



Liaison, Dialogue and Research

Reg no: 2006/020285/08

The Southern African Liaison Office (NPC)

Liesbeek House, River Park,
Gloucester Road, Mowbray, Cape Town 7700

Tel: +27 (021) 680 5306

Email: info@salo.org.za

www.salo.org.za

[@salo_info](https://twitter.com/salo_info)

Policy Brief

19 November 2021, Zoom Platform

SALO Public Multi-stakeholder Dialogue: Zimbabwe Civil Society Briefing

- *By Athenkosi Thoba*

SALO PUBLIC CIVIL SOCIETY BRIEFING ON ZIMBABWE

FRIDAY 19 NOVEMBER 10:00-12:00

REGISTER HERE

SPEAKERS INCLUDE:

 @salo_info

 salo.org.za

 LIVESTREAM:

fb.com/saloinfo



MICHELLE MATSVAIRE,
LEGAL OFFICER AT
ZIMBABWE
ENVIRONMENTAL LAW
ASSOCIATION (ZELA)



SAMUEL MATSIKURE,
PROGRAMMES MANAGER
AT GAYS AND LESBIANS
OF ZIMBABWE (GALZ)



BLESSING VAVA,
DIRECTOR AT CRISIS IN
ZIMBABWE COALITION



Executive Summary

Civil society organisations (CSOs) are important role players in the socio-economic development and advancement of democratic principles in many developing countries. Their importance has been observed in strengthening democracy and deepening good governance.¹ However, the ability of CSOs to contribute to development depends on the nature and character of their relations with the state.² According to Itai Kabonga and Kwashirai Zvokuomba, “*the relations between CSOs and the state in Zimbabwe are not static but are in a constant state of flux, swinging from collegiality to an attempt at reformation to confrontation.*”³ As a reflection on the status of CSOs and the environment in which they conduct their affairs, this Policy Brief is a product of the Southern African Liaison Office’s (SALO) public multi-stakeholder Civil Society Briefing held on 19 November 2021 via Zoom.

Zimbabwe continues to undergo seismic political and economic shifts. Since the military coup that removed the late President Robert Mugabe in 2017, the country has battled with socioeconomic challenges and political tensions. The country is also faced with the shrinking of the democratic space and the use of violence against the political opposition by the current regime. This challenge to civic space has not shown any signs of slowing down and state intervention has further led to an even more fragmented and weakened civil society and opposition. As such, in the lead-up to the 2023 national election, it is important to amplify the voices of ordinary Zimbabweans and civil society groups who have sought to keep Zimbabwe on the region and South Africa’s public agenda.⁴

The dialogue allowed Zimbabwean civil society leaders to provide an update on the rapidly deteriorating human rights situation in the country and other aspects of the ongoing political and economic crisis. Indeed, since the Coronavirus hit Zimbabwe, many feel that the government’s management of the crisis has been poor and deepened existing political tensions.⁵ The worsening economic, social and political crisis in Zimbabwe has ramifications for the SADC region, particularly South Africa.

Context of Discussions

The Significance of the 4th Anniversary of the 2017 coup - where is Zimbabwe now?

¹ Dessalegn Rahmato. 2010. “Civil Society and the State: The Challenge of Democratisation in Ethiopia.” In *(Dis)Enabling the Public Sphere: Civil Society Regulation in Africa*, edited by B. Moyo, 191–222. Midrand: Southern Africa Trust.

² Bhekinkosi Moyo. 2010. *(Dis)Enabling the Public Sphere: Civil Society Regulation in Africa*. Midrand: Southern Africa Trust.

