of Coronavirus (COVID -19) on Zimbabwe.

<sup>16</sup> United Nations Zimbabwe. 2020. IMMEDIATE SOCIO-ECONOMIC RESPONSE TO COVID-19 IN ZIMBABWE. Available: <https://www.undp.org/content/dam/rba/docs/COVID-19-CO-Response/UN-Zimbabwe-COVID19-Socio-economic-Framework-Final.pdf>

The support received from the private sector in this regard could shore up some health infrastructure for Zimbabwe.<sup>17</sup> If the Covid-19 pandemic is viewed through the lens of human security it could hold some opportunities for future improvements. An approach which prioritises human health during this time could make the best of these investment opportunities in order to create a stronger health system in the future.

The health, economic and food security of Zimbabweans is threatened by various environmental challenges. Zimbabwe is experiencing its worst drought in decades. This threatens water supplies and good sanitation practices, which is dangerous in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic. Many dams are below pumping level and have stopped operating and safe and clean water is unavailable to some communities, heightening the risk for disease.<sup>18</sup>

Further, the effects of Cyclone Idai, which hit Zimbabwe in March of 2019, are still felt. As a result of this, 128, 270 people need humanitarian assistance in the areas affected by the cyclone. Additionally, a locust outbreak is threatening to derail the already existing food insecurity faced by many Zimbabweans and will inevitably have a negative impact on economic activity, seeing as Zimbabwe is reliant on its agricultural sector.<sup>19</sup> Locusts are very harmful to food security as a 20km<sup>2</sup> swarm of locust can consume the same amount of food which could feed 2, 5000 people for a year. There are currently multiple swarms in the Southern African region. In Zimbabwe, they initially infested two areas of the Chiredzi district but have since moved to Manicaland province.<sup>20</sup>

Another worrying environmental event is the rising temperatures in Southern Africa as a whole. Temperatures are rising more than twice the average global rate and rainy seasons are becoming more erratic. This has the potential to create an unprecedented climate disaster in Zimbabwe, threatening its farmers and civilians.<sup>21</sup>

### Personal and Political security

Personal security includes physical safety from things such as torture, war, crime, domestic violence, drug use, suicide and even road accidents.<sup>22</sup> Many of these factors have been taking place in Zimbabwe, including torture

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Mutasa, H. 2020. Drought adds to hardship as Zimbabwe economy shrinks. Al Jazeera. 7 March. Available: <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/03/drought-adds-hardship-zimbabwe-economy-shrinks-200307094450513.html#:~:text=Severe%20water%20shortage%20is%20forcing,its%20worst%20drought%20in%20decades.&text=Zimbabwe%20is%20one%20of%20the,struggling%20with%20daily%20water%20shortages>.

<sup>19</sup> United Nations Development Programme. 2020. Policy Brief. A Preliminary Assessment of the Socio-economic Impact of Coronavirus (COVID -19) on Zimbabwe.

<sup>20</sup> FAO Regional Office for Africa. 2020. Locust outbreaks threaten food security in southern Africa. 4 September. Available: <http://www.fao.org/africa/news/detail-news/en/c/1306167/>

<sup>21</sup> Khorsandi, P. 2019. How drought is killing Zimbabwe. World Food Programme Insight. 3 December. Available: <https://insight.wfp.org/how-drought-is-killing-zimbabwe-c466176b73db>

<sup>22</sup> Paris, R. 2001. 'Human Security: Paradigm Shift or Hot Air?', *International Security*, 26(2):87 – 102.



and abductions. This also relates to political security, where the enjoyment of rights and freedom from political oppression should be present to safeguard this type of security. Personal security and political security are thus interdependent.

This is especially true for women. According to feminist scholars, the personal is political and the political is personal. The public/ private divide is constructed, however, men dominate the public (political) sphere, while women are forced into the private (personal/ domestic) sphere.<sup>23</sup> These spheres are constructed through power relations, through the dichotomies of masculinities and femininities.<sup>24</sup> These constructed dichotomies, in turn, affect women's daily lives. Thus, personal relationships are infused with power structures, usually along gendered lines.<sup>25</sup> A gendered perspective to personal and political security is relevant in Zimbabwe.

