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Editorial Introduction

Welcome! We are excited to share with you the inaugural issue of the **AfriFuture Research Bulletin**, which we are proud of having managed to produce under very challenging conditions brought by the COVID-19 pandemic. The Bulletin, which is published quarterly, is under the auspices of the AfriFuture Research and Development Trust (AfriFuture), which is a new organization, committed to undertaking and disseminating cutting-edge, rigorous and transformational social science research. The organisation is particularly interested in research that focuses on the socioeconomic and political situation of communities in the Global South, while providing sustainable and transformational solutions to identified problems. In line with the organisational objectives, the AfriFuture Research Bulletin endeavours to offer a new and exciting platform where contributions that engage and interrogate the contemporary social, economic, and political questions in the Global South are invited. The Bulletin is a channel for disseminating nuanced, authoritative, and up-to-date research and opinions with articles being invited from any interested persons. It seeks not only to publish and disseminate contemporary scholarly articles but is also committed to providing critical and constructive feedback on submitted manuscripts. This is an integral part of its capacity building initiative; hence, all articles undergo initial editorial screening and a double-blind peer review process. The aim of the process is to improve the quality of submissions while providing guidance and support to emerging scholars. This comes in a background where young scholars in the Global South face challenges in receiving critical and constructive feedback as they seek avenues to publish their research. Unfortunately, at times, due to lack of support young and emerging scholars end up publishing in predatory journals. This is tragic, given the effort which they put in research and manuscript development with manuscripts ending up being published by mediocre publishers without peer review. This does not in any way improve their scholarship or contribution to knowledge.

In this Bulletin, we have an exciting and in-depth analysis of the disruptive impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on children in Zimbabwe's high-density areas by Agness Mutemaringa. In her article, she shows that children (who are often a demographic that is rarely acknowledged), have also been impacted by COVID-19, which has deepened existing development deficiencies, structural inequalities and vulnerabilities. For her, this highlights the need for a multi-stakeholder approach that is responsive and transformational. Given the ravages of COVID-19 in the past year and the challenges which it is presenting, Mutemaringa's article is timely and provides critical contemporary analysis of urgent urban challenges affecting children which need immediate attention.

What has been the role and contribution of women to economic sustainability and what have been the state responses in this context? This is a question which Emmanuel Osewe Akubor and Beatrice Amili Akubor interrogate in their article published in this Bulletin. They employ a narrative historical approach to critically explore the experiences of women in the oil rich, but environmentally degraded Niger Delta. They show that environmental degradation in the Delta has for decades posed serious livelihood concerns for women given their central social reproduction roles in the household and community. The implications of



environmental degradation are shown as being worse for women compared to men, who show an indifferent attitude to its implications. Akubor and Akubor argue that women have for decades been at the helm of the struggle against environmental degradation, resource exploitation and low yields in the agricultural sector. Despite this, critical and nuanced analysis of the challenges they experience are lacking, and it is this gap in knowledge which their article addresses.

In this Bulletin, we have interesting article by Irony Mazaruse, who critically explores urban agriculture as an alternative poverty reduction strategy for poor urban households. He argues that in African cities, urban agriculture has shown the potential of increasing household food security by increasing household income as well as nutrition. For him, expanded urban cultivation in the face of debilitating socio-economic crisis facing most countries and especially the precarious urban poor is essential. Studies undertaken in different contexts show that it has far reaching positive implications on health, housing, education and welfare. It is thus important that policy makers urgently take it into consideration.

‘The wellbeing of communities globally is anchored on guidance and counselling.’ This is according to Resina Banda who explores the fundamental role of guidance and counselling in child and community development. She gives precedence to the role of schools as basic institutions of every society. From empirical data gathered from schools in Masvingo, Banda advances the view that focusing on child wellbeing through guidance and counselling is consistent with national, regional and international frameworks for good governance and sustainable development. For her this is a pivotal contribution because the future of all societies is guaranteed by children and youth.

Knobby Tomy brings in yet another focal facet of socioeconomic development in Zimbabwe. He prioritises livestock health and rural livelihoods particularly in a context where the country has since late 2019, been experiencing the devastating effects of *theileriosis* (commonly called January disease). He argues that approaching livestock diseases from a livelihoods approach is largely missing in development literature. Using a Sustainable Livelihoods Approach (SLA), he goes on to interrogate the livelihood dimensions of the disease. He proffers valuable recommendations on how *theileriosis* can be controlled, accordingly reducing its impact on rural livelihoods. His contribution is highly significant in Zimbabwe and other countries of the Global South where agriculture is the mainstay of livelihoods.

The Bulletin has a special section where individuals can freely express their opinions on various socio-economic and political issues. In this section, we have a thought-provoking piece from Rhabhelani Mguni who argues that ethnic minorities in Zimbabwe have for decades suffered from what he sees as a ‘humanitarian crisis.’ Historical and current socio-economic, political and legal trajectories for him, do not favour ethnic minorities and he points out to the Gukurahundi atrocities of the 1980’s in Zimbabwe as a classic example of ‘genocide’ showing how ethnic minorities have been mistreated. He argues that this dark history in Zimbabwe’s past should be looked at in the spirit of true reconciliation. Mguni goes



on to highlight what he believes are essential steps which need to be taken so that policies and the legal framework guarantee civil liberties, socio-economic emancipation of marginalised ethnic minorities. Nothando Petra Magwizi also offers her opinion as she explores the nexus between politics, security and global relations in the Global South and the attendant challenges. She argues that when we look at the countries in the Global South, they have faced persistent challenges of natural disasters, pandemics, weak health systems, gender-based violence as well as economic, cultural and religious challenges. These challenges are more persistent in the Global South when compared to the Global North, and this is attributable to various reasons with capitalist, imperial, colonial and neo-colonial domination being dominant. She argues that the experience which states in the Global South have gained from dealing with challenges offer important lessons. These lessons should be harnessed to develop solutions which are important for socio-economic development, enhancing human capacity and wellbeing in the Global South. For Magwizi, the conversation needs to be opened up and solutions sought to improve the lives of citizens in the Global South.

As the inaugural issue, the Editors have authored a special bonus article under the 'Editors Article Contribution' section. In this special editor's article, Clement Chipenda and Tom Tom explore what they term pandemic politics in a time of COVID-19 in Zimbabwe. While the new virus has attracted the attention of scholars and practitioners in various disciplines, and substantive evidence of its impacts and relevant policy responses is accumulating, Chipenda and Tom focus on the political manoeuvrings and authoritarian consolidation enclave. They reconnoiter the historical and current facets of pandemic politics, and dwell on how the ruling party - the Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU PF) rode on COVID-19 to consolidate its hegemony over the agentive opposition political parties, civil society organisations and the general citizens in a context of sliding populism and legitimation crisis. This dimension is immensely significant given the wider reach of politics to all the other spheres of life during and post COVID-19.

We hope that you will enjoy reading the AfriFuture Research Bulletin.

Tom Tom
Editor-In-Chief

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Research Article:

COVID-19: Exploring the situation of children in Zimbabwe's high density urban areas

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Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic has had disruptive impact across the globe. Scholars and practitioners are still grappling with its effects on socioeconomic and political systems, along with exploration of how best to respond to the pandemic. Despite significant developments ushered by epidemiology, medicine and public health to understand, prevent and contain COVID-19, pivotal contributions from social science are still low. As the pandemic continues to unfold in a context where the knowledge base and policy responses are inadequate, the paper explores the situation of children in Zimbabwe's high density urban areas, using Chitungwiza town and child-sensitive social protection as the case study and conceptual underpinning of the paper respectively. The interrogation shows that COVID-19 has tapped on and deepened existing developmental deficiencies, structural inequalities and vulnerabilities. Effective responses to the pandemic should be anchored on a multi-stakeholder approach that addresses poverty, inequality and marginalisation, while advancing developmental transformation.

Keywords: *children, COVID-19, inequality, social protection, marginalisation, poverty, Zimbabwe.*

1. Introduction

The disruptive and devastating impacts of COVID-19 are widespread and still unfolding (Ataguba, 2020: 325; Harris et al. 2020; Loembe et al. 2020). On 11 March 2020, the World Health Organisation (WHO) declared the new virus a global pandemic along with encouraging countries to adopt measures of preventing and containing the pandemic (Liu, Lee and Lee, 2020: 277; Lone and Ahmad, 2020: 1300). Since inception, COVID-19 is mainly presented as a biomedical problem hence, the dominance of epidemiology, public health and medicine in attempts to comprehend and control the pandemic (Eaton and Kalichman 2020: 341). On face value, the pandemic appears to be principally falling outside the ambit of social science disciplines (Eaton and Kalichman 2020: 341, Weible et al 2020). However, the new virus emerged, and is spreading and affecting people within a social context. The implication is that people and the attendant social organisation and social processes are at the centre responses to the pandemic hence, justifying the importance of including social and behavioural sciences in responses to the pandemic (Van Bavel et al. 2020). Grounded in quest to transform wellbeing, the article explores the situation of children in Zimbabwe's high-density areas in a context of COVID-19 lockdown.



