

Policy Dialogue Forum

Online Series Number 2 of 2020

HARNESSING ZIMBABWE'S DIASPORA TOWARDS THE NATIONAL SETTLEMENT

25 June 2020

The 2nd in the SAPES Trust Policy Dialogue series took place on Thursday the 25th of June 2020. In advertising the Policy Dialogue, the convenor, Dr. Ibbo Mandaza set the scene by issuing the following statement:

The period since the year 2000 has seen an unprecedented growth in the number of Zimbabweans who have left the country, as largely a reaction to the deteriorating political and economic situation at home. Estimates of the population of Zimbabweans living in the Diaspora is between 4 and 5 Million, if not more. In other words, at least 25% of the Zimbabwean population is in the Diaspora. The largest number of Zimbabwean Diasporians is in the SADC neighbourhood, mainly South Africa, Botswana, and Namibia; in the UK, USA, and Canada; and in New Zealand and Australia. The most significant feature of all these statistics is the shocking discovery that as many as 70 -75 percent of all skilled and professional Zimbabweans are in the Diaspora, notably medical doctors, nurses, teachers, engineers, lawyers, financial and managerial experts, university professors, international civil servants and the best of technocrats generally. Not to mention the large numbers of semi-skilled and unskilled workers who have become as indispensable to the receiving countries as their skilled and professional counterparts. The negative impact on Zimbabwe's human capital base is obvious, particularly for a country which during its first decade of independence boasted a historic revolution in education and human resources development. Now, the fruits of independence are being enjoyed elsewhere while Mother Zimbabwe suffers the loss as reflected in the deteriorating economic and political situation. The fact that the volume of remittances is about \$5 Billion per annum, which is either more or equal to Zimbabwe's annual budget and no doubt an indispensable factor on the part of the Diaspora, cannot be sufficient compensation for the kind of contribution that the 25% (and 70-75% of skilled and professional Zimbabweans) of our population might have made to the national development objectives while engaged at home. Not surprisingly, the capacity for both economic and political recovery is severely curtailed; and, conversely, the harnessing of Zimbabwe's Diaspora is a necessity for the National Settlement. This, then, is the subject before us, calling out as it does, less about how we got here - because all that is obvious; but more of what needs to be done Now!

At the start of the conference, the Convenor, Dr. Ibbo Mandaza welcomed all, and pointed out that this is the 2nd in the Policy Dialogue series and it was focusing on the Diaspora. He said that with 4 to 5 million people in the Diaspora, constituting of 75% of the country's skilled personnel, it was not possible to achieve any national settlement that excludes this large number of people. He pointed out that the Diaspora is very important for the national development of Zimbabwe. Dr. Mandaza went on to introduce the day's panellists as follows:

1. Godfrey Kanyenze
2. Chipo Dendere
3. Tendayi Dumbutchena
4. Yvonne Gwashawanhu, and
5. Violet Gonda, the Moderator.

The profiles of the panellists are on the annexes.

At the start of the presentations, the Moderator highlighted the need for the presenters to make policy suggestions on what should be done to make the Diaspora contribution more effective. The Panelists were required to make their presentations in light of some discussion questions that were published earlier to the public as follows:

QUESTIONS / ISSUES FOR DISCUSSION

1. The role of the Diaspora has assumed greater prominence in the development discourse since the turn of the millennium. What are the underlying factors to this?
2. Given the immediate effect of skills losses amongst sending countries, how can the 'brain drain' be turned into a 'brain gain'?
3. Which areas of skills are associated mostly with out-migration, and how are these skills transformed in recipient countries?
4. How interested and involved is the Diaspora where you are with the homeland, Zimbabwe in terms of both the politics, governance and economic development?
5. Are they interested in returning home at some point?
6. How organized is the Zimbabwe Diaspora where you are?
7. In what ways is the Diaspora where you are participating in the affairs of their country of origin, Zimbabwe?
8. What would be the preconditions for the return or active participation of the Diaspora where you are in the politics and economic development of the homeland (Zimbabwe)?
9. What has been the impact of COVID-19 on the perceptions of the Diasporans about their country of origin as well as their intentions to return, especially in the context of growing nationalist tendencies in the countries where you are?
10. Zimbabwe has gone through multiple and internecine crises since the turn of the century (2000), from your experiences where you are, how can these crises be resolved?
11. Some argue that part of the reason why Zimbabwe is failing to move forward is that it has not been able to deal with its past conflicts from the colonial period, liberation struggle and post-independence period which often resulted in violence and human rights abuses from all sides. What would be the lessons from South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission?