## The personal is political

As a result of the gendered dichotomies and the power relations infused by these, women and girls are more vulnerable to the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic. Ideas about femininity result in the expectation for women to bear the brunt of care work. Female nurses are on the forefront of working to curb the disease, women's businesses will be negatively affected by the lockdown as they are more likely to work in the informal economy, and women and girl's health, especially reproductive health, will not be prioritised as investments in healthcare will focus on the pandemic.<sup>26</sup>

The personal is political in Zimbabwe. Personal security for women is largely determined by political decisions. The national lockdown due to the Covid-19 pandemic has had several personal impacts on women's lives. The national gender-based violence hotline had recorded a total of 4,032 calls from the beginning of the lockdown in March to August, an increase of over 60% compared to pre-lockdown numbers. About 94% of the calls came from women.<sup>27</sup> It is important to note that these numbers are often not a true representation of the number of gender-based and domestic violence incidents. Many women do not report on these types of violence for various reasons, such as being locked up with their abuser and being unable to call the hotline as they are always being monitored.

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<sup>23</sup> Petteyman, J. J. 2005. *Worlding Women: a Feminist International Politics*. London and New York: Routledge.

<sup>24</sup> Enloe, C. 2000. *Bananas, Beaches and Bases: Making Feminist Sense of International Politics*. Los Angeles, Berkeley and London: University of California Press.

<sup>25</sup> Enloe, C. 2000. *Bananas, Beaches and Bases: Making Feminist Sense of International Politics*. Los Angeles, Berkeley and London: University of California Press.

<sup>26</sup> United Nations Development Programme. 2020. Policy Brief. A Preliminary Assessment of the Socio-economic Impact of Coronavirus (COVID -19) on Zimbabwe.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

Of the cases reported, an increase in psychological violence was noted in July, with other dominant forms of violence being physical, economic and sexual. Almost 90% of cases were intimate partner violence.<sup>28</sup> Further, the number of gender-based violence cases against adolescent girls have also been on the incline since the beginning of the lockdown period. An increased risk in child marriage due to the closures of schools and economic hardship is another factor plaguing young girls in Zimbabwe.<sup>29</sup> This is compounded by an increase in teenage pregnancies. Survivors have been experiencing limited access to justice, as plaintiffs who need to attend court are being turned away by security forces at roadblocks, despite having all the documentation allowing them to travel to court.<sup>30</sup>

Further, sexual violence has been used as a political tool in Zimbabwe on various occasions. In January of 2019 a national stay-away was organised by the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions and other civil society groups to protest against the 150 per cent increase in fuel prices amidst an already difficult economic situation. During the stay-away, reports of systematic torture, indiscriminate beatings and arrests were reported. Further, politically motivated sexual violence was also reported to the United Nations Special Rapporteur to Zimbabwe. Some women claimed they had been raped by military and police members. The women explained that they did not make formal complaints because of a lack of trust and fear of the police system.<sup>31</sup> It is clear from the above that the personal is in fact political. Personal experiences of gender inequality, discrimination and sexual and gender-based violence are often motivated or caused by political elements.

## Children

Zimbabwe has one of the highest youth literacy rates in Africa - 91, 75%.<sup>32</sup> The school closures due to the lockdown regulations render children vulnerable in various ways. This can have negative impacts on children's learning, physical, social and mental health and well-being. It runs the risk of reversing the progress made on the high literacy rate as many children are unable to be schooled at home. This will exacerbate existing

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<sup>28</sup> Zimbabwe Digital Situation Support. United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. 24 September 2020. Available: <https://reports.unocha.org/en/country/zimbabwe/card/2XxB9GOV93/>

<sup>29</sup> United Nations Zimbabwe. 2020. IMMEDIATE SOCIO-ECONOMIC RESPONSE TO COVID-19 IN ZIMBABWE. Available: <https://www.undp.org/content/dam/rba/docs/COVID-19-CO-Response/UN-Zimbabwe-COVID19-Socio-economic-Framework-Final.pdf>

<sup>30</sup> Zimbabwe Digital Situation Support. United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. 24 September, 2020. Available: <https://reports.unocha.org/en/country/zimbabwe/card/2XxB9GOV93/>

<sup>31</sup> Report of the Special Rapporteur on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association. 2020. United Nations General Assembly.