Crystallised around children in Chitungwiza, the largest dormitory town of Harare, the central questions that I address in this article are: What child issues emanated from or were shaped by the pandemic? How can the issues be understood and addressed through social policy for the current and future wellbeing of children?’ The paper advances a child perspective to COVID-19 and the associated lockdown in Zimbabwe primarily due to existing lacunae in this regard in literature and ongoing responses to the pandemic. Essential to understand is that indepth, solid, nuanced and situated empirical knowledge is essential if Zimbabwe is to comprehensively understand and effectively respond to the pandemic. The importance of such knowledge is not restricted to COVID-19 but transcends time and geographical context, thereby heralding ongoing and future relevance. Appropriate responses to pandemics through social policies that guarantee the wellbeing of children are in essence assuring reproduction of society and sustainability of development because children are the future of every society. The importance of children and youth in improving and reproducing society is widely explored (see Bastien and Holmarsdottir, 2020). Accordingly, marking the article is the question, ‘In what ways were children in Zimbabwe’s high density urban areas affected by COVID-19 lockdown, and how can their lives (and those of families) be improved through policy in the immediate, and in future?’ Acknowledged in this paper is that children are not a completely exclusive group. From a sociological perspective, children belong to families, households, and communities (Sharma, 2013). This dimension of studying children applies to all social groups and should fully be brought to the fore in efforts to comprehensively explore, respond and improve the wellbeing of children.

The 20th of March 2020 heralded the onset of COVID-19 and mandatory testing of all returnees started on 26 May 2020 (Ministry of Health and Child Care, 2021). Compared to earlier stages, local transmission has superseded imported cases hence, increased focus on internal measures to reduce transmission since 22 July 2020. For detail pertaining to COVID-19 statistics, see Ministry of Health and Child Care (2021). While the statistics seem low compared to other countries, they signify a major threat to Zimbabwe’s fragile health care system, ailing economy and weak social protection measures. The country’s economy, healthcare and other areas of social policy have been tumbling since 2000 when Zimbabwe adopted a radical indigenisation programme (Chinyoka 2017, Kidia, 2018). Since then, the capacity to deliver socioeconomic wellbeing has been eroded. The country’s inflation rate stood at 500 per cent in 2019, while 90 per cent of the economically active group are out of formal employment (Chagonda 2020), with youth being the bulk of the unemployed and under-employed (Gukurume and Oosterom, 2020); industries are folding operations; healthcare facilities lack basic medical equipment and drugs (Kidia 2018); the informal sector is expanding and constitute 60.6 per cent of the economy (International Monetary Fund, 2019); and 7.7 million people constituting approximately 60 per cent of the population are food poor, 2.2 million being in urban areas (Zamchiya et al 2020). Food insecurity is increasingly being experienced in a context of paltry social protection programmes. Currently, Zimbabweans await changes that are likely to realised due Emmerson Mnangagwa’s ascendancy to presidency, re-engagement with the international community and efforts to



attract foreign direct investment. This national outlook of macroeconomic meltdown, fragile social services and protection programmes, and broadening and intensifying poverty is reflected at micro levels such as high-density urban areas. While not portraying a uniform picture of the country's high density areas and acknowledging differentiation in such areas, Chitungwiza is a classic example of a densely populated town characterised by weak or erratic social services (potable water and refuse collection), ailing public health service institutions (municipal clinics and government hospital), slums, decayed urban infrastructure in its diversity and rampant uncontrolled urban sprawl (Chigwenye 2019, Gallagher 2018, Zvobgo 2020). In this 'gloomy' urban environment coupled with weak national response and social provisioning under COVID-19 lockdown, the wellbeing of poor children and other social groups is threatened.

The article is envisaged to be significant to child and family studies for various reasons. Firstly, I provide fresh and real-time scholarly insights on COVID-19 and lockdown in Zimbabwe thereby contributing to literature on the novel virus that is largely still in its infancy in Zimbabwe and other African countries (reference being made to the time of writing). Since the onset of the pandemic in Zimbabwe, scholars focused on various aspects (see Dandara et al 2020, Zamchiya et al 2020). However, reputable literature is still scanty. Secondly, I specifically focus on children in a context of the pandemic and lockdown. This group is often marginalised in mainstream research and subsumed under other groups and their experiences are rarely heard directly from them. Limited focus on children in exploring COVID-19 is acknowledged in literature (Karombo 2020, Save the Children 2020, UNICEF 2020). Thirdly, I focus on child-sensitivity in social policy and programming. This is a novel approach of exploring COVID-19 lockdown in Zimbabwe, therefore, provides alternative lenses for interrogating and advancing child wellbeing. Fourthly, I proffer recommendations with practical relevance to the government, parents and guardians, child service providers, programme implementers, policymakers, and other stakeholders. The superior objective of the article is to improve the wellbeing of children through influencing policy. Leveraging on this aim, it is envisaged that the responsible stakeholders will embrace the recommendations thereof for the improvement of the lives of current and future children during and beyond the pandemic. The article is composed of four sections. In the ensuing section, I explore and justify child-sensitive social policy as the relevant conceptual approach for addressing children's issues in a COVID-19 lockdown context. In the second section, I discuss the research approach and methods anchoring the article. The third section is constituted by six selected themes of COVID-19 lockdown and children, while in the fourth section, I present the overview of the main arguments and recommendations for improving the wellbeing of poor children, families and households in Zimbabwe's high-density areas. How useful then is the child-sensitive social protection (CSSP), and what innovations are necessary in the ambit of Zimbabwe's COVID-19 lockdown? This is my focus in the next section.



2. Conceptual framework: Child-sensitive social protection

While fully acknowledging its limited scope compared to child sensitive social policy, CSSP lenses were adopted to explore the situation of children under Zimbabwe's COVID-19 lockdown. Broadly, social protection is just one of the tasks or functions of social policy (Adesina 2011 2020, Mkandawire 2011). However, due to neoliberal corrosion, hegemony of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) institutions, increasing infiltration of (global) capitalism in social policy and development, and the ascendancy of targeting the deserving or ultra-poor, social policy has been reduced to social protection (Adesina 2020, Ouma and Adesina 2019). Most governments in the developing world have been swayed by dominant international financial and development institutions including the World Bank (WB) and International Monetary Fund (IMF) to embrace a neoliberal agenda, and narrow social provisioning based on shortemism (Park 2019). Social protection through social assistance and social insurance has become predominant in the developing countries. Accordingly, programmes based on social protection are commended for improving livelihoods in Africa (see Devereux 2016, Devereux and Sabates-Wheeler 2004, Moore and Seekings 2019). Restriction of social policy to social assistance has led to mono-tasking of social policy through peripheralisation of other social policy functions (production, redistribution, social reproduction and social cohesion/compact) (Adesina 2011, 2020). Yet, social protection does not challenge the structural causes of inequality, marginalisation and poverty (Adesina 2020, Mkandawire 2006, 2015; Ouma and Adesina 2019, Yi and Kim 2015). Both established and emerging scholars are critical of the trends in current social protection and have called for transformative social policy with its aim of addressing the structural causes of poverty through multiple functions, and a wider vision of people's wellbeing (Adesina 2020, Mkandawire 2015, Yi and Kim 2015); and re-engineering of governance in Africa and broadly, the Global South (see Mkandawire 2015, Park 2019). The bottom line is that when applying CSSP to improving child wellbeing during COVID-19 and the accompanying lockdown (and in the aftermath), its attendant strengths and pitfalls should be understood and addressed particularly through inclusion of other tasks of social policy.

While deserved criticisms have been highlighted, CSSP provides essential lenses for analysis of the situation of children during COVID-19 lockdown. Along with application to child issues in Zimbabwe's lockdown, two key questions should be addressed: What is CSSP? What falls within the ambit of CSSP? Conceptualising CSSP calls for understanding social protection first - the set of public policies, programmes and systems that help poor and vulnerable individuals and households to reduce their economic and social vulnerabilities, improve their ability to cope with risks and shocks, and enhance their human rights and social status (Save the Children International 2015: 5). Basically, social protection falls into two broad categories – formal and informal. Formal social protection includes social assistance (conditional and unconditional non-contributory cash transfers, in kind transfers or social contributions including school feeding programmes, public works programmes and pensions); social insurance (health insurance and employment benefits); and relevant national legislation, policies and regulations (Bilecen et al 2019, Castellani and Martin-Daiz 2019). Four elements



are central in formal social protection (preventive, protective, promotive and transformational change). Informal social protection (also called traditional social protection) includes mechanisms that are provided through family and community networks. In practice, formal and informal mechanisms for social protection should be complementary (Ashraf, 2014). If applied to children and COVID-19 lockdown, informal provision for child welfare by family and community networks, and formal provision by government and other organisations should complement each other.

Various conceptualisation of child-sensitive social protection are available in literature (see Jones and Holmes 2010: 1, Temin 2008, UNICEF 2009, Yates et al 2010:210). For example, Yates et al (2010: 210) argue that child-sensitive social protection focuses specifically on addressing the patterns of children's poverty and vulnerability and recognizing the long-term developmental benefits of investing in children... In addition, interventions do not have to target children directly to be child-sensitive. For instance, food provision during COVID-19 lockdown can be distributed to parents and guardians therefore, reaching children indirectly. While critiquing earlier definitions, Roelen and Sabates-Wheeler (2012:294) reiterate the need for CSSP to focus on outcomes rather than a set of inputs or instruments. In that context, they bring three distinct sets of vulnerability and asymmetry that are pertinent to children. Physical/biological vulnerability acknowledges that children at different ages are more susceptible to the negative impacts of malnutrition or disease by virtue of their immature immune systems and under-development. Dependence-related vulnerability focuses on the understanding that children are dependent on adult members of the family, household and community for their wellbeing (meeting physical, emotional and social requirements). For example, in the Chitungwiza case study, most children depend on adult members for socioeconomic wellbeing although some also participate in economic activities to complement family income. Child-headed households primarily depend on the participation of older children in informal activities in the absence of formal provisioning. In their own right, children are not expected to be economic agents. Institutionalised disadvantage (also called cultural devaluation disadvantage) is the devaluation of some groups in society on the basis of perceptions of who they are, and how those in power act in relation to them. Notable is that although the visibility of children in poverty reduction debates and agenda is increasing, they largely lack voice and are an 'invisible' population. Children are largely trivialised and considered a secondary group (Bessant 2020, Elster 2020). On the basis of these three vulnerabilities, a more personalised thinking about social protection is essential. Such an appropriate social protection response for children requires particular elements that constitute the degree of child-sensitivity of the intervention (Roelen and Sabates-Wheeler, 2012: 296). In this way, for example in a COVID-19 lockdown context, child-sensitive social protection should incorporate both the practical and strategic needs of children, those who care for them and the community. Overall, despite definitions of CSSP being work in progress and lean, three aspects are pivotal – interventions that address the specific vulnerabilities faced by children, human capital investment, and making reference to target groups and mechanisms.