12. What role could the Diaspora where you are play in promoting the National Settlement in Zimbabwe? What needs to be put in place to help harness the Diaspora towards that role?
13. What could be the necessary steps towards achieving a National Settlement in Zimbabwe?
14. The churches have called for a Sabbath on elections, while others have come up with the idea of a National Transition Authority (NTA) to help create a conducive environment to address the legacies of the past and provide a basis for real change in the governance of the country. From where you are, do you see this as viable?
15. Where you are based you have seen other Diaspora at work, are there any lessons for Zimbabwe?
16. Do you have success stories of how the Diaspora of other countries you are familiar with have played a proactive role in the affairs of their home countries?
17. The regional bodies such as SADC and the AUC as well as international bodies such as the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and International Labour Organization are actively promoting harnessing the Diaspora dividend. Are you familiar and or involved to some extent with these initiatives?

PRESENTATION BY GODFREY KANYENZE

The first panellist, Godfrey Kanyenze, started by highlighting the significance of the Diaspora to the nation of Zimbabwe. He said that up to the 1990s, the discourse was of Brain Drain, but this changed for a number of reasons:

- (a) Diaspora contributions like remittances increased, doubling globally, overtaking the contributions from donors.
- (b) Recipient countries benefitted a lot from the labour provided by Diasporans, but, home countries also wanted to benefit.
- (c) The Diaspora contributed a lot to the foreign exchange inflows of the country.
- (d) The widening information base especially in the West contributed to the changing perceptions about the Diaspora.
- (e) Diaspora foreign currency became a stable source of income for the country and it was not affected by politics. (Capital is a coward; it does not go to problem areas.)

Kanyenze went on to highlight some of the profiles of the Diaspora, for example, that 75% have secondary education, that 70% have tertiary education, and that the majority are young. Zimbabwe as a whole should take advantage of these attributes of its Diaspora. He pointed out that even the Reserve Bank of Zimbabwe acknowledges that remittances from the Diaspora are crucial for the financial sustainability of the country, and that without these, Zimbabwe's economy would have collapsed a long time ago. Kanyenze highlighted the fact that Diaspora remittances rose from US\$300 million in 2009 to US\$390 million in 2015, and that 30% of Zimbabwe's liquidity comes from the Diaspora, while only 5% comes from Foreign Direct Investments (FDI). It is therefore very clear that while sending money to support their families, the Zimbabwean Diaspora is also sustaining the country.

However, all these figures and estimates come from official sources of information. There is very little data on what is coming from the informal sector such as individuals who bring cash for families and the Malaichas who transport anything.

One of the biggest challenges is that the Zimbabwean Diaspora does not have a feeling of belonging. There is so much tension between the Diaspora and the Zimbabwean authorities. Kanyenze gave the example of the former Head of State, President Robert Mugabe who used to mock Zimbabweans in the Diaspora that they spend all their time in Europe washing the backs of old people. The lack of the feeling for belonging is exacerbated by the fact that the much awaited dual citizenship law has not been effected yet.

Besides feeding their families, Diaspora remittances should go towards investments and not just for consumption. There is also the need to use formal means of transmitting the remittances like they do in other countries such as the Philippines.

Diaspora knowledge is also wanted back home. For example, a Health Worker in the United Kingdom knows a lot about healthcare that can be very useful in Zimbabwe.