³ Itai Kabonga & Kwashirai Zvokuomba (2021): State–Civil Society Relations in Zimbabwe’s “Second Republic”, *International Journal of African Renaissance Studies, Multi-, Inter and Transdisciplinarity*, DOI:10.1080/18186874.2021.1949361

⁴ SALO

⁵ Maureen Kademaunga, Otto Saki. 2020. “Reclaiming Civil Society Legitimacy in Zimbabwe”. *Carnegie Europe*, 07 December 2020. Accessed on 15 June 2022 from <https://carnegieeurope.eu/2020/12/07/reclaiming-civil-society-legitimacy-in-zimbabwe-pub-83148>

This civil society briefing took place during the month of the 4th anniversary of the November 2017 military coup in Zimbabwe. In commemorating the demise of President Mugabe's rule, it was critical to reflect on the promises made by the Mnangagwa administration. All the promises that were made by the new administration came to nothing with Zimbabwe finding itself yet again in a precarious situation - which is potentially worse than it was under Mugabe.⁶ The Constitution of Zimbabwe was well celebrated after it came into effect in 2013, especially by civil society. Yet, instead of implementing that constitution, the current administration has engaged itself in spirited attempts to amend it.⁷ Integral to these attempts seems to be the desire of the current regime to consolidate its power ahead of the 2023 national elections.

According to Kabonga and Zvokuomba, *"since the outbreak of violence after the delay by the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission (ZEC) to announce the July 2018 presidential election results, the state (Second Republic) has been consistently attacking CSOs."*⁸ This has threatened the work of CSOs and Zimbabweans' civil liberties and presented many challenges in addressing issues facing ordinary people. In December 2018, acting Labour and Social Welfare minister Kazembe Kazembe issued a Cabinet briefing statement where a warning was given to CSOs that 'meddle in politics', threatening to expel them.⁹ The minister explicitly warned: *"Should these organizations continue with this behaviour, the government will not hesitate to withdraw their registration certificates"*.¹⁰

Speakers at the civil society briefing informed participants about the recent Constitutional amendments by the Zimbabwe government, including the Private Voluntary Organizations Act (PVO Act). The government also introduced the Cyber Security Act and the Patriotic Act.¹¹ These amendments are all aimed at muzzling the operations of civil society and clamping down on civil society organisations ahead of the 2023 national elections. Indeed, it was emphasised that *"the PVO Act was approved by the cabinet in August 2021 on the basis that the amendments are part of what they call 'efforts to deal with money laundering and financial terrorism', and therefore, they sought to punish the previewers for noncompliance."*¹²

It is clear that the government is attempting to manage and suppress the views of CSOs in the country. CSOs remain important role players in the socio-economic development of Zimbabwe. They are important in developing democratic practices in collaboration with the state as indicated above.

The promise of the 'Second Republic'

⁶ SALO. 2021. "SALO Public Multi-stakeholder Dialogue: Zimbabwe Civil Society Briefing", SALO, 19 November 2021.

⁷ Ibid

⁸ Itai Kabonga & Kwashirai Zvokuomba (2021): State–Civil Society Relations in Zimbabwe's "Second Republic", *International Journal of African Renaissance Studies, Multi-, Inter and Transdisciplinarity*, DOI:10.1080/18186874.2021.1949361

⁹ Xolisani Ncube. 2018. "ED Threatens to Deregister NGOs." *Newsday*, 12 December 2018. Accessed on 15 June 2022 from [ED threatens to de-register NGOs - NewsDay Zimbabwe](#)

¹⁰ Ibid

¹¹ SALO. 2021. "SALO Public Multi-stakeholder Dialogue: Zimbabwe Civil Society Briefing".

¹² Ibid

The term “Second Republic” or “New Dispensation” reflects the promise made by President Emerson Mnangagwa after the removal of former President Robert Mugabe. The Mnangagwa regime promised wide-ranging reforms of the country's political and governance models. This included:

- Restoring constitutionalism and rule of law;
- Ending rampant corruption that dominated the previous regime; and
- Promoting human rights and democracy.¹³

Instead of these promises, since the post-2018 national elections, Zimbabwe has witnessed democratic regression, the rise of corruption and financial mismanagement, and economic challenges. This points to more talk and less action, as the Crisis in Zimbabwe Coalition (CiZC) report points out.¹⁴ The report states that *“there has been democratic regression and increasing reliance on crude authoritarianism in the exercises of public power. There has not been much difference between the first and second republic”*.¹⁵