What is the context of CSSP? A joint statement meant to establish wider agreement on the essence of CSSP, highlighting the vulnerabilities experienced by children and families, how social protection can improve children's lives even in cases where they are not the direct beneficiaries, along with creating approaches and principles for executing child-sensitive social policy was made in 2009 (UNICEF 2009). This global initiative emphasised the importance of social protection. Accordingly, the development agenda is increasingly being weighed on the basis of how well it protects people (Devereux 2016). Still on global commitment, social protection is prioritised in the 2030 Development Agenda that is grounded in the 2015 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Target 1.3 implement nationally appropriate social protection systems and measures for all including floors, and by 2030 achieve substantial coverage of the poor and vulnerable is included under SDG1 (End poverty) (Devereux 2016). Furthermore, at global level, policy attention on child poverty gained momentum. However, while the inclusion of social protection in the SDGs raises hope for improved child outcomes, distinctive factors in different countries will determine success in this regard. Disaggregation of the Global Multidimensional Poverty Index by age group and gender (executed by the Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative in 2017), for purposes of interrogating the condition of 1.8 billion children specifically focused on assessing and reducing child poverty (see Alkire 2018). Despite social protection gaining global mileage, sufficiency of coverage is worrying. Approximately 45 per cent of the world's population and 35 per cent of the child population are covered (International Labour Organisation, 2017 cited in Mahendru and Tasker 2020: 3). At a micro level, public food and potable water assistance for children was recorded in Chitungwiza during COVID-19 lockdown.

Why is momentum for CSSP increasing globally, and in what ways is CSSP relevant to exploring the children's questions in Zimbabwe's COVID-19 lockdown in high density areas, and in informing social policy? CSSP provides new impetus to calls for social protection in a context of intensifying or widening poverty especially in developing countries (Osabohien et al 2020). Emphasis on CCSP acknowledges aspects pertaining to child poverty, vulnerability and wellbeing as important in poverty reduction responses. Children are disproportionately affected by extreme poverty that is pegged at 1.90 United States dollars (Christensen 2019: 1). In 2016, approximately 385 million children constituting 19.5% of the world's population were living in extreme poverty compared with 9.2 per cent of adults (Newhouse et al 2016, UNICEF and WB 2016). If current trends are not abated, 305 million children in Africa will be living in extreme poverty by 2030 (Watkins and Quattri 2020: 1). In Zimbabwe, as is the case in most African countries, statistics of child poverty are scanty. The lack of cogent statistics on poverty in Africa is explored by other scholars (Dadalen et al 2016, Flahaux and De Haas, 2016). Three themes stand out in relation to increasing calls for CSSP – acknowledgement that children have different basic needs from adults and are affected most, both in the short and long- term, when their basic needs are not met; rights- and efficiency-based arguments approaches for child wellbeing (social protection as a human right by reference to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), moral obligation to guarantee children's wellbeing in a context of dependence on others, rights-based policy around child poverty by



the United Nations and NGOs, and ratification of the Convention on the Rights of the Child); and social protection for children is investment in addition to being a mere welfare or a protective measure. This is an efficiency-based justification for CSSP (Merrien, 2013, Roelen and Sabates-Wheeler 2012). As I indicated in the introductory paragraphs of this section, CSSP is essential as a stop-gap measure for example, providing food and other basic livelihood goods and services during lockdown, but fails to advance developmental transformation in the long-term. Transformative social policy is an essential alternative. What are the appropriate research approach and methods for the exploration of the situation of children and family under COVID-19 lockdown? In the next section, I explain and justify the approach and methods adopted.

3. Materials and methods

In this section, core aspects of the methods applied are justified. These include an outline of Chitungwiza town, preparation for fieldwork and research approach adopted; sampling, data collection and ethics observed; researching with children and data analysis.

The study area, preparation for fieldwork and research approach

Chitungwiza is a dormitory town of Harare (Zimbabwe's capital city) and is among the oldest towns of the country. The town was established under British colonial administration and is located approximately 30 kilometers to the south of Harare (Gallagher 2018). As a dormitory town, Chitungwiza was meant to accommodate low-income people working in Harare (the then Salisbury). Since establishment, most people residing in Chitungwiza commute to Harare for work or goods and services that they may not access in the town (Chirisa, Mazhindu and Bandaiko 2016). Rated in terms of population, the town is the second largest after Harare, and accommodates approximately 1 million people (Zimbabwe National Statistics Agency, 2012).

Since the colonial era, the town is marked by development gaps due to limited, and in some cases, the absence of strategic town planning, infrastructural and industrial development and renewal, and pathetic social services delivery (sewage and solid waste management, regular potable water provision, servicing of residential and industrial stands and urban renewal). These deficiencies are mounting in a context of a population boom due to both natural growth (biological reproduction) and migration (Chigudu 2020, Zvobgo 2020). Cheap accommodation and other factors of real or perceived low cost of living, opportunities for informal trade and employment, and easier connectivity to Harare are the main reasons for the increasing influx of people to the town (Ray of Hope Zimbabwe 2017). Several scholars explored various socioeconomic woes bedeviling Chitungwiza and other towns (see Gambe 2019, Manzungu et al 2016, Muchadenyika and Williams 2020). These problems have negative implications to the lives of children and broadly, families in Chitungwiza in a time of COVID-19.

The study informing the article was executed during Zimbabwe's COVID-19 lockdown in 2020, implying the need for clearance and protecting self and others from the virus.



Preparing for fieldwork included applying for clearance and approval, submitting data collection guides to senior researchers and child specialists for assessment and incorporation of comments, preparing a budget and sourcing funds, pretesting and refinement, and developing strategies for gaining entry. Approval was sought from the Zimbabwe Republic Police (ZRP), the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education, Chitungwiza Town Council, parents and local childcare organisations. There are several high-density towns in Zimbabwe, but Chitungwiza was selected for convenience in terms of access and accumulation of research networks and contacts. I adopted an interpretive research approach anchored on qualitative-dominant research methods to gather solid, fresh and nuanced data on the situation of children and associated families under COVID-19 lockdown. To enhance geographical coverage across the town, Old St Mary's and Manyame Park (new St Mary's), Zengeza 2 and 5, and Seke Units E, L and Makoni were selected. The what and how questions pertaining to preparing for fieldwork, interpretivism and qualitative-dominant research methods are widely documented (see Creswell and Creswell 2018; Creswell and Plano Clark 2017).

The sample, data collection and considerations for ethical research

Although the focus of the study was primarily on children, its demands could not be comprehensively satisfied without including other individuals and groups. Accordingly, I selected representatives of children organisations, residents, informal traders' associations, and Chitungwiza municipality, and community leaders purposively. This sampling technique was applied to select participants who were known in advance to possess essential information. Children, parents and guardians, teachers and school administrators, clinics and hospitals, and churches were randomly selected in an attempt to give each a fair chance of being selected. In addition to this main corpus of participants are child vendors, and men and women who operate at informal markets or move from one household to the other selling various wares that I interacted with on the basis of convenient availability.

The final sample was as follows: children (30); parents and guardians (15); representatives of children's organisations (2); teachers and school administrators (5); local health institutions (2); residents' representatives (1); informal traders' associations (1); local community leaders (ward councillors) (3); churches (2); and representative of Chitungwiza municipality (2). Sampling is a pivotal area of research practice (Lohr, 2019; Patten and Newhart, 2017). Both primary and secondary data, scholarly literature, COVID-19 regulations and social policy documents were essential in informing the study. Though scanty (at the time of fieldwork), scholarly articles on COVID-19 in Zimbabwe and the accompanying lockdown were reviewed, along with media sources, statutory instruments and other provisions relating to the pandemic.

Data collection was executed in October and November 2020 using mainly face-to-face indepth interviews (with for example, children, parents and guardians); key informant interviews (with for example, local community leaders and health institutions); telephone interviews and skype (with for example, child specialists and representatives of children's



organisations); observation based on a flexible guide (of children at playgrounds, child vendors and informal markets); and informal interaction and questioning (with children, parents and guardians, vendors). Three aspects are worth noting. Firstly, the number of interviews correspond to the number of the stated participants. Secondly, data were gathered from children aged 14 to 16 years due to the closeness of this age group to the legal age of majority (LAMA) in Zimbabwe and the assumption that in the absence of constraining factors, these children are competent to represent themselves in research relating to their lives. Thirdly, the new virus has disrupted the so-called natural setting therefore, remote methods of data collection were also applied to complement face-to-face data gathering where physical contact with some key informants was impossible due to various reasons, or had to be complemented. This justifies why I used remote interviewing (telephone and Skype interviews) with child specialists and representatives of children's organisations. Interacting with these participants in this way built on existing, wide and accumulating contacts and networks in the town.