There is need to also deal with healing and reconciliation. However, some proposals from the Diaspora have not been fruitful.

It is important to look for example at how China leveraged its Diaspora in the West and managed to transform its own economy from socialism to capitalism and has now overtaken even the United Kingdom and is now breathing down the neck of the United State of America. Zimbabwe should imagine the benefits that would accrue to the country if the Diaspora was considered in a positive light.

Questions and Answers

During the discussion, the question was asked whether the figure of 5 million Zimbabweans in the Diaspora that is often mentioned is accurate. It was noted that the figures are not verifiable.

From the comments that were coming in from the participants, it was pointed out that Zimbabwe's remittances from the Diaspora are actually higher than the figures being mentioned. But then, the question of How do we know? could not be answered.

Another question that was raised is whether the legitimacy of the Diaspora was difficult to understand? The response was that it would not be difficult if there was more official engagement between the Government and the Diaspora especially on the political level on issues such as the Diaspora vote. On whether the political engagement was more important than other kinds of engagement, the response was that obviously there was a need to cover all areas and not just politics.

PRESENTATION BY CHIPO DENDERE

Chipo said that her presentation would focus on how political parties have responded to the Zimbabwean Diaspora. She started by pointing out that ZANU-PF survived for so long in power because many people who opposed the party either left the country, or were too afraid to express themselves or they had died mainly of HIV and Aids. She pointed out that in the

1980s and 1990s, there were so many asylum seekers from Zimbabwe in the United Kingdom and in the United States of America.

Chipo also highlighted the problems with getting accurate data on Diaspora issues, but mentioned that there are people for example Professor Makina in South Africa who can provide some of the data that people are looking for.

Back to the issue of political parties, Chipo said that in the early days of the 1980s and 90s, the majority of the Zimbabwean Diaspora were ZANU-PF. The situation changed in the early 2000s when many MDC supporters started to troop into the Diaspora. However, both ZANU-PF and the MDC did not do much for their Diasporan supporters. For example, both parties did not accept the demand for the Diaspora vote. One reason given was that the political parties could not send their representatives to the various countries to campaign and to mobilize the Diaspora.

After the November 2017 coup, again we see a lot of ZANU-PF joining the Diaspora, but, these new arrivals are not yet really engaging with the majority of the people already in the Diaspora.

Zimbabwean political parties could take a leaf from the Mexican political parties that actually make it a point to go and campaign for their parties and to mobilize for votes among the Mexican Diaspora in the United States of America.

In their last election this year, Malawi political parties made use of their Diaspora. This was also the case with Zambia in their last election where the Zambian Diaspora donated a lot of money to their political parties. This is different from Zimbabwe where the Diaspora sends money only to their families.

Questions and Answers

On the discussion, a question was asked whether Zimbabweans in the Diaspora are really active in the country's politics? The response was that Zimbabweans are very active for example with online engagements on social media, online protests, demonstrations at the UN and other places, and some even host visiting Government officials. In Ethiopia, the Diaspora even built a hospital, but if Zimbabweans in the Diaspora wanted to build a hospital, it will be in exchange for what? It also seems as if Zimbabwean political parties care very little about the Diaspora engagement on social media.

It was pointed out that many would dispute the assertion that post-coup Diaspora warmed up to ZANU PF. The response was that there is no data to support the assertion and counter assertion on that. But, when there was a call for financial support by the main political parties, there were donations of US\$20 or so each from individuals donating to the MDC, but for ZANU PF the donations were in thousands of US\$ each from individuals. The example was given of Nick Mangwana who mobilized lots of donations for ZANU-PF in the UK.