During the dialogue, it emerged that the general feeling is that President Emmerson Mnangagwa made broad promises on political reforms but has failed to deliver since taking power in 2017. Since the consummation of the ‘Second Republic’, Zimbabwe has seen the unilateral gazetting of Statutory Instruments that are subverting Parliament's legislative role and oversight capacity.¹⁶ The democratic space in Zimbabwe is continuing to shrink and currently, it appears that the regime is weaponising the law.

In terms of the overall feeling regarding the ‘Second Republic’, the report by CiZC points out that *“governance and economic relations issues in Zimbabwe have generally attracted negative ratings for more than two decades. Based on key business and economic indicators useful for assessing the strength of the economy, the Second Republic scorecard has never been different from its predecessor.”*¹⁷

In recent months, Zimbabwe has experienced a high number of systematic violations of human rights, particularly the targeting of opposition members and civic actors such as journalists, MDC Alliance members, student leaders, and trade unionists by security forces. This is not what the ‘Second Republic’ promised and indeed many CSOs and human rights activists have been vocal about the state of democratic redress in the country.¹⁸ Recent amendments to the Constitution point to the growing attempt to criminalise the work of civil society and entrench authoritarian rule in Zimbabwe. The government is clamping down on anyone who will present a threat to its power going into the 2023 national elections.

Climate Justice and Sustainable Development

¹³ SALO. 2021. “SALO Public Multi-stakeholder Dialogue: Zimbabwe Civil Society Briefing”.

¹⁴ Elia Ntali. 2021. “The Second Republic Has Failed to Deliver Its Promises – Report”, 18 November 2021, *AllAfrica*. Accessed on 15 June 2022 from <https://allafrica.com/stories/202111180599.html>

¹⁵ Ibid

¹⁶ SALO. 2021. “SALO Public Multi-stakeholder Dialogue: Zimbabwe Civil Society Briefing”.

¹⁷ Elia Ntali. 2021. “The Second Republic Has Failed to Deliver Its Promises – Report”, 18 November 2021, *AllAfrica*. Accessed on 15 June 2022 from <https://allafrica.com/stories/202111180599.html>

¹⁸ SALO. 2021. “SALO Public Multi-stakeholder Dialogue: Zimbabwe Civil Society Briefing”.

The public dialogue touched on the importance of climate justice and sustainable development. This is important in the context of Zimbabwe because climate change affects people differently from different social and economic backgrounds. In his recent article, climate change communicator Peter Makwanya (*NewsDay*), points out that vulnerable communities are subject to the unpredictable nature of climate change impacts and risks in Zimbabwe.¹⁹ He states that these communities are occupied by the poor, but they are only poor due to a lack of material resources, while very rich in local knowledge, resilience, and expertise.²⁰

Vulnerable local communities include people living with disabilities, women, youth, and children. The assumption that climate change affects everyone equally leads to climate injustice. The global community and civil society groups must adopt the best initiatives that look at mitigation, adaptation and addressing the injustices of climate change.²¹ In the spirit of the 2015 Sustainable Development Goals, Makwanya argues that there should be an inclusive action plan to ensure that no one is left behind.²² It is therefore important that local communities and vulnerable groups are protected against the dangers posed by climate change and climate injustice.