To safeguard the health of participants included in face-to-face interviews against COVID-19, physical distancing, appropriate wearing of face masks and sanitisation were prioritised (as outlined in SI83/2020). Furthermore, primary data collection was done in the 'relaxed' phase of Zimbabwe's lockdown. In this phase, restrictions on physical interaction were reduced but adherence to COVID-19 prevention and containment were enforced (see *The Insider*, 2020 April; China Global Television Network, 2020).

Data collection guides (flexible guides for in-depth interviews and informal interaction and questioning, and observation), and the code of ethics underpinning the study were shared with peer researchers and senior scholars (including psychologists, sociologists and child development specialists), requisite research councils, children's organisations and carers for review. I incorporated essential comments from these stakeholders in refining data collection instruments and the ethical base to their satisfaction. Prevention of COVID-19 through adhering strictly to the government and WHO regulations, informed consent and assent, avoidance of harm in its diversity (not only restricted to physical but also relating to psychological, social and political aspects), confidentiality and provision of feedback were highly prioritised. However, ethical dilemmas were also experienced and managed. For example, instead of restricting myself to mere data gathering, where information gaps on COVID-19 or risky behaviours (not practicing physical distancing) were noted, I actively engaged the participants for their safety and health.

Considerations in researching with and for children

How did I conduct research with children particularly where literature is rife with debates in this area? Against a background of research being on children, the researcher designed and executed the study to be for and with children. While acknowledging the methodological and ethical complexities of such research, children's reality could not be attained without putting them at the centre of the exploration. Accordingly, children were viewed as competent participants particularly where Zimbabwe's legal frameworks on research with children were



satisfied; parents and guardians consented; and relevant regulatory organisations approved the study. Several scholars focus on diverse aspects of a new social science for and with children (Alderson 2000, Barker and Weller 2003, Christensen and Prout 2002, Darbyshire MacDougall and Schiller 2005), and children's rights discourse (Fargas-Malet et al 2010, Horgan 2016, Jenks and Prout 1998, Punch 2002a).

What methodological and ethical priorities did I make and why? Gaining access and seeking consent and assent to conduct research with and for children implied securing cooperation from parents and guardians, carers and social workers in Chitungwiza. These constitute what I term gatekeepers in this article. This was not an easy task due to situational differences particularly a longstanding 'traditional' view held by some gatekeepers that children are not competent to represent themselves in studies of whatever kind. However, I prioritised children aged 14-16 years due to the closeness and consistency of this age to the legal age of majority. Children falling within this age range were considered to be competent minors therefore having sufficient knowledge to understand the focus and content of the study (after I explained the study in detail), and to exercise discretion in decision making and responding to questions. This is a valid argument unless a child has intellectual disabilities. Due to the broad scope of the category 'children' reference to other age categories was unavoidable. The children represented themselves, with parents and children giving passive consent/agreement. Passive consent is explored in social science research literature (Martins and Sani 2019, Range Embry and MacLeod 2001). However, in few cases where parents and guardians emphasised that children cannot represent themselves, their assent/agreement was sought and where they so deemed, interviews were done in their presence.

The location and context of the study were also special considerations in pursuit of enhancing familiarity, improve children's feelings and level of discussion. These crucial aspects of research with children are vibrant in scholarly literature (Abma and Schrijver 2018, Marsh et al 2019). Interviews and informal questioning and observation were therefore done in their homes or on the streets where they gather to play. The home, streets and markets also provided an opportunity for data collection through observation. The researcher became a guest in the homes. Important to note is the presence of parents and guardians at home. While posing a challenge through taking over or dominating the interview, their presence and those of other family members older than the participants helped in sharing experiences and knowledge. It affirmed that children do not exist in isolation – they belong to families and communities. Domination or taking over were controlled through re-emphasising that children were the main participants, and redirecting questions to children. The merits and demerits pertaining to the presence of parents and guardians during interviews are documented (Alder, Salanter and Zumstein-Shaha 2019; Sim and Waterfield 2019).

Throughout the data collection phase, child-friendly language, explanations, questioning, and formal and informal interactions were used in their usual settings (at home or informal markets) to increase familiarity as explained. In addition, the methods and techniques were applied sensitive to COVID-19 regulations, adapted to the physical setting and limitations of time and other resources. The flexible interview guide started from the



familiar including daily livelihood routines, knowledge and feelings on COVID-19 lockdown, to the unfamiliar. This helped the children and other family members (as applicable), to settle in and for the researcher to establish what they already understand, and to grasp the situated meanings and lived experiences of COVID-19 and lockdown. The researcher created a conducive environment for children and family members to narrate events and experiences, broadened their participation, prioritised reflexivity, and reduced the influence of power inequalities. For example, I created a collegial relationship with children and other participants. In addition, I emphasised that, addressing child and family issues during lockdown are best achieved through collective effort. The importance of building functional relationships and reciprocity is emphasised in literature (Sim and Waterfield 2019; Wilkins 2018). Closely linked to data collection is the use of rewards. The researcher did not give financial and non-financial rewards to children, parents and guardians, other family members, carers, and social workers for participation to avoid the influence of such rewards on participation and the responses. I explained that the best reward is the contribution of this article to policy change and delivery for transformation of their wellbeing. These were the various aspects that I considered in researching with and for children.

Data analysis and interpretation

Analysis of data and drafting of the article started during fieldwork and were finalised after exiting the field. Gathered data were cleaned, collated, organised according to the objectives of the study. Three types of analyses were conducted. Thematic and discourse analysis were applied to qualitative data. The former involved generating themes from the data based on the guiding objectives, and other pertinent aspects that were raised in field. The later revolved around the character of interaction, topical issues and debates. For example, debate revolved around state-civil society relations and their roles in responding to COVID-19. Basic statistical analysis catered for data in numeric form. Although the approach adopted was qualitative-dominant, some primary and secondary data were in numeric form. Examples include number of children in a household, and health and childcare institutions in the town.

I sought to interpret the results primarily from the position of the children, families and other participants due to the need to be as close as is possible to their lived experiences and situated meanings in relation to the study's objectives. Collecting, analysing and interpreting data in this way increased the opportunities for trustworthiness, confirmability and transferability. Furthermore, I interpreted the data through a social policy perspective to advance the transformative implications. In the next section, I present the results and discuss selected issues of COVID-19 lockdown and children, and aspects that overlap to families, households and the community.

4. Results and discussion

The new virus and the associated lockdown, and the implications of these to children, family and community where children belong have many facets. However, in this article, I focus on six themes as the point of entry into child and family studies in a COVID-19 context. These



are: closure of schools, associated innovative and manipulation strategies, and implications to children's vulnerability to COVID-19; participation of children and youth in precarious informal sector activities; child-sensitivity in COVID-19 community education; appropriate use of personal protective clothing; the right to play and cognitive development; and ineffective social protection programmes and social services. In addition, I engage with how the pandemic and these associated lockdown in Zimbabwe link with economic, sociocultural and political aspects along with implications on children, family and other groups. Important to note is that the themes I included in this section are a mere selection therefore are not exhaustive.

Closure of schools: Innovation, manipulation and vulnerability to the novel virus

A cross section of the participants explained that due to COVID-19 and lockdown, Zimbabwe's schools closed prematurely on 24 March 2020. Lower, higher and tertiary institutions of education and learning were affected by the closure. The critical question was, 'How have parents and guardians, government and schools responded to the premature closure and limited chances of reopening in 2020, and implications of the responses to children's vulnerability to COVID-19?' From the perspective of the government, schools should have remained closed until directed to reopen. The 5 teachers explained that based on SI83/2020 COVID-19 prevention and containment regulations, opening schools without authority, and conducting private face-to-face lessons are illegal. They pointed out that to address the gap created by prolonged lockdown, the government introduced radio lessons. These were scheduled to start on 16 June 2020, a date that parents, guardians and school administrators viewed to be way too late considering that schools were disrupted in March 2020 and that Ordinary and Advanced Level students were expected to sit for examinations in December 2020. Radio lessons during lockdown are noted in literature (Dzenga, 2020; UNICEF, 2020). However, important to understand is that while both primary and secondary level learners may access the lessons through radios and smart phones, not all households in Chitungwiza have access to these gadgets.

Interviews and informal interaction with children of school-going age in Chitungwiza showed that accessing educational content through radio is not appropriate for all categories of learners for example, those with hearing impairment. Some learners are not used to radio lessons while for others, radio lessons should merely be used to complement face-to-face teaching and learning. Of the 30 children included, 23 emphasised the later argument. The implication is that radio lessons should be delivered cognisant of this diversity. According to the 5 school administrators, the government authorised learners to sit for June 2020 Ordinary and Advanced Level examinations under strict adherence to sanitisation, social distancing and wearing of masks to reduce transmission of COVID-19. Media also reported this news (Masikati 2020, Mutongwizo 2020). As reopening of schools was gloomy at the time of writing, November 2020 Ordinary and Advanced Level examinations were scheduled to start on 1 December 2020 and will extend to January 2021 (Zimbabwe Schools Examinations Council 2020).



