

## **From Bread Basket to Basket Case: Can Zimbabweans regain their economic footing regardless of who wins the political power struggle?**

This research paper will articulate the far-reaching consequences of Zimbabwe's economic collapse. In particular it will focus on how the seeds of political and economic decline, sown throughout the 80s and 90s, came to fruition in dramatic and devastating fashion at the turn of the century and have seen a deterioration of every aspect of Zimbabwean life since.

The effects of Zimbabwe's decline are as numerous as they are far-reaching: internal displacement; widespread starvation; the collapse of the health services due to lack of qualified practitioners and medicines; large scale emigration of the skilled workforce; separation of families as spouses, or their children, leave home to search for work outside Zimbabwe; increasing isolation from the international community including suspension from the Commonwealth and being cut off from international loans and aid. It's a long list to which, recently, hundreds of deaths from a fresh cholera epidemic can now be added. The water system – neglected for so long – has finally given in and sanitation systems have crumbled.

Tina Fey, in one of the episodes of her hugely successful sitcom, *30 Rock*, was satirizing the political events in the US over the last year and, in so doing, examining the parallels between the obstacles faced by women in modern America and those that black people still have to overcome. In one scene two characters, a black man and a white woman, are engaged in a heated argument of one-upmanship – each trying show that he/she is still the more marginalized. At the climax of the exchange, the black male character shouts: "If it weren't for you people (whites), I'd still be in Africa. Gorgeous, politically stable Africa!" This followed by the breathless silence that the show uses to announce the delivery of a punch line.

For therein lies the joke. The continent that has hurtled from one crisis to another has veered so far to the extreme of the scale of profligacy, desperation and deprivation that it is difficult to see how it can be pulled back from the brink. "Well, we've tried everything else, what else is there to do but laugh?" one might ask. I don't believe that we have yet done "everything". I have a few ideas that I would like to substantiate through exhaustive research and that is the inspiration behind this proposal.

My own country, Zimbabwe, looked, for a time, to have escaped that most virulent of diseases. The one that is sometimes referred to as "The African disease": a bloody-minded unwillingness by a country's head of state to cede power under any circumstances. Yet Robert Mugabe's, and Zanu PF's, one-party rule has presided over a period of such unmitigated socio-economic decline and the protracted suffering of the Zimbabwean people that the joke, if ever it were funny, has now worn disastrously thin. I do not accept that there is no longer anything to do but shrug our shoulders and reduce the continent to a single punch line – albeit a tragicomic one.

The answer to how Zimbabweans can hope to rescue themselves from the abyss of poverty and oppression into which they have been plunged lies in understanding how it came to this is the first place. On paper, the country is a democracy. Which means that the people have the government that they put into power. On paper, there is

constitution – by which the “democratically elected” President is bound. Zimbabwe is rich in natural resources like copper. At least it used to be. And it is the fourth largest producer of tobacco in the world. Well, it was – back when there was an agricultural industry to speak of. All these things mean that Zimbabweans can, and should do more to influence their own destinies.

The Zimbabwe economy was in decline since as far back as 1990 when the ill thought out Economic Structural Adjustment Programme (ESAP) was introduced. But for the dramatic collapse we need only go back 8 years, to the turn of the millennium. February 12 and 13, 2000 to be specific. For it was on these dates that voters in Zimbabwe rejected the new constitution proposed by President Robert Mugabe and the Zimbabwe African National Union-Patriotic Front (Zanu-PF). Four months later, while escalating the lawless farm invasions and aided by violence against opposition party members, rigging of electoral registers and the strong-arm tactics of Chenjerai Hunzvi's National Liberation War Veterans' Association, Zanu PF secured victory in a widely discredited election. It was then that Mugabe and his party abandoned any pretense of heeding the will of the people for once and for all and the not-so-velvet glove gave way to the bloody iron fist. Farms were wrested from the ownership of white farmers and (black, non-partisan farmers) and placed into the hands of “war veterans” and other Zanu sympathizers with no knowledge or experience of large-scale farming.

African political stories are a litany of disappointments, disenfranchisement and dictatorships. For each rare success story like Zambia and Botswana, there is a gallery of failures jockeying for gold in the continent's bizarre Olympics of corruption and despair. What I want to do is look at the ways in which, despite the social, political and economic crisis in which Zimbabweans find themselves, they can still, by changing their own processes, their own mindsets and the choices they make, empower themselves to halt the seemingly endless descent into ruin and aspire to something more than day-to-day survival.