<sup>32</sup> United Nations Zimbabwe. 2020. IMMEDIATE SOCIO-ECONOMIC RESPONSE TO COVID-19 IN ZIMBABWE. Available: <https://www.undp.org/content/dam/rba/docs/COVID-19-CO-Response/UN-Zimbabwe-COVID19-Socio-economic-Framework-Final.pdf>

vulnerabilities and inequalities among children, especially for those with disabilities, girls, those in rural areas, orphans and those from poor households and fragile families. It could lead to some children permanently dropping out of school which will negatively affect their futures. This will have various consequences for human security, currently and in the future. Vulnerable children will not enjoy personal security and a lower literacy rate will inevitably have a negative impact on economic security.

## Human rights abuses

Political security is not guaranteed in Zimbabwe. According to the UN's Special Rapporteur Report there have been many "reports of massive door-to-door searches and unlawful entry into private homes, particularly from councillors and Members of Parliament representing the Movement for Democratic Change and the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions, as well as leaders of targeted civil society organizations who were even abducted from or arrested at their homes."<sup>33</sup>

Journalists and civil society organization leaders have been arrested under the auspices of calling for the incitement of public violence. This includes Hopewell Chin'ono, a journalist who broke a big government corruption scandal linked to the first family, and Jacob Ngarivhume, leader of the non-government organization, Transform Zimbabwe, who called on civilians to demonstrate against corruption. They were both detained and denied bail for six weeks. Furthermore, they were denied prison visits and prevented from wearing Personal Protective Equipment during their stay. This threatened their personal security, as prisons are Covid-19 hotspots, and this increased their risk of contracting the virus. They were curtailed of their freedom of expression and political freedom and thus did not enjoy political security.<sup>34</sup>

Moreover, two journalists Sam Takawira and Frank Chikwore were arrested and held for four days in May (2020), accused of breaking lockdown regulations. They were working on a documentary titled: *Is there Freedom Under Lockdown? How Covid-19 Is Being Used to Attack Democratic Rights in Zimbabwe*. They were interviewing three MDC Alliance members who had also been victims of alleged state violence and torture, Joana Mamombe and youth leaders Cecilia Chimbiri and Netsai Marova who are also facing charges for faking their own

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<sup>33</sup> Report of the Special Rapporteur on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association. 2020. United Nations General Assembly

<sup>34</sup> Mohamed, F. 2020. Detained journalist Hopewell Chin'ono vows to continue reporting on corruption. Daily Maverick. 27 July. Available: <https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2020-07-27-detained-journalist-and-government-critic-hopewell-chinono-vows-to-continue-anti-corruption-campaign/>



abductions. Further, the MDC Alliance vice-chairperson is imprisoned, also facing charges of inciting violence related to the July 31 demonstrations.<sup>35</sup>

Journalists and opposition members are being systematically targeted and their political and personal securities are being suppressed. This decrease of the democratic space renders the people of Zimbabwe politically and personally insecure. This will have consequences for the other factors of human security. Being unable to speak out and keep the government accountable could have consequences for the people's economic, health, environmental and food insecurities. This is an example of how the government is deliberately suppressing political security, as opposed to an unintended consequence. These intentional acts could be detrimental to the region's stability and democracy.

## Conclusion

The human security as a perspective on Zimbabwe is useful as it allows for a broad and holistic view of the security situation as faced by the citizens of the country. It allows for a thorough investigation of how the Zimbabwean government in some cases deliberately clamps down on citizen's human security and at other times does so as an unintended consequence of its policies. Further, the ways in which economic security, food security, health security, environmental security, personal security, and political security are interdependent and impacts one another reflect the different intersections of people's lived experiences. Moreover, human security is international in that the lived experiences of people in one country influences others. Zimbabwe's precarious human security situation will affect neighbouring states and the region and could have an adverse effect on regional stability.

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<sup>35</sup> Mahomed, F. 2020. Ailing journalist Hopewell Chin'ono and activist Jacob Ngarivhume finally granted bail. Daily Maverick. 2 September. Available: <https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2020-09-03-ailing-journalist-hopewell-chinono-and-activist-jacob-ngarivhume-finally-granted-bail/>

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