The disruptive effects of COVID-19 on schools in Zimbabwe (see Zimbabwe Human Rights Commission, 2020), and other countries is documented (see Harris and Jones 2020; Rosario 2020). In what parents, guardians, teachers and private schools consider to be innovative attempts or manipulation of government regulations in a context of COVID-19 lockdown, private lessons and online teaching and learning were introduced (based on interviews in Chitungwiza, July-August 2020; Gwarisa 2020). Reports from all the 7 parents/guardians who are sending children to private schools show that these institutions are complementing self-study through online teaching. Teaching and learning content are uploaded on school websites or learners and teachers interact through WhatsApp and email. Parents and guardians explained that they are expected to continue paying fees but as a reduced amount and view this initiative as appropriate in a COVID-19. Yet, 16 parents cited issues pertaining to availability, affordability and use of online teaching. Parents and guardians are also arranging with teachers of both public and private schools (names supplied but withheld for ethical reasons) for face-to-face lessons with pupils at a cost. For teachers, this is an opportunity to get income while for parents and guardians, this arrangement addresses the gap created by the closure of schools during the lockdown. However, these arrangements do not only breach the law but expose the teachers and child learners, families and the wider community to the new virus. Child learners who gather in houses come from various households whose COVID-19 status is unknown, are not observing physical distancing and use of sanitizers, and the venues are not disinfected. The lessons are therefore, creating opportunities for local transmissions as emphasised by an Ordinary Level pupil:

We are expected to sit for exams in December and January despite the COVID-19 lockdown. By the time of closure, we had not covered much of the syllabus and parents have no option except to send us for private lessons But it's not safe. We are congested, no sanitisers and most students and the teacher do not wear face masks.

Unexplored claims are that the Zimbabwe Republic Police (ZRP) in Chitungwiza is aware of some teachers conducting the lessons, and premises being used yet, prefer to get bribes to exercising the law. These are worrying claims given that law enforcement agents are expected to be executing their duties effectively to protect the public. Increases in corruption involving law enforcement agents during the lockdown is documented (Anti-Corruption Trust of Southern Africa 2020; Njanike 2020, Pan Africanism Today Secretariat 2020). Generally, movement is expected to be restricted due to the 'stay home' regulation. However, school going children are moving and interacting broadly for private lessons and group work thereby increasing their vulnerability to COVID-19 and being agents for spreading the virus. These various facets of closure of schools, attendant innovations and manipulation against ban on social gatherings raises critical policy questions pertaining primarily to school going children, but extending to parents and guardians, other family members, teachers and the community in relation to contracting and spreading the virus, and ineffectiveness of the lockdown.



Participation of children and youth in precarious informal sector activities

In Chitungwiza, informal sector activities are diverse, and include vending of vegetables and fruits, sale of used clothes, groceries and other wares. Children and youth are active participants in the town's informal economy. Representatives of informal sector associations, parents and guardians revealed that most of the informal activities are precarious and have increased the vulnerability of children and youth to the new pandemic. The precarity of livelihoods in urban areas is also reported by scholars (see Gukurume and Oosterom 2020, Oosterom 2019). Interviews with children and observation of their participation in the informal economy confirmed these claims. Reports by parents, guardians and representatives of the informal traders' association indicate that the participation of children in some sections of the informal economy in the town is not a mere product of COVID-19 lockdown but has intensified during the lockdown particularly due to loss of or reduced employment and earnings of parents and guardians in both the formal and informal sectors. Beyond children, youth (and women) being more vulnerable to COVID-19 due to their participation in sites for informal trade and movement within Chitungwiza town to sell wares, they are also agents for transmitting the virus. Increased movement and interaction heighten the vulnerability of family or household members and the community to COVID-19. Core questions are: What is the situation of selected children in the town in relation to the informal economy and vulnerability to the pandemic? What are the perceptions of children, parents and guardians, and other stakeholders on the plight of participating children?

The children (26) explained that with intensification of economic woes due to, or broadened by the pandemic and lockdown, vending has increased along with the participation of children in this survival strategy or means for livelihood diversification. Chitungwiza Municipality also reported that children are increasingly being used to vend in prohibited areas on the understanding that they are less likely to be arrested or brutalised by the municipal police, ZRP and Zimbabwe National Army (ZNA). However, in addition to breaching child labour laws, this practice exposes children to a wide array of human rights abuse. For example, child vendors and other informal economy participants at Chigovanyika and Huruyadzo in St Mary's/Manyame Park, and Zengeza 2 and 5, Unit D and Makoni Shopping Centres reported being beaten and arrested by the ZRP and Chitungwiza municipal police. However, as is the norm in Zimbabwe, the Chitungwiza municipality rejected claims of physically abusing informal vendors. Human rights violations during COVID-19 lockdown are widely explored in literature (Piri 2020, Zimrights 2020). The use of children to beg is also widely used in Zimbabwe's urban areas by poor parents and guardians (Hove and Ndawamna 2019, Ndlovu 2016).

Across the study sites, children (especially girls) on their own or with their mothers move from household to the next selling various wares. For example, in Seke Units D, E and H, the Johane Marange religious sect mainly survives through making and selling steel household utensils (pots, buckets, knives, spoons). Children and women belonging to this religious group are very mobile in the town to widen the market for their wares despite the threat of COVID-19. These issues are captured in the following excerpt:



We have been surviving on this trade for decades. I move around this town selling *midziyo yemumba* (household utensils) and vegetables with my children. This is our main livelihood source These children are raising money for their school fees, clothes and food. We know that this is a time of COVID, but do we have an option? Fearing COVID means accepting to die of hunger.

Worth understanding is that parents and guardians involved in this trade are aware that they are exposing children, themselves and other households to acute vulnerability through participation in the informal economy particularly through limited opportunities for observing physical and social distancing, low use of face masks and non-use of sanitisers. However, they are pressed between poverty and the pandemic. Urban poverty is a key feature in Zimbabwe's urban development studies (Matamanda 2020; Ndlovu, Mpofu and Moyo 2019). In other contexts, the participation of children and youth in the urban informal sector is explored (see Gukurume 2018; Zimbabwe National Statistics Agency 2019).

Child-sensitivity in COVID-19 community education

In Chitungwiza, health education pertaining to COVID-19 was reported to be provided by various stakeholders including clinics and hospitals (falling under the Ministry of Health and Child Care, MoHCC), NGOs (local and international) focusing on community health, community health workers, parents and guardians, and church leaders. At national level, the Ministry of Information and Publicity and the COVID-19 Information Hub provides information on COVID-19 (UNESCO 2020, UNICEF 2020). While reliable information provided by the MoHCC and WHO is readily available through the media, local clinics and hospitals, gaps exist. I single out three critical lacunae that are worth urgent attention in Chitungwiza. First, the local health institutions are not active in community education that primarily focus on COVID-19. The usual approach would be to gather people for health education yet, this increases the risk of spreading the new virus. However, local health institutions can target people at shopping centres and informal markets. Second, is the dominant assumption that parents, guardian and carers have sufficient knowledge and are appropriately placed to address children's information needs pertaining to the pandemic. The Chitungwiza case study revealed that this assumption is partly valid. Interaction with parents, guardians and church leaders showed that some have information gaps implying that the same gaps may be reproduced in children. Moreover, they may support risky practices and non-conformity to COVID-19 regulations. For example, some churches (names provided but withheld to protect their identity) and parents belonging to these shun modern medicine and discourage the use of sanitizers along with rejecting physical distancing. This religious teaching is directed to all members including children.

Children often view parents, guardians and church leaders as focal opinion leaders therefore in the absence of more powerful alternative sources of information and socialisation, children have information gaps and negative attitudes to formal strategies meant to secure their wellbeing. Another negative implication of some churches and other



religious organisations (names not included for ethical reasons) to their membership is the claim that they can cure COVID-19. Reporters also noted this in other areas of Zimbabwe (see Chimuka 2020, Nkomo 2020). Third, are age biases in the delivery of COVID-19 education. While content can be developed by specialists and elders, children and youth can be agents of communication through the formal channels. For example, inclusion of children and youth in broadcasting COVID-19 prevention messages via national television and radio stations or delivering the messages in communities. Children are often attached to messages delivered by peers. The absence of direct engagement with children and issues affecting their lives is documented (Alder et al 2019, Bastien and Holmarsdottir 2020, Bessant, 2020). Applied to Zimbabwe's lockdown, critical children's issues and associated responses are being missed due to these gaps.

Appropriate use of personal protective clothing

In terms of COVID-19 travel restrictions and 'stay home' regulations, in cases where people have a genuine and pressing need to travel, they should do so wearing face masks as the prescribed personal protective clothing (Herald Reporter 2020). At the time of writing, face masks were mandatory and people who appear in public without wearing face masks properly are breaching COVID-19 prevention and containment regulations, therefore, should be arrested and pay a fine of ZWL\$500 (Bulawayo Staff Reporter 2020, Maphosa 2020, SI83/2020). In relation to children in the town (while acknowledging variations in age and competency), I explored the wearing of face masks further. I asked: When leaving homes, what type of face mask are they wearing? Are masks appropriate for use by all children? Are the children able to sustain the use of face masks even when some elders are failing?

A recurring theme by all parents, guardians and teachers is that children in lower grades (1 to 5) who are attending private lessons or interacting with peers in streets and playgrounds may not be able to cover the mouth and nose, or do so in a sustainable manner. Observations in streets, playgrounds and informal markets (at Chigovanyika, Huruyadzo, Zengeza 2 and Makoni), and child vendors confirmed these arguments. Most of the face masks used by the majority in Chitungwiza are home-made and should be appropriately handled and washed. However, the level of safety provided by such masks to young children or elders may be low depending on material used and capability to appropriately use the masks. However, although wearing of face masks do not guarantee complete protection from the new virus, the 30 children and other participants indicated that they are essential especially when worn properly yet, appropriate and sustainable use by some children is problematic. Overall, the children leaving homes for private lessons or play are highly vulnerable to contracting and spreading the virus.