The Zimbabwe problem is not a unique one. And this may, for a large part, account for the international community's inertia. “Same old Africa” must be the defeated sigh heaved across the continents. Time for “African solutions to African problems” is another mantra that is now chanted with increasing regularity. “We have our own problems to deal with”, says the average man on the 1st World Street. And of course, these statements hold more than a kernel of truth. There is a global Depression; people are worried about their jobs, their homes, and their pensions. And Africa can often seem very far away and easy to rinse one's hands of. Except to dismiss Zimbabwe as just another distant, anarchic blemish on the collective global psyche is to miss the point entirely. It matters.

It matters to the world altruistically because to sit back and watch the suffering of another when you have the power to help, is as bad as perpetrating the harm oneself. It matters, too, from a perspective of self-interest. Zimbabwe is awash with untapped reserves of gold, platinum, diamonds, copper and other minerals that the Chinese are already exploiting for bargain basement prices. It matters regionally: the stakes for sub-Saharan Africa are incredibly high. As the political crisis in Zimbabwe intensifies, South Africa has seen its currency lose value and many potential overseas investors have cancelled or postponed deals due to a fear of impending regional

instability. Racial tensions – black on black – have sharpened and xenophobic attacks on non-native South Africans have swept through Johannesburg. Botswana, which shares a border with Zimbabwe, has also seen a sharp fall in tourist bookings and an influx of refugees from the south of Zimbabwe.

The answer is not necessarily more aid. In 2000, Zimbabwe received official aid and developmental aid worth \$175.8 million. The figure rose to \$367.7 million in 2005. In September of this year, the EU's Aid Commissioner called for a further injection of \$14.7million in aid to Zimbabwe. It's how the aid is distributed and, equally importantly, how the recipients are empowered to use it.

Books that I will use to conduct research

The Survey Research Handbook

Pamela Alreck & Robert Settle (1995) 2nd edition

This book is exhaustive in its articulation of all the steps that need to be followed by someone inexperienced at conducting research. Each chapter represents a step by step by which is clear, concise and easy to follow. At the end of each chapter is a summary which gives the reader a condense clarification of the points outlined in the chapter, and affords the reader ease of reference once he or she has a good grasp of the topic has been obtained.

Survey Research Methods (2nd ed.) Belmont: Wadsworth Publishing

Earl Babbie (1990)

Fundamental and rooted in practice, this book highlights the parallels between the theoretical logic behind methodology and the concrete skills need to conduct research. It can be used by anyone interested in conducting surveys and is particularly useful to inexperienced researchers. Within the text, issues such as the historical aspects of research, applied qualitative research traditions, examination of the methods of collecting and analyzing empirical materials and speculations about the future of qualitative research are all tackled.

The End of Poverty: Economic Possibilities for Our Time

Jeffrey D. Sachs (2005)

This is going to be the main reference I use for my resource. World-renowned economist, Professor Jeffrey D. Sachs, believes that “the core problem in Africa is not corruption but the lack of basic infrastructure and services.” In this book he articulates his conviction that we are less than a generation away from being able to eliminate extreme poverty among the one billion poorest people around the world who are caught in a poverty trap of disease, environmental stress, political instability, and lack of access to capital, technology, medicine, and education. In order for them to aspire to something more than just survival, Sachs believes that the poor need a leg-up onto the first rung on the ladder of prosperity. For this to happen, the rich nations need to be more targeted in the financial aid they offer to the poor. Sachs calls on international institutions like the UN, the IMF, and World Bank to play a stronger role in this effort. In the book, Sachs also challenges developing nations to do more to help themselves and outlines key areas in which they need to be more proactive and transparent.

The book provides a comprehensive overview of the poverty cycle, and, despite the bleakness of the picture painted by Sachs's statistics and experiences, it is largely positive in tone. A strong case is made for why countries are morally as well as economically obliged to battle poverty.

