

Chipangano, a Business Outfit, Hiding behind Zanu PF,

30 October 2011, Mbare- SO much has been written about the Chipangano (Agreement) shadowy group, notorious for its crude reaction to opposition to Zanu PF. However, there has been a clear distinction in the manner the private and the state-controlled media has covered similar events where this outfit is involved. While there have been attempts to make the Chipangano grouping a formal Zanu PF outfit, the leadership has always disowned them, instead claiming this group belonged to the MDC. That is untrue and those in Zanu PF know this.

In this instalment I will explore the origins and motives of this grouping, made of young women and men, mostly drawn from Mbare's different hostels and Jourburg Lines. It will be an injustice if I end without highlighting some of their major actions and actors, their backgrounds and linkages within the unfolding Zanu PF succession battle. An indepth analysis of these will follow. I will prove that this group is merely there to protect business interests of various leaders within Zanu PF, who also use the outfit to intimidate and silence critics and opponents. I will lastly attempt to suggest solutions to ending the reign of terror by this outfit.

Mbare residents live in fear. They are constantly harassed and threatened with beatings. And they are consistently forced to attend meetings, with unclear agendas, convened outside bars, markets, in corridors, and pambureni (where firewood is sold), and in open spaces, even at service stations. Mostly, there is no notice of the meetings but rowdy young men and women move into your neighbourhood and coerce everyone to attend meetings.

How do you locate the security apparatus in all this? In terms of Section 25 (1) (b) of the Public Order and Security Act (Chapter 11:17), a convener of a meeting should give a notice of the intention to hold a meeting, in writing signed by him or her to the regulating authority for the district in which the public meeting is to be held.

The Act further states in Section 25 (5) that "Any person who knowingly fails to give notice of a gathering in terms of this section, shall be guilty of an offence and liable to a fine not exceeding level twelve or to imprisonment for a period not exceeding one year or to both such fine and such imprisonment."

Taken literally, the above paragraph means that anyone who convenes a meeting without notifying the police shall be arrested. That is not the practice the nation has witnessed in relation to Chipangano. This outfit has been exempt from these legal requirements and the Police have a lot to explain on this.

According to knowing people, Chipangano was set up by the late Ali Khani Manjengwa in 2001, who was aspiring to be a councillor in the March 2002 Harare Municipal Elections. Other senior people who have direct links to this outfit include Jimmy Kunaka, Onismo Gore, who now heads another offshoot of the Chipangano group called the Zimbabwe Home Industries and Marketers Association (ZHIMA), targeting the home industries. Kunaka and Gore are losing municipal and parliamentary Zanu PF candidates since 2002, after repeatedly being trounced by the MDC's different candidates. The other actors are Gobvu, Namion Modern Chirwa, the Chairperson of the Joshua Nkomo District, Douglas Mutyoramwendo, who operates from Mbare District 3, Nathan Mapuranga, Elizabeth Madzimure among the influential players (commonly known as Mai Bwanya) of the Women's Affairs in the party's District

Coordinating 5 Committee (DCC) 6 and also a Zanu PF provincial member, whose husband Cornelius Mandizvidza Bwanya is a Zanu PF Central committee member.

As the name implies, Chipangano means 'agreement' or taken in context of existence implies an 'oath' among those involved.

From an outside viewpoint, the oath or agreement among those who spearhead the work of Chipangano including murdering, harassing and beating up those who stand in its way, mostly with impunity.

The media has been trying hard to link this outfit to Zanu PF as an institution. My discussions with various Mbare residents indicate that at its foundation, Chipangano was established with the following key objectives;

- To mobilise support for Zanu PF candidates in Mbare, to control all council properties and make money, and to prevent the penetration of the area by the MDC and any other civic groupings not linked to Zanu PF.

While these objectives are not in writing, the actions and language of the lead actors speak of their desire to accumulate wealth at all costs, ostensibly hiding behind powerful Zanu PF faction leaders or warlords in Mbare. The primary goal is to control the levers of financial power, especially the retail and wholesale farmers' markets, Siya-So and Magaba home industries, car parks, Mupedzanhamo Flea Market, the bus termini. Who are these people?

At the retail and wholesale markets they are called makoronyera, at Mupedzanhamo they are 'wezingoro/majega' and they are the lead gate marshals who spent time chanting words inviting people to buy different clothing. There is also a team of security guys, those who monitor the movements and language of people.