The right to play and cognitive development

Child specialists and carers reiterated that play is a right and essential determinant of children's cognitive development; and that children need to learn from and share with their peers. Scholarly attention on these themes is notable (see Abessa et al 2019, Whitebread et



al 2017, Yogman 2018). Interviews with child rights organisations and children in and outside Chitungwiza town, childcare specialists and renowned child development psychologists in Zimbabwe's institutions of higher learning revealed the significance of play in child development and the yet to be explored consequences of the lockdown. The following excerpt sums the discussion:

We may not get into greater detail of child development theory and practice. However, play is paramount in cognitive development and social aspects of child growth. Besides parents and guardians, children learn immensely from their peers. Multiple repercussions of play-deficiency are notable at both early and later stages. In the later, the problems are difficult to address.

In Chitungwiza, the level of risk perception was commendable along with attempts to reduce children's vulnerability to the new virus. Reports were that the lockdown constrained opportunities for children to play outside their households especially in the early phases of lockdown (April and May 2020). Parents and guardians were seeking to reduce the vulnerability of children to the pandemic by restricting inter family and household physical interaction, but success is limited due to the high-density character of most parts of the town, and generally the social character of the society. Elsewhere, scholars also note how children were prohibited from visiting common playgrounds (Masiyiwa 2020, United Nations Development Programme 2020), particularly in a context of the government's call for staying home, emphasis on social distancing and ban on social gatherings except unavoidable ones (for example, funerals yet, these are also controlled in terms of the number of people who attend).

Parents and guardians reiterated that trade-offs between restricting play and allowing children to go out and play are not easy considerations. However, with people getting used to the new virus (emphasised in interaction with various participants), and government's relaxation of regulations (see Gwarisa 2020, Marawanyika and Ndlovu 2020), child play on the streets, community playgrounds and open spaces is increasing (confirmed by observations). This is encapsulated in the following excerpt:

As a parent, my role is to protect my children from various risks. At this stage, COVID-19 is the main risk. In the early stage, parents in this area attempted to prevent child gatherings on the streets and playgrounds but failed. Up to when can we try to avoid interaction among children? We are getting used to the pandemic and are allowing children to interact ... restrictions are getting lighter. Even some elders are no longer wearing face masks and are spending time at beer halls... but this may increase our vulnerability to the virus.

Despite efforts to prevent the vulnerability to COVID-19 by restricting broader interaction of children outside homes, families and households are not entirely closed systems. This argument is consistent with sociological analysis (see Bailey 2019, Hofkirchner 2019). In the current context (at the time of writing), critical questions should be posed and utilised in influencing policy: Given the rise in local transmission of COVID-19 (see Zimbabwe Ministry of



Health and Child Care, 2020), how safe are the children and other family or community members? Should families prioritise children's right to play and its implications to cognitive development or protecting them against the pandemic? What are the limits of tapping on the government's relaxation of the COVID-19 regulations particularly in relation to the wellbeing of children? Despite diversity in answering these questions, children's health and security against the new virus is paramount.

Ineffective social protection programmes and social/public services

Representatives of Chitungwiza Municipality emphasised that the town is topical for dilapidated and inadequate social services infrastructure against a booming economy and urban sprawl. These issues are notable in literature (Jonga and Munzwa 2009, Muchadenyika and Williams 2018, Zvobgo 2020). Observations showed that one of the study sites - St Mary's - the oldest township in Chitungwiza, is a classic example of urban decay. Low access to potable water, perennially leaking sewer pipes and poor solid waste management are emblems of most parts of the town. Scholars noted that these challenges contribute to the vulnerability of residents to cholera and typhoid (see Mafundikwa 2018, Gambe 2018, World Health Organisation 2018). Germane to the analysis of COVID-19 lockdown and social services is access to and use of potable water. The two ward councilors, representatives of Chitungwiza municipality and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) explained that to reduce potable water challenges, NGOs and the municipality are partnering in drilling and servicing boreholes while residents are also drilling private boreholes and sinking wells.

In the town, community boreholes and private wells (where people share) were reported to be posing challenges in preventing the spread of the virus. Interaction with women and children indicated that they bear the greater brunt of the burden of sourcing water in the town. This is corroborated by other scholars (see Gambe 2018, Munyoro 2020). Physical distancing, sanitisation and appropriate use of face masks are not key considerations at community boreholes or shared wells (based on observations and interviews). In other contexts, the challenges to appropriate use of face masks and sanitisation are explored in relation to other contexts (Chimuka 2020, Esposito and Principi 2020, Swain 2020). Interviews with a female child at a community borehole indicated various challenges that have implications to COVID-19:

Water is a major problem in St Mary's. We last received council water supply six months ago. As a girl and generally as an able-bodied child, I am expected to fulfill household responsibilities including fetching water. This place is always overcrowded. I am usually here by 4am or I come here at night with my mother and other girls We are not sanitised Very few people wear face masks This place is not fumigated. We are aware of coronavirus, but we do not have another option We cannot afford to buy water from private suppliers.

While fully recognising the challenges posed by collective utilisation of water sources, I pose crucial questions that are pertinent to social policy in both the short and long-term: Are there immediate solutions to the potable water challenges particularly alternatives that allow



access to water at each house given that the town does not have own water development plants, and some formal and informal settlements do not have water connections? How effective are health education and promotion programmes pertaining to the new virus that reiterate frequent washing of hands with running water when potable water is a critical challenge for most households in the town? Given that women and children are responsible for sourcing water (while acknowledging diversity of gender and age divisions of labour across households), what are the implications to these group's vulnerability to COVID-19? Even if they are the most vulnerable due to frequenting collective water sources, is vulnerability mapping restricted to these groups? Can social distancing and appropriate wearing of face masks be ensured for children and other groups who gather for water at community boreholes and shared private boreholes and wells? These questions indicate the development challenges rooted in structural causes of water poverty and the complexity of responding to COVID-19 in a context where social services are inadequate. The municipal representatives reiterated that developmental transformation should be a long-term priority in Chitungwiza. Core social policy literature also emphasises the significance of developmental transformation (see Adesina 2020, Mkandawire 2015).

Closely associated with the exploration of social services in a context of COVID-19 lockdown are fragile public health systems and weak social protection programmes particularly relating to food provision and healthcare. The ward councillors, parents and guardians reported high incidence of food insecurity and poor healthcare. In literature, scholars document how food insecurity and poor healthcare have greater consequences for children (see Chakona and Shackleton 2018, Ke and Ford-Jones 2015, UNICEF 2020). Health personnel indicated that all the polyclinics in the town and Chitungwiza referral hospital are ill-equipped to handle COVID-19 positive cases. Ineffective public health systems are a national problem (see Chinyoka 2017, Kidia 2018; Shamu, January and Rusakaniko 2016, Meldrum 2008). Important to understand is that even though the town has private health care providers that are better resourced compared to public clinics and hospitals for example, CITIMED, affordability is a major challenge. In addition to poor public health delivery are food challenges in a context of lockdown, loss of or under-employment, ban on informal sector operations except registered operators who are utilising approved sites, seizure of wares by the police and reduced income. Councillors, parents and guardians were unanimous that the government promised to provide food hampers and cash transfers to vulnerable households as social safety nets in a context of pandemic and lockdown yet, these are yet to be realised. Literature supports these reports (see Gukurume and Oosterom 2020, Vendors Initiative for Social and Economic Transformation 2020). The argument by representatives of the town's municipality and ward councillors is that the food and health issues are beyond their capacity and raise the need for the intervention of national government for the benefit of children and other categories of the population.



5. Conclusion

The article advanced exploration of COVID-19 lockdown and the situation of children in Zimbabwe's high density urban areas in the ambit of social policy. A micro study of Chitungwiza town provided the empirical base of the article. While the new virus is a socioeconomic challenge countrywide, the diverse qualities of urban poverty and high population density in Chitungwiza town create a fertile ground for vulnerability to COVID-19 and other health pandemics. Critical risk factors include high rate of urban poverty, weak social services and social protection programmes in a time of pandemic, impracticality of the stay home regulation due to acute poverty, child and youth participation in precarious informal activities, limited use of sanitisers, face masks and other personal protective clothing, biases in COVID-19 education, and broadly, a fragile economy. Child-sensitive social protection, a component of the social protection paradigm, provided the conceptual lenses for the exploration. Fundamental to child social protection is its particular focus on tackling children's poverty and vulnerability. The social protection paradigm has gained prominence in Africa to the extent of being equated to social policy. The dominance of social protection implied the proliferation of its tiers including child-sensitive social protection. However, child-sensitive social protection suffers from the weaknesses of its underpinning paradigm – social protection. The approach failed to address the structural causes of poverty, and to lead to developmental transformation in relation to children and other groups in the African continent. Evidence in African countries particularly sub-Saharan Africa shows that increases in social assistance programmes have failed to reduce poverty levels. The pitfalls of attempting to deliver wellbeing through social protection-limited instruments provide justification for social policy practitioners and scholars to search for approaches that focus on the structural causes of poverty, inequality and marginalisation, and broader instruments for addressing these problems. In this respect, transformative social policy is an approach whose time has come (see Adesina, 2020).