#### Africa Now

Stephen Ellis, Heinemann (1996)

This book, published just over a decade ago, is an introduction to contemporary Africa. Most of the contributors are Africans who have held senior positions in government and in international organizations. Each chapter is forward-looking and expands on agriculture and economic change (and, often, how one influences the other). The individual authors focus on the flourishing of pro-democracy movements; problems of urban poverty; agricultural change within villages; increasing youth violence; struggles over ethnic identity; corruption at the highest levels and population growth exceeding resources.

#### The Collapse of Zimbabwe in the Wake of the 2000-2003 Land Reforms

Craig Richardson (2004)

Data from official Zimbabwe government sources, The IMF, The World Bank and Zimbabwe's Commercial Farmers Union, provides the platform from which Richardson launches his explanation of the domino effect which saw the collapse of one key Zimbabwean institution after another. These include the Central Bank, foreign exchange markets, the health sector and the education sector. Richardson also uses data from Zimbabwe's meteorological authorities to argue that the 2001 drought did not lead to collapse agricultural yields, as the current regime would have people believe. Finally, he draws a parallel between the southern African country and Nicaragua, which underwent a similar collapse in the late 1980s, as a blueprint for how a country can once again prosper by respecting the importance of property rights.

#### Economic Decline: Neither Growth Nor Equity

Carolyn Jenkins & John Knight (Eds.) (2002)

This book traces the roots of Zimbabwe's economy through to the period immediately after independence in 1980. It pinpoints exactly when the seeds of the current unsustainable policy initiatives were introduced and illustrates lessons for countries wrestling with the compromise between growth-orientated and redistributive policies.

#### The Battle For Zimbabwe: The Final Countdown

Geoff Hill (2003)

Zimbabwe's recent history condensed into a 300-page paperback. The focus is on the land invasions that began in the early 2000s, the presidential elections and the reported massacres of thousands of Zimbabweans. Based on interviews with regular citizens, ZANU PF members, opposition supporters, torture victims and exiles.

#### Planning for Post-Mugabe Zimbabwe

Michelle D. Gavin (2007)

In this book, the author urges the USA to look use its foresight to see beyond the current regime to Zimbabwe's future. She argues that by leading an international process to plan for recovery and reconstruction after President Robert Mugabe eventually departs, the United States can increase the likelihood that when the change does come, it will herald the arrival of reform, rather than continued conflict and state

collapse. Gavin's report highlights the fact that without international support, the drive for change will ultimately be unsuccessful.

#### Proposed Research Methodology

My research will be rooted in the qualitative approach. As a native Zimbabwean, I have the language skills, cultural awareness and access to assemble focus groups and conduct interviews and surveys in order to generate predominantly verbal data. My intention is to divide my time among different areas of the country and engage Zimbabweans from all walks of life. I aim to get them to respond to my questionnaires and participate in interviews that look to establish the role that social, economic, political, technological and environmental factors have in the average Zimbabwean's life. Aside from interviews and surveys, I will use ethnography to uncover how people in various locales are living. The case studies will then individualize these findings by looking at what, if any, differences in culture or way of life can be found amongst Zimbabweans and how these variations correspond to each individual's standard of living. I will also examine the coping mechanisms employed by Zimbabweans during this difficult period. Though Zimbabwe has no recent history of military conflict, it is not a stretch to draw parallels between the suffering experienced during this time of economic turmoil and that experienced during the war of Independence in the late seventies. The only difference being that now mortality rates are higher than they ever were then.

Ethnography. Whatever the make up of its government, the people of Zimbabwe will remain the same. I want examine how ethnicity influences the way that the black majority in Zimbabwe lives. How cultural influences have contributed to the current Zimbabwe situation and what changes need to be affected for the negative amongst these influences to be dissolved, in order to allow to the average Zimbabwean to reach at least the first rung of what Jeffrey Sachs calls the "ladder of economic development". Returning home to my native Zimbabwe will allow me to conduct the necessary fieldwork. I will live in both the high- and low-density areas, in the urban parts of the city and the rural areas of the country. During this time I will observe my surroundings and conduct informal interviews with the people among whom I live. The objective of this will be to observe the average Zimbabwean's way of life, and how, if at all, the rituals he performs and an assortment of other events, affect his day to day reality and perpetuates the cycle of poverty. Only by understanding the cycle can we hope to break it.