How does this work?

From interviews with knowing people, there is leadership at all these places. The touts who harass people at bus termini, the people with the pushcarts, the vendors you see selling their wares, the stall holders in flea markets and the retail and wholesale markets are all under a known structure, with strict reporting systems.

For any person to be allowed to operate a stall or table, or even push those carts, and even to be allowed to operate as a vendor, one has to produce a Zanu PF membership card that indicates your cell, branch among other details. Usually there is a fee to be paid to security teams that claim to be protecting operators. Currently they are gathering voting information. Where one is not registered they are facilitating the registration through writing of confirmation letters of residential addresses for all in the markets. People are forced to comply or they will lose their market stalls.

To operate a market stall or table, one has to pay a monthly figure, determined by these structures. Only 10 percent goes to the City of Harare, paid at Remembrance District Office while the rest is taken by individual warlords/landlords who operate more than one table and stall. What this means is that from the council infrastructure, local bullies have taken over and making more money than the council. They make the rules. You object you are ejected. You complain you are victimised as an opposition activist.

From the early formative days, this outfit was structured in such a way that different districts, wards and branches had their own sources of money- council buildings, car parks, markets and ranks. Loyalties within Mbare are along these lines. The leader makes decisions on who gets what, where, when, why and how. In their operations, these complex lines are maintained and respected as in a cult movement.

But there are key areas of convergence among these players. When Zanu PF leaders have a meeting/demonstration/receiving of foreign dignitaries in Harare, they are all expected to rally behind the 'party' and 'ensure that everyone' attends without fail or they lose their positions/markets/stalls. This scenario would explain why you will find that the thousands who appear to rally behind Zanu PF during these public shows of support activities are not translated into ballot votes. Zanu PF has lost all elections contested in Harare, except for Harare South, since 2000.

The majority of the participants in the demonstrations/ meetings/marches and toyi-toying are coerced and threatened with different punishments- leaving them without any choice but to participate. In fact all markets are shut down whenever Zanu PF's top leadership have activities in Mbare. Despite differences among the leaders, the Chipangano group is mandated to publicly keep everyone in line behind the leadership. Yet when they are not in their groups, the same members of Chipangano talk of how much money they are making and claim they will do everything in their power to protect their right to make money. These same people end up voting for the 'enemy party' yet continue to moonlight as the real 'party members'.

Why Not Arrest them?

This has been a serious matter of concern to citizens, particularly Mbare residents. In this part I will attempt to highlight why these young men and women are not arrested. In my investigation, both as a journalist and also a civic leader, I stumbled upon disturbing information. The operations of Chipangano are indirectly linked to individual policemen at Matapi Police Station, Stodart Police Station and at the police bases spread across Mbare District. What apparently happens is that respective group members give certain police officers money as bribes for staying out of their way.

So, when a member of the public reports harassment and persecution by these people, the police will not do much for you, unless one knows the police system to take the matter up the ladder using the police complaints desks. These identified police officers have become so entrenched in Chipangano that they have actually become a part of the repressive outfit.

What the police have been doing is that they document all reports of violence by the Chipangano members and stagger the arrests and prosecution. We have seen some of the violent youths being arrested but being left of the hook.

My belief is that some powerful people have assured the youths that they will not be arrested even if they commit crime.

To deal decisively with Chipangano in our society, the police have to arrest them and send a clear message that this outfit has no business interfering in people's lives. Let the arrested hooligans flood the courts and face the music.

Because Chipangano is linked to senior leaders in Zanu PF, the liberation movement has to rid itself of this barbaric unit that continues to distance Zanu PF from the grassroots. While Vice President John Nkomo and party spokesman Rugare Gumbo have distanced Zanu PF from this notorious outfit, more

has to be done to demonstrate their willingness to facilitate the disbandment of this harmful unit that has potential to even kill or maim its masters. As long as Chipangano exists, Zanu PF does not stand a remote chance of winning against any other party in Mbare and elsewhere in Harare. Let the police do their work and end this madness.

However this problem of youths causing chaos in communities may be directly linked to unemployment, which can be traced right through to such issues as domestic violence, marriage breakdowns, corruption, and political instability. The insecurity that people daily experience is coming from unemployed youths who have had their dreams shattered by economic hardships brought by an irresponsible leadership in national politics and state institutions.

The existence of Chipangano is purely an economic interest initiative that should be ended political and through a comprehensive national development strategy.

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