Zimbabwe Media Digest

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1. Introduction

This report was commissioned by the Overseas Development Institute as a contribution to a Roundtable discussion on Zimbabwe to be held at the Overseas Development Institute in June 2007. It summarises media coverage of Zimbabwe from February to May 2007. The report is divided into sections based on selected themes including: Inflation and foreign exchange rates; Social unrest and insecurity; Agricultural and land reform policies; Political opposition; The future of Mugabe and ZANU-PF; Donors and the International Community; Role of Civil Society; Labour markets and unemployment; Migration and remittances; Access to key services (health and education); HIV infection rates and life expectancy. References are provided as footnotes indicating the title, publication and date of web access (where applicable) (see Appendix I for list of sources).

This media digest is based on uncorroborated media reporting and *neither the author nor the Overseas Development Institute can be held responsible for any inaccuracies or bias* in these media sources.

1.1 Overview

Zimbabwe is currently in the grip of interrelated political, economic, and social crises, which are taking a terrible toll on the country's people. Consecutive years of economic decline have resulted in periodic shortages of food, fuel, electricity, medical supplies and other basic survival commodities. Inflation has risen to over 2000% and unemployment is touching 80%[2]. Once robust social services are decaying, exacerbated by the AIDS epidemic and a considerable 'brain drain' of skilled personnel.[3] Hunger is spreading and life expectancy has dropped to roughly 35 years.[4]

2. Inflation and foreign exchange rates

Poverty levels around the world are usually measured against the value of one US dollar/day, but according to media reports, calculating that value in Zimbabwe is becoming increasingly difficult. By the end of March, inflation in Zimbabwe had risen to a record 2,200 percent. A 160 percent rise in March alone, which if sustained would lead to an annual increase of 6,300 percent, was far above the 50 percent month on month official definition of hyperinflation[5]. The level of inflation in Zimbabwe can be interpreted as a clear signal that President Robert Mugabe's government is failing to save the free falling economy from collapse.[6]

With the highest inflation rate in the world and foreign exchange scarce, the government cannot afford to maintain basic infrastructure such as roads, railways and vehicles, and Zimbabweans struggle to beat the cost of living and to feed their families, as prices of basic commodities shoot up by significant amounts every week.[7] The government prints money as fast as the presses allow. Hyperinflation is spinning out of control and many shops have dispensed with price tags. Monthly wages are spent

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[2] Zimonline (SA), 27 April 2007: http://www.zimonline.co.za/
[3] USAID, 2007 http://www.usaid.gov/zw/
[4] The Economist, April 5th 2007 *Africa's Titanic problem* http://www.economist.com
[5] Business in Africa, Johannesburg, 09 May 2007. https: http://www.businessinafrica.net/
[6] Zimonline, SA, 27 April 2007: http://www.zimonline.co.za/
[7] IRIN Johannesburg, 22 Feb 2007: http://www.irinnews.org

immediately, before the notes become worthless. One day, soon, notes a local economist, it will all come crashing down.[8]

Many have criticised the government for using coercion and price controls to try and curb inflation, arguing that this has exacerbated economic problems by driving affected products into the informal sector. Prices of basic commodities rocketed as the government resorted to coercion and the arresting of parallel market traders. While the official price of bread remains at Z$825 for a 700g loaf, the (parallel) market price is about Z$7,000. Cooking oil prices are supposed to be about Z$10,000 a litre but are over Z$50,000 and rising in the parallel market. Local brands are nowhere to be seen, as manufacturers are not prepared to break the price controls for fear of retribution.[9]

Hyperinflation and an artificial foreign exchange rate have also posed tremendous challenges for humanitarian organisations in Zimbabwe struggling to provide aid and development. Basic office equipment could cost NGOs several thousand US dollars at the official, fixed exchange rate of Z$250 to US$1, given that the parallel market exchange rate, upon which real prices are based, has risen to over Z$6000 to US$1. Some of the larger NGOs have negotiated preferential exchange rates with their banks to stretch their limited foreign currency, but not all have the financial muscle to do so. [10]

In a policy paper released on 30th April 2007, the IMF recommended that the Zimbabwean dollar be substantially devalued immediately in order to escape further economic turmoil.[11] The Reserve Bank of Zimbabwe (RBZ) governor Gideon Gono has repeatedly dismissed calls by business leaders to devalue the Zimbabwean dollar, but did so 'through the back door' when he announced a *Drought Mitigation and Economic Stabilisation Fund*, the overall effect of which is to shift the Zimbabwean dollar to Z$15 000 against the US dollar. Gono insisted that he had not de-valued the Zimbabwean dollar but, according to economic analysts, the stabilisation fund is tantamount to devaluation except that it does not have a major impact on all sectors of the economy. The fund, which came into force immediately, is applicable to exporters, companies in the tourism sector, non-governmental organisations, Zimbabweans in the Diaspora and local individuals with free funds to sell to the RBZ.[12]

3. Social unrest and insecurity

The problem of social unrest is growing in Zimbabwe as the country's population struggles to cope with food shortages, record inflation, repression and corruption. The situation took a violent turn in February after police imposed a ban on political rallies in February. Strikes and protests to highlight the worsening economic situation gave way to bombings of police stations, a passenger train and a supermarket, among other targets across the country.[13]