The SALO Public Civil Society Briefing focused on the role of CSOs in advancing climate justice and sustainable development, specifically the extraordinary steps that the 2021 United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP26) took by requesting countries to revisit and strengthen their climate change pledges by the end of 2022. This dialogue was an opportunity to hear the views of different CSOs on the outcomes of COP26. In the case of Zimbabwe and many other developing countries, there was a major call for a phase-down of coal, as opposed to a phase-out of coal as was expected.²³

In his opinion piece for *Aljazeera*, President Mnangagwa indicated that

“If world leaders do not step-up climate action, developing nations at the forefront of the fight against climate change will see jobs lost, livelihoods destroyed, and lives devastated.”²⁴

He indicated that this should be avoided and that, *“Zimbabwe is coming to the table with ambitious plans to tackle climate change and save our planet.”²⁵*

Indeed, the briefing highlighted that Zimbabwe revised its nationally determined contributions and committed to a conditional 40% per capita greenhouse gas emission

¹⁹ Peter Makwanya. 2022. “Mainstreaming local climate actions into development planning”, *NewsDay*, 23 May 2022. Accessed on 15 June 2022 from <https://www.newsday.co.zw/2022/05/mainstreaming-local-climate-actions-into-development-planning/>

²⁰ Ibid

²¹ Ibid

²² Ibid

²³ SALO. 2021. “SALO Public Multi-stakeholder Dialogue: Zimbabwe Civil Society Briefing”.

²⁴ Emmerson Mnangagwa. 2021. “Zimbabwe is set on tackling climate change”, *Aljazeera*, 14 November 2021. Accessed on 17 June 2022 from <https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2021/11/14/zimbabwe-is-set-on-tackling-climate-change>

²⁵ Ibid

reduction by 2030, increasing it from 33%.²⁶ ²⁷ While it is critical to reflect and understand the challenges posed by climate change, it is also imperative to ask how developing countries could achieve a decrease in emissions while sustaining development and poverty eradication. Zimbabwe as a country must be able to balance the issues of climate change and climate justice, whilst trying to develop its economy. Essentially, civil society groups felt that the global community must provide developing countries with the necessary funds for adaptation.²⁸

Democratisation and Shrinking Civic Space

CSOs in Zimbabwe indicate a growing feeling that the government is attempting to use to Constitution and the law to crack down on opposition and civil society. They point out that there is a clear weaponisation of the law, in that it is being used for political gains. The above-mentioned amendments to the PVO Bill have had a chilling effect on CSOs and they are afraid to speak out on human rights abuses in Zimbabwe.²⁹

There is a clear indication that the democratic space is shrinking in Zimbabwe and that human rights abuses continue unabated in the run-up to the 2023 national elections. The changes made by the government on the PVO Bill have resulted in reluctance from civil society and human rights activists to condemn these actions. In the current state, the norms of democracy are no longer being respected. Zimbabwe and ZANU-PF's historic aspirations of the liberation struggle continue to move towards authoritarian rule and dictatorship.³⁰

The Road to 2023 National Elections, Any Lessons for Civil Society?

Many political actors are focussing on the upcoming national elections. ZANU-PF is ramping up its campaigning while the opposition is attempting to provide a meaningful democratic contest come 2023. However, observers have indicated that the political and electoral playing field remains deeply uneven and stacked in favour of the ruling party.³¹ There are concerns about the readiness of the state to conduct free and fair elections in 2023. CSOs indicated that they are worried about the way ZANU-PF is acting.

The situation on the ground is that the government wants to implement laws which will make it dangerous for civil society to operate. As the country moves toward the 2023 national elections, the global community will witness a clamp down on civil society. Recent developments indicate that there is an overt military state in Zimbabwe.³² It is

²⁶ SALO. 2021. "SALO Public Multi-stakeholder Dialogue: Zimbabwe Civil Society Briefing".

²⁷ Greenhouse Gas Emissions Factsheet: Zimbabwe. 2015. Climate Links. Accessed on 17 June 2022 from <https://www.climatelinks.org/resources/greenhouse-gas-emissions-factsheet-zimbabwe>

²⁸ SALO. 2021. "SALO Public Multi-stakeholder Dialogue: Zimbabwe Civil Society Briefing".

²⁹ Kenneth Nyangani. 2022. "PVOs Bill suffocates CSO voices", *NewDay*, 2 June 2022. Accessed on 18 June 2022 from <https://www.newsday.co.zw/2022/06/pvos-bill-suffocates-cso-voices/>

³⁰ SALO. 2021. "SALO Public Multi-stakeholder Dialogue: Zimbabwe Civil Society Briefing".