However, it is not clear whether the ZANU-PF Diaspora gives in expectation for benefits such as getting land in Zimbabwe. It is also not clear whether those who donated to ZANU-

PF actually received such land or not. The question was also linked to whether the ZANU-PF Diaspora is more well off than the MDC Diaspora. There was need for more research to find out whether ZANU-PF Diaspora were well off before arriving in the Diaspora or after. On the other hand, the benefits for those who donate to the MDC are not clear either, although issues such as support for asylum applications have been mentioned.

On the effect of ethnicity on the Zimbabwean Diaspora, it was noted that there is not enough data to make any assertions on this point. The one fact that was clear was that of cultural differences between the Diaspora and those at home. This came out very clearly on the treatment of returnees from the Diaspora when they could not get adequate facilities and provisions in the quarantine centres during the National Covid-19 lockdown. While the returning Diasporan was shocked when placed at a center where there was no running water from the taps, the local people who have had no running water from their taps for more than 20 years were not shocked. But both of them were not wrong in any way.

PRESENTATION BY TENDAYI DUMBUTCHENA

Tendayi said that he would focus mainly on the Zimbabwean Diaspora in South Africa. He has seen many Zimbabweans in various sectors of South African society, including in the many prisons that he had the privilege of visiting throughout South Africa.

There are so many Zimbabweans in South Africa, including some in executive positions, academics in universities and many teachers in South African schools. But, the majority of Zimbabweans in South Africa do not have it easy. These include waiters, security guards, farm workers, cab drivers and many others. They work very hard but earn very little, especially now with the Rand depreciating against the US Dollar. So, the majority have very hard experiences. They send most of their money home to Zimbabwe. The majority of these are willing to go back home to Zimbabwe if the economic and political situation changes for the better. Those who are in executive positions may not be so keen to go back to Zimbabwe even with a new political dispensation because the salaries in Zimbabwe are not likely to match those of South Africa.

There are also those Zimbabweans with University Degrees but with no work permits who end up taking up menial jobs such as Uber drivers. One such was murdered in Cape Town recently. Also, the prominence of Zimbabweans in South African schools and in the hospitality industry may soon change because of the high rate of unemployment in South Africa, and the hardships brought about by the Covid-19 restrictions.

On the political front, there is very little engagement by the Zimbabwean Diaspora in South Africa. There was some excitement in the Diaspora after the November 2017 coup, but that excitement soon faded. Tendayi's personal view was that political engagement by the Diaspora works well when there is heightened political activity back home in Zimbabwe. It is difficult for the Diaspora to play any meaningful political engagement when the politics at home is not unfolding. But when there is political action at home, the Diaspora can pressure the host country to support positive change, to support a transitional arrangement and other positive issues.

In the past, around 2008/ 2009, the MDC had a strong showing in South Africa and in Botswana, and they lobbied for change in Zimbabwe. But after the shock of the election aftermath in 2013 and in 2018, there is very little political engagement with the Zimbabwean Diaspora in South Africa.

Questions and Answers

There was a question on whether the post-coup Diaspora in South Africa was more ZANU-PF or MDC? The response was that there are still more MDC supporters in South Africa than ZANU-PF supporters. However, Zimbabwe's Central Intelligence Organization (CIO) is very active in South Africa, which may indicate the Government discomfort with the Zimbabwean Diaspora in South Africa.

On the question whether Zimbabweans are a burden to the South Africa tax payer, the response was that the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees is assisting a lot of Zimbabweans in South Africa. But, it is true that there is a lot of pressure on South African social services such as schools, clinics, hospitals etc, although the pressure is coming not only from Zimbabweans, but also from other foreigners such as from Mozambique, DRC Condo and other countries.

PRESENTATION BY YVONNE MAHLUNGE GWASHAWANHU

Yvonne said that her presentation will be short because most of the points she had were already mentioned by previous presenters. She would therefore focus on the Zimbabwean Diaspora in the United Kingdom. Yvonne highlighted the fact that the movement of Zimbabweans to the UK after independence was in waves as follows/

- (a) The 1st wave was of Rhodesians fleeing because of fear of prosecution by the new Government in the early 1980s.
- (b) The 2nd wave was of those Zimbabweans who were fleeing the violence of the Gukurahundi operations in Matebeleland in the mid-1980s. This group included refugees.
- (c) The 3rd wave was of the people fleeing from the hardships of the IMF/ World Bank Economic Structural Adjustment Programme of the 1990s.
- (d) The 4th wave is that of people fleeing the economic and political upheavals at the turn of the century from 2000 onwards.