International Crisis Group said the unrest could have been triggered by economic issues, rifts in President Robert Mugabe's ruling party over his continued leadership, rising discontent among underpaid police and army troops, and an "energized" opposition and civil society groups who are increasingly willing to protest in the streets.[14]

In response, the cash-strapped government is forking out hundreds of thousands of US dollars to pay Pakistani military experts to help train and equip the Zimbabwean army, which has been weakened by mass resignations of experienced officers. The government has been heavily recruiting to replace army and police officers, deserting in droves to find better paying jobs in neighbouring countries and beyond. [15] President Robert Mugabe also invoked his presidential powers and passed a statutory instrument setting up a conscripted reserve army of ex-combatants as government prepares to deal

[8] The Economist, 05 April 2007 *Africa's Titanic Problem* http://www.economist.com
[9] The Zimbabwean, Bulawayo, 27 April 2007: https://www.thezimbabwean.co.uk/
[10] IRIN Johannesburg, 22 Feb 2007: http://www.irinnews.org
[11] ZimOnline, 03 May 2007: http://www.zimonline.co.za/
[12] ZimOnline (SA) 27 April 2007: http://www.zimonline.co.za/
[13] IRIN Africa: Zimbabwe 28 March 2007: http://www.irinnews.org
[14] Associated Press, 6 March 2007: https://www.ap.org/
[15] ZimOnline SA 10 January 2007: http://www.zimonline.co.za/

with raging unrest in Harare.[16] It is believed that the Presidential Guard now consists of Congolese troops, which suggests a deep mistrust of Zimbabwe's own military.[17]

The main opposition party, the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) strongly condemned the deal with Pakistan. *"There is no justification whatsoever to be importing gunmen instead of grain or importing ammunition and bombs instead of fuel. This rogue regime ought to be isolated and we don't understand why Pakistan is doing this"* said Nelson Chamisa, MDC spokesman.[18]

4. Agriculture and Land reform policies

For years Zimbabwe was a major tobacco producer and a potential bread basket for surrounding countries. But the forced seizure of almost all white-owned commercial farms, with the stated aim of benefiting landless black Zimbabweans, led to sharp falls in production and precipitated the collapse of the agriculture-based economy.[19]

Zimbabwe faces worst ever food shortages

Zimbabwe faces its worst food shortages yet with this year's harvest expected to meet only 30 to 50 percent of national requirement, according to the Famine Early Warning System Network (FEWSNET). In its latest food outlook report on Zimbabwe covering the period from March to July 2007, the network said that widespread crop failure caused by poor rainfall and a long running economic crisis had combined to drastically slash food production in the southern African country. One and a half million people out of the 12 million Zimbabweans are in need of urgent food aid and the number of hungry people is expected to rise in the coming months and peak around early 2008 when the network said food shortages would worsen to levels not seen in recent years. The worst affected provinces currently include Masvingo, Midlands and North and South Matabeleland.[20]

Maize-meal queues have resurfaced in most parts of southern Zimbabwe. Long and winding queues have become the order of the day in most towns and cities in the region as people desperately search for the commodity, the main staple food for the majority of Zimbabweans.[21] Salt, sugar and other commodities are also missing from shops and only available in short supply on the parallel market at extortionate prices.[22] Poor in-country distribution, due to transport problems, fuel shortages and mismanagement, is an additional constraint.

Food aid

Despite declaring 2007 a drought year, the Zimbabwean government has not made a formal appeal to the United Nations to institute an international appeal for food for Zimbabwe because it maintains that Zimbabwe has the capacity to feed its own people.[23] In 2004, the government called a halt to general feeding programmes run by humanitarian agencies and their non-governmental organisation partners, saying the country was expecting a bumper harvest, which proved not to be the case. Since then, aid agencies have scaled down their operations to target vulnerable groups, such as people living with HIV/AIDS and the elderly.[24]

Zimbabwe is reportedly importing thousands of tonnes of maize and wheat from neighbouring countries Malawi and South Africa to cover the national shortfall. Reserve Bank governor Gideon Gono told a panel of lawmakers that his priority was to allocate hard currency for imports of corn to

[16] The Zimbabwean, 30 March 2007: https://www.thezimbabwean.co.uk/
[17] Pambazuka News: Zimbabwe: 20 April 2007: *Time for Civil Society to seize the space?* http://www.pambazuka.org/en/
[18] Zim Online, SA, 10 January 2007: http://www.zimonline.co.za/
[19] BBC News, Africa 10 May 2007: http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/africa/default.stm
[20] FEWSNET cited in ZimOnline, 08 May 2007: http://www.zimonline.co.za/
[21] Zimonline, 04 May 2007: http://www.zimonline.co.za/
[22] The Zimbabwean, 08 May 2007: *Shortage of Salt Looms.* https://www.thezimbabwean.co.uk/
[23] ZimOnline, 08 May 2007: *Zim Faces Worst Food Shortages Ever*: http://www.zimonline.co.za/
[24] IRIN Africa, 21 March 2007: http://www.irinnews.org

avert a looming food crisis. Currency has been diverted from almost every government department to buy food.[25]

The World Food Programme is currently providing food assistance to 1.5 million beneficiaries through various feeding programmes for vulnerable groups: "*There is absolutely nothing in the fields here [in Matabeleland South]. People are already going hungry because the crops did not do well. We do selective distribution in compliance with government policy, but what looks apparent is that, ultimately, wholesale food distribution will be needed*", an aid worker commented.[26]