The vulnerability of children, youth and families in Chitungwiza to COVID-19 is mainly due to poverty and macroeconomic meltdown. Acute urban poverty is leading to the urban poor children, parents and guardians to engage in precarious activities to generate livelihoods. Awareness of how the activities increase vulnerability to the pandemic is high while a significant number of children comprehend the pandemic and the risk factors. However, they have constrained livelihood alternatives besides precarious activities in the informal sector. In addition, low economic activities in the formal sector led to unemployment and loss of incomes. Most urban households are turning to informal activities as the main or alternative livelihood sources. In this context and in relation to children, two central pathways can be explored. First, the government of Zimbabwe, NGOs and other stakeholders can consider child-sensitive social policy as a top-tier priority compared to child-sensitive social protection. Shifting from child-sensitive social protection to child-sensitive social policy is essential primarily given the latter's broader instruments (production, redistribution, social protection, social reproduction and social cohesion/nation building). Second, and based on the first recommendation, is ongoing economic empowerment of urban families and



households, and formalisation and funding of legal informal activities to improve wellbeing outcomes. Children are part of families and households therefore socioeconomic provisioning should be comprehensive.

Child-sensitive social policy or any other approach of delivering welfare to urban children must be informed and supported by child-sensitive research. The concept of child-sensitive research is broad and contested. However, a desirable objective is to research with children where the national regulations and code of ethics permit such novel approaches in seeking to understand socioeconomic problems from the viewpoint and experiences of children. This requirement pertains to COVID-19 and other problems. Where child-sensitive research has been appropriately applied, there are higher chances that what is portrayed as reality is that of children, and that the policy responses generated will work for them. The COVID-19 pandemic has revealed that the wellbeing of children and vulnerable families in Chitungwiza and other high-density areas cannot be provided through the market. Basic social provisioning is a necessity during and beyond the COVID-19 pandemic. Despite contestation on what constitutes 'basic needs' and 'poor people' children and other members from poor households are failing to meet critical requirements - food, health, potable water and other essentials during the COVID-19 lockdown. State intervention and long-term pro-active measures that are fused in mainstream social policy are important. The government of Zimbabwe and its development partners should provide food and other essentials and should consider having an ongoing pandemics fund to cater for basic requirements and other needs. Chitungwiza municipality should improve supply of potable water as an essential requirement during and after COVID-19 lockdown.

Child health education must be part of community health education during and after the new pandemic. While health education on COVID-19 in Zimbabwe is remarkable in terms of content and media used (broadcasting, print and internet) and participation of community health workers, NGOs, churches and other stakeholders, child-sensitivity is a key priority. The assumption that health education pertaining to the new virus will trickle down to children through parents, gardenias, older community members and pastors may be valid but may not always be effective. The design of the messages and medium used should be informed by child-sensitivity in terms of age, ability to comprehend, circumstances and other crucial factors. Parents, guardians and child carers are close to children despite diversity in age groups falling under children as a social category. They should take a leading role in educating children in appropriate ways, discarding risky cultural and religious beliefs and practices, and changing grand media messages to content that is relevant to children. Children's organisations are important during and after the lockdown. As such they can ensure children's rights and welfare through their diverse areas of competency. Child health education must be part of mainstream community health education during and after the new pandemic, and should be child-sensitive. The implication of children's issues arising from the COVID-19 lockdown is that the roles of media specialists, parents and guardians, child carers and specialist, community health workers and other stakeholders must be redefined in relation to the child sensitivity of the content and delivery of health education.



The effectiveness of lockdown is paramount to preventing and containing COVID-19. Depending on risk assessment, the government should continue to enforce lockdown but addressing gaps in its social provisioning particularly on the basic needs of children and generally vulnerable families. Moreover, enforcement agents must execute their work in a transparent manner for the benefit of children and other groups. The issue of private face-to-face lessons, infringement of children's rights during raids of informal markets, and manipulation of the law through corruption are topical. I make a plea to parents and guardians who are sending children for private lessons, and the teachers who are disregarding the ban on gatherings and conducting private face-to-face lessons to desist from this practice as doing so increases the vulnerability of the whole community to COVID-19. Investment in social services including health, potable water and refuse collection is critical. These social services complement the efforts to attain healthy communities and lives in high density areas. For instance, the biomedical dimension of COVID-19 requires the availability of potable water and competent health personnel. Hygienic practices including frequent washing of hands under clean running water and staying home are not possible where potable water is not available or where people gather at community or private boreholes to get water. The government of Zimbabwe is incapacitated to invest substantially in social services due to fiscal woes but can transform social services in phases and partner with well-resourced non-state development partners.

Political and economic stability along with networking and collaboration beyond national borders is indispensable given the global character of COVID-19 and limited capacity of Zimbabwe to effectively meet the financial requirements of the pandemic and other development priorities. For example, Chitungwiza town requires developmental transformation which the government cannot deliver through its sole effort. Functional international relations create opportunities for collective responses. Zimbabwe's economic crisis is rooted in radical indigenisation and authoritarianism by the ZANU PF-led government rooted in the late 1990 and early 2000s. This led to capital flight, closure of industries, limited participation of NGOs and other civil society organisations in development programmes. While good governance is debatable and sometimes used by global powers as a leeway for achieving hegemony in less developed countries, Zimbabwe should reflect on its governance and adopt relevant principles. Overall, although the article is based on a single case study of Chitungwiza town and is a micro study restricted to COVID-19, it provides essential insights that should be considered in terms of the wellbeing of children in a time of the new virus and other pandemics. The insights are relevant for the effective operation of diverse stakeholders involved in child-sensitive social policy. However, further research in other areas, both urban and rural, is crucial to explore core children's issues with full acknowledgement that children are part of families, households and communities, and their contexts vary.

Notes on contributor

Agness Mutemaringa is an emerging scholar whose research and publication focus on urban sociology and development with particular focus on children, youth and gender. She



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Research Article:

Interrogating women's contributions to economic sustainability and state responses in Africa: Nigeria's Niger Delta area in focus

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Abstract

Women's dignity has not often been acknowledged, their prerogatives misrepresented, and they have often been relegated to the margins of society. This has often prevented them from being themselves and achieving their fullest potential. Women have contributed to history as much as men and more often than not, they did so in much difficult conditions. Sadly, very little of women's achievements in history can be registered by the science of history. This paper is an attempt to examine the role of women in the struggle for economic liberation in the harsh environment of the Niger Delta area of the southern part of Nigeria. It also explores the dangers which they have been exposed to over time. It is the how, why and effect of this, that the paper intends to interrogate. The paper is based on the qualitative research approach with data being obtained from both primary and secondary sources. The study employed an analytical and narrative approach which included historical, descriptive and analytical lens. The research established that while the Niger Delta area has been under serious threat of environmental degradation due to oil spillage and low agricultural production, men have not shown as much concern as women on the implications of the degradation on livelihoods. This has been in a context where women for decades have been shown as being at the helm of the struggle against environmental degradation, resource exploitation and low yields in the agricultural sector.

Keywords: *gender, environment degradation, economic deprivation, Niger Delta.*

1. Introduction

Extant literature has established that the Niger Delta has been a region of intense economic activities. Ogbogbo (2005) specifically noted that by the 15th Century, there were clear indications that a long-distance trade between the people of the Niger Delta and their neighbours had developed. It was on the trade links already in existence that the European



trade was grafted. However, at present, the modern history of the region has often been associated with crisis and struggle over resources and the attempt of a neglected people to survive economically. It is however surprising that unlike other areas of the world, where such agitations should have been led by men, in the case of the Niger Delta area, it is women that are often at the helm. This is because, they are often the ones whose major economic lives are tied to land (agriculture) and as such they usually bear the brunt of oil spillage, gas flaring and erosion which negatively affect their crops. This has been the case since the discovery of oil in the Niger Delta area thereby impacting negatively on the general economy of the area in the last two decades. This is in a context where the area is known for suffering from the crisis of environmental degradation and gross underdevelopment. This position has been brought to the limelight by a Report of the UNDP in its Niger Delta Human Development Report (2006) where it was argued that perceptions of neglect and exclusion were major factors of conflict and insecurity in the region. The Report highlighted that:

The pristine Niger Delta with rich aquatic resources and high biodiversity has over the last five decades been impacted by oil and gas exploration and production and other human activities. The ecologically sensitive fresh-water swamps, mangroves and rainforests that characterize the region had been degraded, while infrastructural underdevelopment and low amenities have helped to create disaffection against the backdrop of the enormous oil and gas resources that provide 90% of the country's export earnings and over 80% of the governments' annual revenue.

From the issues raised above, it is clear that despite the area, its resources and people accounting for a large chunk of the revenue that is used in running the Nigerian government and economy, not much has been done to compensate them for the losses which they have incurred in their forest and aquatic resources as oil and gas have been extracted from their home areas.