On statistics, a United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees report of 2010 recorded that during that year, 1 in 4 asylum seekers in the UK were from Zimbabwe. Also, the UK Census of 2001 recorded that 49,000 Zimbabweans were residing in the UK, while the census for 2018 recorded 112,000 Zimbabweans in the UK. If we add to these figures the number of British born Zimbabweans, and the unknown number of undocumented Zimbabweans, it is estimated that there are currently between 200,000 and 500,000 Zimbabweans in the UK.

Most of the Zimbabwean Diaspora in the UK comprises of mainly well-educated but displaced middle class of nurses, teachers, lawyers, engineers, social workers and others, mainly people who can afford to buy an air ticket to fly to the UK. Of late however, some

Zimbabweans in the UK have become self-employed, and some have become employers with businesses of their own.

Most of the Zimbabwean Diaspora in the UK have social contact with home and continue to support their families mostly through informal routes of money transfer. They participate in social activities such as going to church and other social activities. They support worthy causes such as relief for victims of Cyclone Ida and other disasters including the Covid-19 pandemic.

Questions and Answers

On the question why Diasporans should fight for the vote when they are not paying tax, the response was that voting is an inalienable right that is being denied. The situation of the Zimbabwean Diaspora has changed through the years. At first the majority of Zimbabweans were not properly documented and they could not travel back to Zimbabwe even to vote. Today the majority have adequate documentation and they can travel home to vote without problems.

OPEN DISCUSSION, OBSERVATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Many participants contributed to the open discussion, with the following major points being highlighted:

- (a) There is need for a Diaspora programme for engaging with authorities in Zimbabwe. So far the focus has been mainly on the political issues.
- (b) Political parties have shown that they need the support of the Diaspora, but so far the parties have offered very little if at all, to the Diaspora.
- (c) Some important issues that may be included on the Diaspora programme include the following;
 - i. The issue of passports for families,
 - ii. The right to participate in political and social activities at home without fear of being arrested at the airport,
 - iii. Participation in activities at home without having to pay bribes to some officials,
 - iv. The proposals for Diasporans to be able to move with their benefits such as pensions should be taken up with SADC.
 - v. The need to engage more with the International Organization for Migration (IOM) for the protection of the rights of migrants.
 - vi. A programme for skills transfer by Diasporians to people at home. Nigerians are already doing it.
- (d) It is better to focus on human rights issues rather than to focus on political issues. It will make every ones lives easier when ZANU-PF becomes the opposition in the future.
- (e) The Diaspora should not threaten to stop the sending of remittances to Zimbabwe as this will only hurt families and not the authorities. In any case, remittances are private funds that should not be politicised.
- (f) Support for political parties is currently difficult due to the factionalism in the major parties. Which ZANU-PF to support and which MDC to support?

- (g) There is need to establish a Diaspora Think Tank for Zimbabwe. It is not OK for people in Zimbabwe to do the thinking for those in the Diaspora.
- (h) The collection of Diaspora data is of crucial importance and it does not need Government involvement.
- (i) There is need for political education so that people who make political comments on social media are well informed about the political situation.
- (j) The Diaspora should be organized in groups to be able to interact with organised groups in Zimbabwe such as nurses, teachers, universities etc.
- (k) There is need for a lot of prayers for the Diaspora to become a movement, a powerhouse, an institution for change, and not just to follow political parties.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, it was pointed out that the purpose of the dialogue was to reflect not only on what the Diaspora want, but more importantly, what the Diaspora is prepared to do to remove Zimbabwe from the situation of the Failed State that we find ourselves in right now.