Recent reports suggest that Zimbabwe would consider making a formal appeal for food aid only after the completion of an assessment of food availability and food needs, which the government is jointly conducting in collaboration with the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and the UN World Food Programme (WFP). Without a formal appeal for help, UN agencies are handicapped in their efforts to seek help for starving Zimbabweans, while a late appeal would also delay aid reaching the hungry in time. The decision to invite the two UN organisations was viewed as a major climb down by Mugabe, who last year blocked them from scrutinising the country's crop harvest. The assessment was reported to be likely to have been carried out in April and May 2007 (we are not clear whether it has already taken place).[27]

Land reform policies

The Zimbabwean food crisis followed the seizure, from 2000 onwards, of more than 5,000 white-owned commercial farms, a fast-track land redistribution exercise that sought to give land to thousands of black Zimbabweans from impoverished rural areas by removing white commercial farmers from their estates.[28] The land reform policies undoubtedly contributed to Zimbabwe's rapid social and economic decline as it disrupted production and displaced thousands of farm workers.[29] President Mugabe, who has been the country's sole ruler since the former Rhodesia gained independence in 1980, blames plummeting agricultural fortunes on drought and European and US sanctions and maintains that the land reforms were necessary to correct colonial imbalances in land ownership.[30]

Reports that the few (about 500 in total) remaining white, large-scale, tobacco growers, who are in the unique position of having their infrastructure intact, more than doubled their output this year from about 35,000 tonnes last year to over 70,000 tonnes this year, have called into question the significance of "drought" conditions as the main factor underpinning low agricultural outputs. The white farmers stated that their dams were full at the beginning of the year and, together with near perfect growing conditions and the ability to import their inputs directly, this enabled them to produce record quantities of tobacco per grower. In contrast to this, small-scale output has declined, as has that of the 'new' commercial growers, suggesting political factors (and connected market collapse) as a possible explanation.[31]

Critics, including members of Mugabe's own party, note that many of the new farmers have struggled to produce food over the last 7 years as they were allocated farms on the basis of political patronage rather than agricultural expertise. Reports state that many lack the dedication, financial resources, equipment and expertise to run large farms.[32]

Food shortages have been further compounded by the introduction of price controls for maize and wheat, which have encouraged rent-seeking and speculative behaviour. Evidence of rent-seeking abounds in the agricultural sector, with the Grain Marketing Board buying maize at $52,000 per tonne

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[25] Zimbabwe Associated Press, 28 Feb 2007: *Official Says Zimbabwe Hungry and Broke*: https://www.ap.org/
[26] IRIN Africa, 21 March 2007: http://www.irinnews.org
[27] ZWNews, 30 Mar 2007: https://www.zwnews.com/
[28] IRIN Johannesburg, 22 Feb 2007: http://www.irinnews.org
[29] Busse, 2006 *An Annotated Bibliography on Indigenous strategies and community dynamics in response to extreme poverty and vulnerability in Zimbabwe.* ODI https://www.odi.org.uk/
[30] CAJ News 06 March 2007: https://www.cajnews.org/
[31] The Zimbabwean, Bulawayo, 27 April 2007 *A Drought by any Other Name*. https://www.thezimbabwean.co.uk/
[32] Mail & Guardian, SA, 05 March 2007: http://www.mg.co.za/

and selling it to politically connected millers at $600 per tonne, who then sell the subsidised maize at exorbitant prices.[33]

Input markets:

Similar speculative activities take place in input markets for fuel and fertiliser. New farmers who have benefited from land occupations are receiving subsidised inputs from the state and selling them, rather than using them for productive activities.[34]

Farm labour shortages

A serious shortage of farm workers is further crippling agricultural production in Zimbabwe as a deadlock over low wages and worsening conditions of service on farms has hastened the exodus of workers, who would rather be gold panners and informal market dealers than work for US$120 a month. Farm workers want salaries raised from US$120 (at the official exchange rate) to at least US$500 but this would still be well below the US$1,406 a month needed for a family of six to survive in Zimbabwe.[35]

5. Political opposition

According to one reporter who recently visited Zimbabwe, the political opposition are currently in disarray. The MDC party is split, seemingly along ethnic lines, in a way that bodes ill for the country. Some analyses of the divisions of Zimbabwe now emphasise the rivalry between the Shona people of the north and the Ndebele people of the south. Worse, rival ethnic groups within the Shona are rumoured to be lining up against each other. Concerns about a fragmented and weak opposition have sparked debates about what role they will play in the future of Zimbabwe and whether change will have to come from within a corrupt and violent ZANU-PF.[36]

ZANU-PF use violence and repression to crush opposition

Earlier this year, Mugabe launched a crackdown on the opposition and accused them of trying to topple the regime on behalf of Zimbabwe's former colonial master, Britain. He used violence and repression to suppress independent media, harass human rights defenders and intimidate opposition leaders and peaceful demonstrators:

- In February, in reaction to growing unrest over the economy, police outlawed rallies and demonstrations in Harare and other parts of the country regarded as opposition strongholds. Using teargas, batons and water cannons, police scuttled a rally that Morgan Tsvangirai, leader of the Zimbabwean opposition Movement for Democratic Change (MDC), was to hold at Zimbabwe Grounds in Highfield to launch his 2008 presidential election campaign.[37]
- In March, Morgan Tsvangirai and several other members of his party were detained in a police raid in the capital, Harare. Scores of police officers in riot gear, wielding AK-47 assault rifles, barricaded all the roads around Harvest House, the MDC headquarters in Harare. Police confirmed a crackdown on "perpetrators of violence".[38]
- Four members of the opposition Movement for Democratic Change were prevented from leaving Zimbabwe, including one MP, Nelson Chamisa, who was badly beaten when travelling to a meeting in Brussels. A significant number of activists and opposition supporters are still being arrested and tortured throughout Zimbabwe. Trade and student union members have been harassed and arrested.[39]
- Opposition supporters were denied state-supplied food aid. In a public statement, Charumbira, president of Zimbabwe’s Council of Chiefs, confirmed that traditional leaders had been ordered to

[33] Zimbabwe Independent, 26 Feb 2007 Mugabe faces Dilemma. http://www.thezimbabweindependent.co.zw/
[34] Zimbabwe Independent, 26 Feb 2007 Mugabe faces Dilemma http://www.thezimbabweindependent.co.zw/
[35] Irin, BULAWAYO, 22 Jan 2007: http://www.irinnews.org
[36] The Economist, 27 April 2007 *Unseating Mugabe*.: http://www.economist.com
[37] Financial Gazette, Harare, 01 Mar 2007: https://www.fingaz.co.zw/, also available at https://www.allafrica.com
[38] IRIN Africa, 28 March 2007: http://www.irinnews.org
[39] UK MP’s Hear Statement on Zimbabwe, 26 Mar 2007

consider only Zanu PF supporters on programmes initiated by the government. *“We cannot afford to continue feeding the enemy because they are sellouts,"* he said. ZANU-PF deny the use of food aid as a political weapon.[40]

- The government's urban slum demolition drive in 2005, which left some 700,000 people without jobs or homes, drew international condemnation and was seen by critics as an attempt to destroy slums housing opposition supporters. Mugabe claimed it was an effort to boost law and order and development.[41]

6. The future of Mugabe and ZANU-PF

Although much of the discourse on, and in, Zimbabwe, has revolved around the economy, politics is at the real centre of the crisis. The future of Zimbabwe is, for better or worse, understood to be inextricably linked to the future of Mugabe. It is generally accepted that a transition of sorts has already begun but there remain considerable doubts as to where the transition will lead, and what sorts of political – and possibly military – processes will occur within it.[42]

After failing to garner enough support to extend his rule to 2010, Mugabe is rallying supporters within his party to back his candidature for president in March 2008. The Zimbabwean President said he had no plans to retire soon after the 2008 presidential poll, calling media reports on an early exit strategy "wishful" thinking.[43]

Loss of immunity is one of the main threats to Mugabe, should he lose his power. He may face prosecution for overseeing the massacre of thousands of villagers by North-Korean trained soldiers in Matabeleland in the early 1980s. Many other instances of state-sanctioned murder and torture might also be examined too.[44]

Within the ruling party, Mugabe loyalists are likely to be challenged by the ‘progressives’, who would want Mugabe to stand down in 2008. Critics within the ruling party are becoming increasingly concerned about the crumbling economy and the collapse of their own business operations. Both sides will vigorously canvass the support of ‘neutrals’ within the party.[45]

Zimbabwe: An End to the Stalemate, the latest report from the International Crisis Group sees the current moment as a chance to resolve the situation through the retirement of President Mugabe when his term ends in 2008 and the creation of a transitional government tasked with preparing a new constitution and holding general elections by 2010. For Zimbabwe to begin to recover, the report suggests, President Mugabe must give up efforts to extend his term, and the opposing parties must negotiate a compromise.[46]

The opposition have voiced strong concerns over the fact that the government is not fully prepared for the forthcoming elections and that this may give ZANU-PF an opportunity to rig the outcome. Hundreds of thousands of potential voters have no identity cards and are not on the voters’ roll because the Registrar General’s office was not adequately resourced to register voters. Furthermore, tough security laws, such as bans on public meetings and rallies will make it difficult for the opposition to campaign for the elections.[47]

A major point of contention is the question of whether the 2008 elections will be observed by international monitors/peacekeepers. The two MDC factions agree that an SADC initiative, led by South Africa’s President Thabo Mbeki, to facilitate dialogue between the opposition party and ZANU PF, should ultimately lead to a new constitution that guarantees free and fair elections among other

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[40] Zim Online, SA, 31 January 2007: http://www.zimonline.co.za/
[41] BBC News, Africa, Zimbabwe Country Profile, 10 May 2007: http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/africa/default.stm
[42] Royal United Services Institute (RUSI), 2007: http://www.rusi.org/
[43] The Zimbabwean, 23 April 07: https://www.thezimbabwean.co.uk/
[44] The Economist, 29 March 2007: *The Man Behind the Iron Fist*: http://www.economist.com
[45] Associated Press, Harare, March 6 2007: https://www.ap.org/
[46] International Crisis Group, Africa Report N°122, 5 March 2007: Zimbabwe: An End to the Stalemate? http://www.crisisgroup.org/home/index.cfm?id=1233&l=1
[47] Royal United Services Institute (RUSI), 2007: http://www.rusi.org/

issues. The ruling Party may not agree, however. If the elections take place in 2008, they will most likely be held under the current constitution.[48]

With growing internal unrest, international pressure, mounting violence and political negotiations dominating its landscape, for Zimbabwe, the future is now. Anything could happen. Some predict continuing unrest and an upsurge of political violence against Mugabe's opponents within the ruling Party and the MDC as elections approach. Others predict an increase in political violence nationwide, and a possible economic collapse later in the year, triggering a further exodus.