Case Studies. Alongside the ethnographic research, which will look at Zimbabweans as a whole, I will single out individuals on several points of the socio-economic spectrum and examine what factors influence the bare subsistence of one and the thriving and (relative) prosperity of the other. Factors like education, political affiliation, geographic location, gender, race may all come into play. The case studies will help to personalize and crystallize the experience of "average" Zimbabweans so that solutions can be tailored to fit specific groups – rather than the one-size-fits all method of throwing food and financial aid which has so far seen such limited success in terms of nurturing development.

I feel that the methods outlined above are the correct ones for Development Studies research because although there are resources that have been dedicated to scrutinizing Africa as a whole, or southern Africa as a region, the solutions so far devised have not

really fulfilled their early promise. This means that it is time to try something new. I want to look a little bit closer at my Zimbabwe – to get right underneath its fingernails and get a clear understanding of what that new direction should be and how Zimbabweans, bruised and weary as they are, can be convinced to follow it. I also feel that the country is at its lowest possible ebb, something most would've thought unthinkable 5 years ago when things were already horrendously bad. The need for a targeted, considered and, most importantly, Zimbabwe-specific solution is an acute one.

This research, conducted by walking, talking and living with the Zimbabweans whose reality is the day to day grind in the country with the world's fastest shrinking economy, and its findings can be used to guide and inform a change in policy toward Africa in general and Zimbabwe, specifically. The current policies of haphazardly applied embargoes, intermittent condemnation of the regime, stop-start humanitarian aid and a general reluctance to do or say anything that might be regarded as controversial, is not working. It may need to be abandoned in favor of concentrating on a review and restoration of the crumbling infrastructure.

I understand the need for dispassion during the conducting of this research. At the same time, as a Zimbabwean, there will be the inevitable intrusion of subjectivity because of how close to home, literally, the matters being examined are. I feel that because of this, the subjectivity is justified but it is my aim to take that bias towards my own countrymen and use it to inspire accurate and detached reporting of the findings because only by painting a picture that is truly representative of the situation can appropriate solutions be introduced.

My research will show what Zimbabweans can do in order to help themselves. Where it is shown that Zimbabweans, due to lack of resources or know-how, cannot help themselves, my findings will challenge the International community to be more long-sighted in their approach. To look beyond food and bank balances to see where Zimbabwe needs to be fixed and see how, to borrow a famous phrase from a struggle thousands of miles away, it is the Zimbabwean "hearts and minds" that have to be changed so that they can wrestle their own destiny from the uncompromising grip of a heartless dictatorship.

How the research findings will be disseminated

Only by calling closer attention to the Zimbabwe crisis can the solutions my research will advocate come to fruition. Right now, the world knows there is a crisis and they are aware of the general nature of the crisis, but by exposing my findings to as many people, both in and outside of academia, as possible, I hope for people to gain an understanding of each Zimbabwean's dilemma. Ways of sharing my findings can be Research Dissemination Conferences, local, national or global publications, having the research published in one of the international journals of development studies, like the Canadian Journal of Development Studies which publishes peer-reviewed research findings. Another option is forwarding the research to charities who are invested in third world development. One such charity is Diambars ([www.diambars.com](http://www.diambars.com)) a Senegal-based charity devoted to the education of skilled young African footballers, to give them something to fall back on should their football careers not pan out. By targeting the research towards already established charities, the chances of raising the profile of the research and, therefore, the findings

contained therein, increase drastically. I aim to publish my research on the Diambars website and similar websites (and possibly have it translated into other languages too). I want my research to be accessible to fellow research students, to the people within governments who define policy on Third World Development, to my Director of Research, to the body which funds the research, to the general public, to prospective employers and to my friends and family. The more eyes that get to see it, the more likely it is to be seen by someone who can affect a change.

I think of my grandmother now living in abject poverty in her village. I think of my parents who have seen everything they have worked for all their lives taken away from them with the collapse of the economy as they face an uncertain retirement. I think of friends who I grew up with who are now struggling to barely make ends meet and I know that Zimbabweans are destined for more than this. Upon completion of my studies, I will have attained a Master's degree in Development studies, but more than that, I will have built a wonderful foundation for my working life through contacts I will have made during my research. I look forward to the education that I am going to receive, I am optimistic that change will happen and I am certain that I will be able to return home and make a difference.