All the important points of the dialogue have been captured and recorded and it will be available on Facebook and on the SAPES Trust website.

The Convenor, Dr. Ibbo Mandaza made an announcement on the forthcoming dialogue series as follows:

- (a) On 09 July, **Zimbabwe: Constitutionalism, and the Return of the Military to the Barracks**
- (b) On 23 July, **South Africa's Policy Towards Zimbabwe: The Case of the Tail Wagging the Dog: Indifference, Incapacity, or Harvesting on the Neighbour's Woes?**

ANNEXES

Annex 1: Profile of the Panellist

(a) Chipso Dendere

Zimbabwean academic, Professor of Political Science at Wellesley University in the USA where she has been for almost two decades; and her PhD studies were on the impact of the exodus of Zimbabwean skilled workers and professionals on the country, both politically and economically.

(b) Tendayi Dumbutshena

A Zimbabwean South African; former renowned journalist and until recently, an advisor for the Government of South Africa. Well placed to understand the Zimbabwean Diaspora in South Africa, especially as a member of the External Affairs Portfolio Committee of the National Convergence Platform (NCP)

(c) Godfrey Kanyenze

Zimbabwe’s leading development economist and passionate advocate for social and economic justice in Zimbabwe; comes on this panel as one who has studied the Zimbabwean Diaspora over the last decade, including policy recommendations on how the country can harness a sector that now constitutes almost 75% of all skilled and professional Zimbabweans, not to mention the \$5 billion in remittances.

(d) Yvonne Mahlunge Gwashawanhu

Human Rights Lawyer, Feminist, Founding Member of the MDC, NCA, ZWLA and ZLHR, Public Law and Immigration Law Consultant Solicitor. MDC Presidential Representative to UK and Ireland.

Annex 2: Social Media Report

Facebook

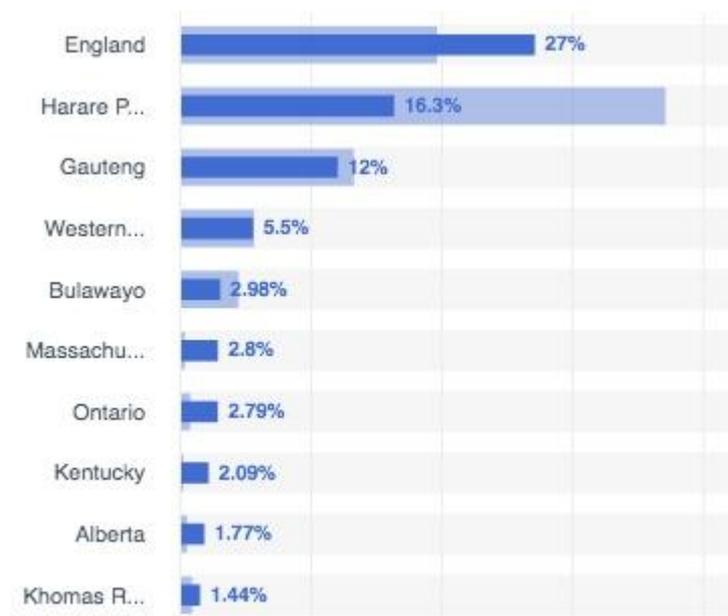
Event Insights

- 6.3K People Reached
- 94 People Interacted
- Main Audience: Men 25-34

Video Insights

- 11k Minutes Viewed
- Peak Viewers on Live: 98 Viewers
- Average Video Watch Time: 2:16
- Top Audience: Men 35-44

Top Locations:



Zoom

Approx. 70 People on call

YouTube

40 Views

Views by Country on YouTube

N/A at present time

Annex 3: Technical and Administration Team

- (a) Tony Reeler
- (b) Robert Henry Jones
- (c) Gertrude Thandiwe Ndlovu
- (d) Norman Mlambo