Lastly, it should not be forgotten that the real power brokers are the security sector - the Army, the Central Intelligence Organization (CIO), the Police, and War Veterans and various state militia. Although there are splits within and between these, it is the soldiers and the CIO who ultimately hold the power, and no decisions on Zimbabwe's future can effectively be implemented without their involvement.[49]

7. Donors and International Community

The government of Zimbabwe has faced increasing international isolation over its human rights abuses and restrictions on freedom.[50] In 2000, the European Union and the US imposed targeted visa and financial sanctions against Mugabe and his top officials as punishment for fraudulent elections, human rights violations, a violent land-redistribution programme and failure to uphold the rule of law.[51] Relations have since remained hostile, and Mugabe has frequently accused Europe and the US of using sanctions to sabotage Zimbabwe's economy in the hope of inciting an uprising against his government. Despite such claims, the EU and the US continue to spend millions on aid to Zimbabwe.

The European Union in Zimbabwe

Information recently released by the EU mission in Harare shows that the EU spent over 79 million Euros on health and education support for Zimbabwe between 2000 and 2005. In addition to the 25 million Euro the EU spends annually on food aid to Zimbabwe, a budget of 12 million Euros is currently being implemented for various forms of humanitarian assistance, including water and sanitation and HIV /AIDS home based care programmes.

- EU aid in the *health sector* has focused largely on procurement of drugs such as Anti-retrovirals for AIDS patients, which have been in short supply in Zimbabwe since the advent of economic recession in the late 1990s.
- In the education sector, the EU has budgeted a total of 11 million Euros for the current year, to benefit impoverished children in Zimbabwe's remote areas through institutional strengthening and provision of learning material.

The US in Zimbabwe

The US currently provide development aid to Zimbabwe in three strategic areas:

- HIV/AIDS prevention ($10 million per annum): This involves support to national ART programme, promotion of voluntary testing and counselling, and prevention of mother to child transmission of HIV.
- Increasing dialogue between the citizens of Zimbabwe and their government institutions ($4 million per annum); and
- Providing economic opportunities such as micro-finance and related business support services for disadvantaged groups ($2 million per annum). This programme is designed to enhance food security and facilitate income-generating activities for communal area (rural) residents, women, under- and unemployed youth, the urban poor, the disabled, orphans, farm

[48] Royal United Services Institute (RUSI), 2007: http://www.rusi.org/
[49] Royal United Services Institute (RUSI), 2007: http://www.rusi.org/
[50] BBC News Africa, 10 May 2007: *Zimbabwe country Profile.*: http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/africa/default.stm
[51] The Zimbabwean, 08 May 07: https://www.thezimbabwean.co.uk/

workers, and households affected by HIV/AIDS.[52] (Given the lack of detailed media coverage on donor programmes, this information was taken from the official USAID website. Anecdotal evidence from August 2006 suggests the third element of the programme – focusing on supporting economic opportunities may have been halted, as the degree of market failure in Zimbabwe had made it unworkable).

The US also provide humanitarian assistance to Zimbabwe. Since 2002, USAID has provided a total of 298,000 metric tons of food commodities to the United Nation's World Food Program. A further 169,000 metric tons was distributed, through a group of international non-governmental organisations, to vulnerable individuals and food-insecure rural households through various programmes. USAID continues to provide targeted feeding to schools and the most disadvantaged.[53]

China in Zimbabwe

China's policy towards African nations has become more active in recent years as it grows increasingly concerned about securing sufficient resources to fuel its industrial revolution.[54] China has promised to build schools, hospitals, give loans in foreign currency and help revive Zimbabwe's ailing agricultural sector.

In April, China agreed to provide Zimbabwe with $25m worth of farm equipment to help revive the tobacco industry in return for large quantities of tobacco. Jia Qinglin, a senior Chinese Communist party official, presented the equipment, including 424 tractors and 50 trucks, to Robert Mugabe in a deal to replace equipment damaged when Mugabe's government seized white-owned farms under the 'fast track' land reform process. China wants all the tractors to go to tobacco farmers and expects Zimbabwe to deliver 30 million kilogrammes of tobacco by the end of 2007. As much as 80 million kilogrammes is to be exported to China by the fifth year.[55]

China has also contributed $100,000 to fund the newly opened Confucius Institute in Harare. The institute is "a very important way of developing our cultural ties with Zimbabwe and Africa," said Wu Jiahua, a spokesperson for the Chinese embassy in Harare. On a recent trip to Africa, Chinese President Hu Jintao insisted that Beijing did not just want to milk the continent for its bountiful natural resources but rather, establish a two-way relationship which could benefit both sides. The funding of the institute is being held up as a proof that such talk is being translated into action.[56]
China is also reported to be providing significant military aid to Zimbabwe.[57]

The South African Development Community (SADC) in Zimbabwe

The expectations of many Zimbabweans and much of the international community had been raised ahead of a summit meeting of SADC governments in Dar es Salaam on the 29th March 2007, at which, it was predicted, Mugabe would be told by African leaders that it was time to step down. The meeting was called to discuss Zimbabwe's economic situation and reports of arrests and beating of opposition leaders. As it turned out, the assembled heads of state showed official support for Mugabe by calling for sanctions to be lifted to take the pressure off their comrade, and declared the presidential election of 2002 free and fair. Below are some of the extracts from the communiqué of the meeting:

"The... Summit recalled that free fair and democratic Presidential elections were held in 2002 in Zimbabwe... The ... Summit appealed for the lifting of all forms of sanctions against Zimbabwe… The

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[52] Given lack of media coverage, this information was taken from the USAID website. However, anecdotal evidence suggests that this programme may have been halted because the degree of market failure made it unworkable.
[53] United States Agency for International Development (USAID)/Zimbabwe, 14 May 2007 http://www.usaid.gov/zw/
[54] Financial times, 04 Jan 2007: http://search.ft.com/.
[55] Al Jazeera News/Africa, 23 April 2007: *China Gives Mugabe $25m in Aid* :http://english.aljazeera.net/
[56] The Mail & Guardian, South African Press Association, 09 March 2007: *China Push into Africa Reaches Zim Lecture Hall*: http://www.mg.co.za/
[57] Carnegie Endowment, 12 December 2006: China's Africa Strategy: A New Approach to Development and Diplomacy?

Summit mandated Thabo Mbeki to come to facilitate dialogue between the Opposition and the Government and report back on the progress".[58]

The SADC has often argued that America and Britain's more confrontational approach is counter-productive, and some reports have interpreted this quiet diplomacy as a decision not to interfere.[59] Alternative assessments view these demands as a necessary face-saving formula to get Mugabe to accept that SADC wants an end to the crisis.[60]

One of the only SADC leaders to publicly criticise Mugabe's regime was President Levy Mwanawasa of Zambia. He compared Zimbabwe to the foundering of the Titanic and said that quiet diplomacy had failed. But it seems that for the moment, Mugabe can count on his anti-colonial credits across the region (The Economist, 29 March 2007 "The Man Behind the Iron Fist").

More recently, African countries elected Zimbabwe to head the UN Commission on Sustainable Development, despite extensive lobbying against this by European countries, the US and international human rights groups. African countries voted for Zimbabwe 26-21. Environment and Tourism Minister Francis Nhema will chair the commission for one year.[61]

8. Role of Civil Society:

Despite deepening social, political and economic crises, Zimbabwean civil society remains a vibrant force, with increasing levels of political consciousness and debate. Unfortunately, the Government of Zimbabwe has responded by tightening restrictions on the independent media and journalists, and proposing legislation that would curb the work of non-governmental organisations:

Zimbabwean authorities recently cancelled licences for NGOs in a crackdown on groups accused of planning to oust veteran President Robert Mugabe: "*Government has annulled registration certificates of all NGOs in order to sift out those seeking to force regime change in Zimbabwe*," a state broadcaster for Zimbabwe Television said. Zimbabwean authorities have in the past accused Western powers of using NGOs and aid agencies to channel funds to the country's main opposition Movement for Democratic Change (MDC). To keep an eye on the operations of NGOs, the authorities drafted a Bill allowing the state to demand records of finances and operations of NGOs.[62]

The Catholic Church speaks out

Following the SADC's official show of support for President Mugabe, it was left to the country's Catholic church to speak out. On April 1st 2007, in an unprecedented pastoral letter, it denounced Zimbabwe's "…*racist, corrupt and lawless…*" government, comparing it directly to the regime of white settlers that had gone before. "*This so-called quiet diplomacy is hogwash*," said the Archbishop of Bulawayo. "*You can't persuade Mugabe to leave. He has to be forced out*." The bishops condemned Mugabe's Government for the brutal oppression of its opponents, with hit squads detaining and torturing hundreds of dissenters in recent weeks; and they appealed for democracy to be restored through a new constitution, and free and fair elections.[63]

"The bishops have decided to turn political," Mugabe told the state-owned Herald newspaper. "And once they turn political, we regard them as no longer being spiritual."[64]

Trade Unions stage protests

The Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions (ZCTU) held a general strike throughout Zimbabwe on the 3rd and 4th April 2007 in response to declining economic conditions. Workers were encouraged to

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[58] UK House of Lords debate: Zimbabwe, 16 April 2007.
[59] The Economist, 05 April 2007: *Africa's Titanic problem.*
[60] Pambazuka News, 20 April 2007: Zimbabwe: Time for Civil Society to seize the space?: http://www.pambazuka.org/en/
[61] Voice of America (VOA) News, 14 May 2007, available at: http://www.voanews.com/
[62] Mail and Guardian Online, 16 April 2007: http://www.mg.co.za/
[63] The Economist, 05 April 2007: *Africa's Titanic Problem* : http://www.economist.com
[64] ZWNews, 12 May 2007 *Beyond the Fear*: https://www.zwnews.com/

'stay away' from their workplaces for two days in response to the escalating economic woes in Zimbabwe. Police were out in numbers to intimidate employers and workers into going back to work. The Central Intelligence Organisation (CIO) moved in to occupy the headquarters of the ZCTU. This move by the CIO - that has imprisoned and tortured several union leaders – was an attempt to intimidate the labour federation. A ZCTU spokesperson said that the ZCTU was not unsettled at sharing the same premises with government spies. The ZCTU declared the strike a great success.[65]

At May Day celebrations in Harare, ZCTU president Lovemore Matombo told thousands of workers that the union – the largest representative body for workers in the country – wanted employees paid wages linked to the country's runaway inflation and that President Robert Mugabe's government urgently move to fix the bleeding economy:

"*In July we need to be strong to demand poverty datum line or breadline linked wages within a specified time frame. We will toyi toyi (march in streets) if we fail to get PDL linked wages*," said Matombo, who has been arrested and tortured by the police in the past for organising worker protests.