³¹ Institute for Security Studies (ISS). 2022. "Slim chance that Zimbabwe's 2023 elections will be competitive", 23 May 2022. Accessed on 19 June 2022 from <https://issafrica.org/iss-today/slim-chance-that-zimbabwes-2023-elections-will-be-competitive>

³² SALO. 2021. "SALO Public Multi-stakeholder Dialogue: Zimbabwe Civil Society Briefing".

therefore essential that all pro-democratic forces join hands and create formidable lines of resistance to safeguard the fundamental freedoms of ordinary Zimbabweans.

Moving closer to the 2023 elections, the dialogue indicated the need to rejuvenate, reorganise, and strengthen civic groups with a focus on key issues, including democracy, the economy, and social service. CSOs pointed out that it was critical to mobilise the grassroots and mount a massive campaign that will restore citizen agency.³³ Furthermore, from a civil society perspective, it is imperative to engage the Zimbabweans living in the diaspora to add their voices to the continuing call for opening up the democratic space in Zimbabwe.³⁴

Indeed, some organisations have sought to challenge the Constitutional amendments through the legal route. While that is a step in the right direction, it is important to note that any solution regarding the current state of affairs in Zimbabwe needs to be a political one. The general population need to be educated about the Constitution and human rights in Zimbabwe. This will enable ordinary Zimbabweans to have a clear picture of whether the government is operating according to just rules and regulations.

The Role of the Region, Particularly South Africa

The civil society organisations present expressed the feeling that the region, particularly SADC structures, has a big role to play in bringing the government of Zimbabwe to order.³⁵ The laws and amendments that have been signed by the government show a clear violation of many protocols of which Zimbabwe is a signatory. Therefore, should SADC ignore these developments, the 2023 period will be very gloomy in terms of the government's adherence to democratic processes and practices. The current violence, kidnappings, and threats to the Constitution are pointing to what is coming.

A lot of work can be done by regional civil society organisations and solidarity movements in demanding good governance in Zimbabwe. Appreciating the SALO platform, CSOs expressed that these collective platforms help civil society and like-minded bodies strategise.³⁶ Such strategies are aimed at bringing the government of Zimbabwe to account and stopping the illegal manoeuvres that pose a threat to the existence of civil society and the fundamental freedoms of citizens. *"The POV Act, in our view, is not just targeted at us that are doing the political work or democracy work, or human rights work, but it [is] also going to move to those organisations that are dealing with the humanitarian relief."*³⁷ Civil society groups claim that ZANU-PF is using humanitarian aid to settle political scores. The idea is that *"if you don't belong to ZANU-PF, you are not going to get humanitarian aid"*.³⁸

The SADC region has to realise the growing challenges it faces in terms of democracy and security. The current security challenges facing Mozambique and the pro-democratic demonstrations that have taken place in eSwatini are testaments to this.

³³ Ibid

³⁴ Ibid

³⁵ Ibid

³⁶ Ibid

³⁷ SALO. 2021. "SALO Public Multi-stakeholder Dialogue: Zimbabwe Civil Society Briefing".

³⁸ Ibid

In this regard, civil society continues to raise more awareness, organise on the sidelines of SADC engagements, and amplify ordinary people's voices.³⁹ The aim is to make sure that regional players are forced to act.

Insofar as developments in Zimbabwe are concerned, there is a danger that there will be a regional humanitarian crisis SADC countries will have to grapple with. Already, South Africa is battling the issue of the Zimbabwean Exemption Permits (ZEPs). In this regard, it is estimated that almost 178,000 Zimbabwean nationals live, study, and work legally in South Africa with the ZEP.⁴⁰ Therefore, the more the issues facing Zimbabwe are not attended to, the more dangerous the humanitarian crisis SADC and South Africa will experience. In the near future, regional countries will not be able to host Zimbabwean fleeing from economic hardships and political repression. It is vital that the region acts now and put pressure on President Mnangagwa's administration to engage with civil society groups and implement the political reforms that it promised in the 'Second Republic'.