The poverty datum line is currently estimated to be above Z$1.5 million per month, far above the average monthly salary for most Zimbabwean workers, which ranges from Z$200,000 to $500,000.[66]

9. Labour markets and unemployment:

Formal sector

The official unemployment level has currently reached 80% in Zimbabwe. The standard of living of urban workers has reached desperately low levels, epitomised by the massive human rights violations of the "urban clean up" Operation Murambatsvina in mid-2005. The result has generated a renewed wave of protests since the beginning of the year by student and civil society organisations.[67]

Public sector workers have led the response. Junior doctors have come out on strike or organised go-slows demanding better salaries and working conditions. The Zimbabwe Teachers' Association and the Public Services Association, have also threatened to take industrial action if their salary demands are not met. Other protests from the constitutional movement, women's organisations and students have added pressure on the state.

Informal sector

The informal economy has emerged as a critically important conduit for survival in Zimbabwe, largely because of the impact of price controls and artificial foreign exchange rates experience in the formal sector. While this issue was not specifically addressed by media reports reviewed here, it has been addressed tangentially under the coverage of various other issues:

For example, Section 2 on *Inflation and foreign exchange rates* describes how the Zimbabwean government has been severely criticised for using coercion and price controls to try and curb inflation, and for its impact, which has been to drive affected products into the parallel market (informal sector). Prices of basic commodities have rocketed as the government has resorted to the coercion and arrest of traders working in the expanding parallel market, *see p.1*. Section 4 on *Agriculture and land reform policies* describes how huge numbers of farm workers are leaving their jobs to work as informal market dealers, as there is far more money to be made in the informal sector, *see p.4.*

Such examples suggest that complex webs of transactions, exchanging both goods and currency, occur within the informal sector and that these support the Zimbabwean economy in unrecorded ways. This suggests that economic collapse, which has been predicted for some time now, is being offset by the informal, internationalised, parallel economy.[68]

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[65] ACTSA, April 2007, Zimbabwe: An Update: http://www.actsa.org/
[66] ZimOnline, 02 May 2007: http://www.zimonline.co.za/
[67] Zimbabwe Independent, 26 Feb 2007 Mugabe faces Dilemma http://www.thezimbabweindependent.co.zw/
[68] [68] Bracking and Sachikonye, 2006 *Remittances, Poverty Reduction and the Informalisation of Household Wellbeing in Zimbabwe*, ODI http://www.odi.org.uk/

10. Migration and remittances

From 2000 onwards, migration has risen sharply in Zimbabwe. The fast track land reform process; widespread poverty and hunger, 80% unemployment in the formal sector and the adoption by ZANU-PF of draconian measures curbing civil and political liberties have driven tens of thousands of professionals to leave the country to find work abroad in the region and in Europe.[69]

Border jumpers:

Some 3 million Zimbabweans have fled to South Africa. More head for the border every day. Zimbabweans crossing illegally into South Africa - the so called "border jumpers" - travel in the dead of night, guided by traffickers. The going rate is 200 Rand (£14 or $28). Even pregnant women or women with babies on their backs are jumping a 2m high razor-wire fence to escape hunger and poverty.

Plenty of illegal migrants are arrested and sent home. So far this year, 57,600 have been deported to Zimbabwe, according to the International Organisation for Migration. Many attempt the crossing again and again, unable to survive in Zimbabwe in its current state.[70]

Remittances:

The money that migrants send home to their relatives is proving to be a major lifeline for a proportion of household in both rural and urban Zimbabwe. The majority of households that receive remittances are dependent on them for essential household goods, including food. Poorer households that do not receive them are in an even more critical state.[71] No one knows how much exactly, but guesses are that $400m is returned each year in remittances.[72]

11. Access to basic services (health, education, electricity and water)

Health clinics close as economic crisis deepens

After more than 50 years of serving the community, Rockford Clinic in Gweru, in Zimbabwe's central province of Midlands, shut down when the last trained nurse quit - a symptom of the wider crisis facing rural health services. The dilapidated clinic had faced serious operational problems, shortages of staff, equipment, drugs, basic food stuffs and even clean water.[73]

State health institutions have been hit by an exodus of key staff including specialist doctors, pharmacists and nurses to countries like Australia, Botswana, Britain, New Zealand and neighbouring South Africa.[74]

"*Health delivery inevitably suffers when the economy deteriorates to the extent that we are seeing in this country*," said Innocent Makwiramiti, an economist and past chief executive of the Zimbabwe National Chamber of Commerce. "*The government is so preoccupied with finding solutions to the economic meltdown that social services like health are now almost forgotten*."[75]

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[69] Pambazuka News, 20 April 2007: *Zimbabwe: Time for Civil Society to seize the space?* http://www.pambazuka.org/en/
[70] BBC news, Africa 10 May 2007. http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/africa/default.stm
[71] Bracking and Sachikonye, 2006 *Remittances, Poverty Reduction and the Informalisation of Household Wellbeing in Zimbabwe*, ODI http://www.odi.org.uk/
[72] The Economist, 05 April 2007: *Africa's titanic problem*: http://www.economist.com
[73] IRIN, GWERU, Zimbabwe, 30 April 2007: http://www.irinnews.org/
[74] Mail and Guardian, South African Press Association, 03 March 2007. http://www.mg.co.za/
[75] IRIN, GWERU, Zimbabwe, 30 April 2007. http://www.irinnews.org/

According to the United Nations Population Fund, "Women and children continue to be particularly at risk as the situation continues to worsen. Maternal and neonatal mortality has spiked in recent years as access to basic health services and critical obstetric care has declined."[76]

Education:

Mugabe's commitment to improving schools is widely known. But now, hyperinflation and high unemployment are forcing many parents to withdraw their children from school. Schools, which cannot afford to buy teaching equipment, have been forced to hike up fees in line with the rate of inflation. Despite this measure, many are still operating at a loss as fees remain stagnant over a term of four months while inflation continues to rise. [77]

An IRIN report that formed part of a special series on conflict, poverty and social alienation of teenagers estimated that around 18,000 teachers have left Zimbabwe over the past five years to seek better-paid jobs, especially in southern Africa.[78]

Electricity:

Mozambique has publicly stated that it could be forced to eventually 'switch off' Zimbabwe for defaulting on electricity payments amounting to US$55 million. Zimbabwe has battled to raise money for power imports from its neighbours due to biting foreign currency shortages. Imports from Mozambique, South Africa, Zambia and Democratic Republic of the Congo meet 40 percent of Zimbabwe's electricity demand. Zimbabwe is experiencing frequent power cuts due to the declining capacity of its ageing power plants and serious shortages of foreign exchange which have hit imports.[79]

Water:

Despite heavy rains, taps are running dry in several of Zimbabwe's major cities. Some residents in the capital, Harare, have gone without water for as long as two weeks, while areas of Bulawayo, the country's second city, have experienced water cuts lasting several days at a time. Old, unreliable water reticulation equipment has been blamed.[80]

12. HIV infection and life expectancy

Zimbabwe faces "Triple threat"

Official UN statistics show that HIV infection is at 24.6%, one of the highest in the world.[81] Roughly 3 million people in Zimbabwe are infected with HIV, but only 50,000 of them have access to antiretroviral therapy treatment, which is too few to contain the disease. A United Nations humanitarian official today appealed to the Security Council for increased funds to allow Zimbabwe to meet the challenges posed by a "triple threat," a combination of food insecurity, the high incidence of HIV/AIDS and declining social services.[82]

Zimbabwe's has the world's highest orphan rate, largely as a consequence of the HIV/AIDS pandemic. Zimbabweans can expect to die younger than anyone else on the planet. A Zimbabwean woman today can expect to live to just 34, while a Zimbabwean man can expect to live to 37.[83]

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[76] [76] IRIN, GWERU, Zimbabwe, 30 April 2007. http://www.irinnews.org/
[77] IRIN, Zimbabwe HARARE, 28 Feb 2007. http://www.irinnews.org/
[78] IRIN special series on conflict, poverty and social alienation, 2007. http://newsite.irinnews.org/
[79] ZimOnline, 11th May 2007: http://www.zimonline.co.za/
[80] IRIN 10 January 2007: *Zimbabwe: Water crisis hits major cities.* http://www.irinnews.org/
[81] Pambazuka News: *Zimbabwe: Time for Civil Society to seize the space?* 20 April 2007: http://www.pambazuka.org/en/
[82] ZWnews, 30 Mar 2007: https://www.zwnews.com/
[83] UK House of Commons Statement on Zimbabwe, 26 Mar 2007 https://www.publicaffairsbriefing.co.uk/

Appendix 1

List of media sources:

Action for Southern Africa (ACTSA): http://www.actsa.org/

AlJazeera News/Africa: http://english.aljazeera.net/

Associated Press: https://www.ap.org/

BBC News, Africa: http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/africa/default.stm

Business in Africa, Johannesburg: http://www.businessinafrica.net/

CAJ News: https://www.cajnews.org/

Carnegie Endowement, 2006: *China's Africa Strategy: A New Approach to Development and Diplomacy?*

Financial Gazette, Harare: https://www.fingaz.co.zw/, also available at https://www.allafrica.com.

Financial times: http://search.ft.com/

International Crisis Group, Africa Report: http://www.crisisgroup.org/

IRIN Africa: Johannesburg, Zimbabwe: http://www.irinnews.org

Mail & Guardian, SA: http://www.mg.co.za/

Overseas Development Institute: www.odi.org.uk

Pambazuka News: Zimbabwe: http://www.pambazuka.org/en/

Royal United Services Institute (RUSI): http://www.rusi.org/

The Economist: http://www.economist.com

The Zimbabwean: https://www.thezimbabwean.co.uk/

UK House of Commons Statement on Zimbabwe: https://www.publicaffairsbriefing.co.uk/

UK House of Lords debate on Zimbabwe, 16 April 2007.

USAID/Zimbabwe: http://www.usaid.gov/zw/

Voice of America (VOA) News: http://www.voanews.com/english/Africa/

Zimbabwe Independent: http://www.thezimbabweindependent.co.zw

Zimonline (SA): http://www.zimonline.co.za/

ZWNews: https://www.zwnews.com/