Recommendations

- Human rights activists and civil society must realise that the struggle for LGBT rights is a struggle for democracy and human rights and the struggle for climate justice is a struggle for equality and accountability.
- Civil society organisations should form alliance-building structures between different interest groups to advance the broader struggle for democracy and freedom in Zimbabwe.
- There is a need for more public constitutional discussions with communities to conscientise the Zimbabwean public.
- There must be a clear realisation that Zimbabwe is facing intersectional struggles, whether it is about youth and women participation or the climate.
- Since the current government came to be through an undemocratic process, its main goal remains focused on holding onto power and consolidating that power by whatever means necessary.
- CSOs should take into account that the past few years have shown that the current regime is not willing to reform and is not willing to ensure that democracy is restored in Zimbabwe.
- It is important to convene various interest groups, including the church, political parties, and different sectoral groups to advance a common voice on issues facing Zimbabwe. A well-coordinated campaign will push the regime to see the seriousness of the issues being raised by civil society groups.

³⁹ Ibid

⁴⁰ Tania Broughton. 2022. "Understanding the Zimbabwean permit case", *Moneyweb*, 21 June 2022. Accessed on 22 June 2022 from <https://www.moneyweb.co.za/news/africa/understanding-the-zimbabwean-permit-case/>

- It is critical that as Zimbabwe moves towards the 2023 national elections, the country hosts an all-stakeholder dialogue to try and address the deeply divided society. In such an engagement, arriving at a social contract is pivotal to forcing the government of Zimbabwe to come to the negotiating table and restore the rule of law and respect for the Constitution.
- There is an important role that regional solidarity groups and SADC structures can play in advancing the voices of CSOs from inside Zimbabwe.

Conclusion

This civil society briefing reflected on the state of affairs in Zimbabwe and the treatment that civil society groups face from the government. The past few years have seen the Zimbabwe government amending the country's Constitution with the sole aim of closing down civic space and suppressing dissent. The civic space is closing at a fast pace and in 2023, civil society might find it difficult to monitor elections. This requires that the pro-democracy movement advance a common view.

The push for dialogue must be a priority for civil society groups inside and outside of Zimbabwe. This calls for the Solidarity Movement in the region and the ANC Solidarity Group to push for more advocacy and action on Zimbabwe. Indeed, the role of CSOs in terms of increased oversight is critical as a response to the government's abuse of the rule of law. Lessons so far indicate that when faced with much government resistance, CSOs have tried to find new ways to safeguard dissent and build resilience against state repression.

According to Maureen Kademaunga and Otto Saki, *“the July 31 protest brought about a new collaboration among emerging voices, social movements, progressive media, and traditional CSOs.”*⁴¹ This collaboration is necessary for organising in the face of regime repression, which is being concealed behind emergency laws and amendments to the country's Constitution. It creates opportunities for civil society groups to come up with action plans to resist the onslaught of CSOs. These action plans should emphasise that the struggles are essentially the same - whether it is about the climate, democratic reform, or LGBTQI rights. Civil society is critical in advancing and challenging threats to freedom of association, freedom of choice, and freedom of assembly. The SALO civil society briefing on Zimbabwe reflected these essential elements of democracy and called for solidarity to achieve them.

The analysis and recommendations included in this brief 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 brief 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.

⁴¹ Maureen Kademaunga and Otto Saki. 2020. “Reclaiming Civil Society Legitimacy in Zimbabwe”, 7 December 2020, *Carnegie Europe*. Accessed on 17 June 2022 from <https://carnegieeurope.eu/2020/12/07/reclaiming-civil-society-legitimacy-in-zimbabwe-pub-83148>

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.

SALO would like to thank

Norwegian People's Aid (NPA)

for their direct support for this event



Norwegian People's Aid