2. Conceptual clarification of the Niger-Delta area: Space and time

The Niger Delta area has been part and parcel of Nigerian history. The history of the area and people is often associated with rivers, creeks and the production/sale of palm oil. In describing the area, it has always been classified into two, the upland and the lowland. However, since the attainment of independence in 1960 and the creation of new states, the Niger Delta, is basically described as all of the present Rivers and Bayelsa states and Delta State excluding largely the north senatorial district. Niger Delta is defined as the area bound by the Benin River in the West, Aboh in the North, Imo River in the East and Palm Point Akasa in the South (Dike, 1956:19). The definition subsisted until 1999 (Willink 1958, Akubor 2017). One distinctive element of this defined Niger Delta is that it produces not only the bulk (over 80%) of the nation's oil and gas both onshore and offshore but most communities and production facilities are to be found in waterlogged terrains which pose considerable challenges. For political/economic convenience, the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC) Act of 2000 embraced a far wider coverage encompassing the nine states where oil



and gas resources are found, namely: Abia, Akwa Ibom, Bayelsa, Cross River, Delta, Edo, Imo, Ondo and Rivers states. In this way, the region has been divided into two, that is, those that are considered as the Core Niger Delta and the Peripheral Niger Delta. This politically defined delta covers some 75,000 square kilometres and 185 local government areas, a definition embraced in the UNDP Report (2006). It is noteworthy that the sensitivity of the Niger Delta ecosystem and developmental challenges posed by its peculiar physical terrain have long been of interest from the colonial times. In more recent times, the issue has changed from just the struggle for resource control to the plight of women especially as it relates to the hardships being experienced as a result of either their exclusion or deprivation from the mainstream economy.

3. The Niger Delta area: The people, their economy and the contributions of women

Due to the geographical location, the people are basically agriculturalist and fishermen/women. Generally, agriculture in the rural area is dominated by women whose efforts are often unrecognised or unremunerated. Their activities are not limited to field and caring for livestock, but also include harvesting, post-harvest processing, storage of crops and animal products, seed selection and marketing (Momsen 2010:141).

Scholars (who include Willink 1958, Alagoa 1970, Udo 1980, Akubor 2017) have argued that, women play critical roles in the region's economy especially in rural communities where they are producers of food. They have the responsibility not only for food production but also for processing, fuel, water, health, childcare, sanitation, and the entire range of the survival needs of households and communities. Women also participate in the commercial sector, and local enterprise to generate income to meet the needs of their families. They are strong, resourceful but have been lacking opportunities to fully participate and share in society and development. In the context of the Niger Delta, women constitute a majority of the poor, the uneducated, the marginalized, 'ignorant,' and diseased (Akubor 2010). They are the most affected by the pollution of communal ponds and rivers that supply drinking water. The health hazards from toxic waste and the pollution of drinking water are borne more by women and their children, while young girls have been lured and susceptible to abuse by the thousands of oil workers (Akubor 2010). The result includes rising incidence of female prostitution, teenage pregnancies, very young mothers, and broken homes. Women have also been victims of state security force, harassment and repression. They, however, have played active roles and mediated in the conflict between the oil producing communities, the State and oil companies.

4. The Niger Delta area: Interrogating the present in the eyes of the past

Alagoa (1970), had earlier argued that the topography of the Niger Delta area can be divided into two: basically, the upland and the lowland. In this way, the needs of those who live in the



creeks and swamps of the Niger Delta are very different from those of the interior and as such, they produced different crops which they exchanged in the various markets. The position of Alagoa has however been re-echoed by the Anthropological Report of the Colonial administration. In 1958, Willink's Commission recognised the Niger Delta as having peculiar physical and economic developmental needs because of its terrain. This position was made clear in the course of attempts to address the problems of minorities in the southern part of Nigeria. The Report of Sir Henry Willink's Commission of Inquiry (1957-1958) established that the core geographic delta was prone to underdevelopment because of its terrain. The Report specifically noted that:

The needs of those who live in the creeks and swamps of the Niger Delta are very different from those of the interior...the country in which they live is divided by creeks and inlets of the sea and of the Niger into many small inlands, which nowhere rise far above the highest tides and floods: transport by water and the construction of roads or railways will be prohibitively expensive. There is a country which has been neglected and which is unlikely ever to be highly developed.

However, before the discovery of oil in the area, the people were able to manipulate the environment in such a way that they were able to make a living out of it. According to Udo (1980:8-9):

It is hardly necessary to say that the economy of the groups of the Niger Delta has been closely related to and very much limited in scope by the conditions of the physical environment. In this vast low-lying region of swamps and innumerable waterways and creeks, the traditional economy has been largely limited to fishing and salt making from sea water. Transportation has been largely restricted to the use of canoes and lately powered riverine boats. The main routes to early migrations as well as of trade followed navigable waterways which were not silted up. The Niger Delta has always been a region of difficulty which hardly attracted population and its short-lived period of prosperity during the slave trade and later the palm oil trade was made possible by its geographical location, not as a result of the natural wealth of the area.

In the economy of the area, it was actually women who were largely involved in trade and farming activities.

5. Women and economic development: Agriculture

For Henn (1983), women in most parts of Africa have long supplied the bulk of labour required in food production. The position is based on an early survey of 140 sub-Saharan ethnic groups, which revealed that in 85 per cent of the cases, women were responsible for all the work, and 45 per cent women did all the work except for land clearing. In the case of the Niger Delta area, apart from obtaining the land for the purpose of agriculture and making sure it is prepared for cultivation by the men, it is the women and children who do the sowing, weeding, harvesting and processing of food. It is also the responsibility of women in the area to keep and rear small animals for household consumption (Uwake and Uwaegbute



1982, Ezumah 1990; Makinwa-Adebusoye 1985, 1988; Makinwa-Adebusoye and Olawoye 1992). In this way, it has been established that 95 per cent of the rural women are small scale farmers who produce most of the food and bear the burden of day-to-day family subsistence. They perform tasks like clearing, stumping, burning and removal of burnt stakes which were traditionally considered as men's work. It has been noted that while the women work on farms, most of the men in the area are more interested in gambling, marrying more wives and working for the oil firms (Uwaka and Uwaegbute 1982, Ezumah 1990). Emuedo et al (2017:3) wrote that:

Agriculture is the most dominant traditional economic activity in the Niger Delta. Farming and fishing according to FOS (1985) account for about 90% of all forms of economic activities in the region. Indeed, agriculture constitutes the main source of employment and income for rural women. Like other parts of Africa, 80% of agricultural production is from small farmers, who are mostly women. Due to their great efforts in agricultural production, women's production helps to guarantee their self-sustenance. However, agricultural practices in the region have been acutely constricted by the negative impacts of oil activities with dire impacts on women's esteem.

Similarly, FOS (1985) reported that farming and fishing account for about 90 per cent of all forms of women's economic activities in the region. Studies show that outside the home, most women are unemployed as they lack education. Consequently, agricultural activities constitute their main source of income; women "comprise 60-80 per cent of agricultural labour and supply 90 per cent of family food needs. This is confirmed in the case of Ogoni people, who according to Barikor-Wiwa (1997), make provision for such by ensuring that when an Ogoni woman gets married, her husband is required to give her a piece of land to farm. The argument is that it is from this farm that she feeds her family and grows food for sale in order to buy other staples. Accordingly, this tradition also allowed women to enjoy a measure of independence. The fertility of Ogoni soil made it very fruitful for agriculture and producing high yields. The bountiful harvests left time for Ogoni women to invest in cultural activities such as art, dancing, singing, and pottery.

6. Women in palm oil production and trade

Apart from agriculture, it has been established that women in the area also engage in the processing of agricultural materials and trade for survival. In line with this, Udo (1980:8-9) identified one of the economic bases of the Niger Delta area as production and trade in palm oil. However, he failed to mention the source of the palm oil. Research has however established that the pre-colonial oil palm industry in the Niger Delta area witnessed a marked division of labour, with the women doing most of the work, this contributed to palm oil being produced in the region becoming an export crop in 1558, and by 1830, it had dominated Nigeria's export list for more than 50 years. Since it was considered a taboo for the women to climb a very high tree, it was therefore the responsibility of the adult male to harvest the



ripe palm heads. Once this was done, every other activity around processing and trade fell on the women (Akubor and Akubor 2018).

Commenting on the process of production as well as possible benefits of the trade, Northrup (1978) opined that twentieth – century studies of palm-oil production by traditional methods in this area suggest that 300 pounds of palm-fruit (25-30 clusters) were required to produce a 36–pound tin of semi–hard oil. The scholar argued that the labour involved equals three to five person/days per tin, half or more of the work being done by women. In his view, assuming an average of four days labour per tin and 62 tins per ton, the person/days devoted to the production of palm – oil for export from south-eastern Nigeria would have risen from 750,000 in 1819 to 10,000,000 in 1863–4.

Scholars have argued that the growth of the palm oil trade greatly enhanced the economic value of the common oil-palms, leading to important changes in their management. According to Northrup (1975), the production and trade demonstrate the capacity for rapid change and overall economic growth which had developed during the earlier decades of oversea trade. This is because the demand for the product and the fortuitous concentration of palm oil in the area were beyond the control of African traders and producers, but the rapidity and magnitude of their response to new opportunity was possible because of their highly developed commercial skills and institutions. This goes to show, that the trade must have opened opportunities for both the women as well as the development of trade within and outside the region. In addition, it increased the level of development of participation for all. However, what remained the major truth is that even though it was a society which saw men as those in control, the trade was initially in the hands of the women, an indication that the issue of national development was ‘dictated’ by the women. This is because historical accounts are of the view that apart from the women involvement in the hectic production of palm oil, they were fully involved in the marketing of the product, which brought profit to both the land and the European nations (Ekechi 1981).

The trade network that existed in the area as well as its import on the economic life and intergroup relations in the entire region have been pointed out by scholars, who argued that through agriculture and trade, women were able to not only boost the economy but also integrated the region. Ogbogo (2005) opined thus:

The importance of the Niger Delta lies in its very many rivers, which were waterway trade routes, hence its referral as the Venice of Africa. Bonny and other cities such as Opobo and Brass were acknowledged as major trading state...simply put the Niger Delta was known for its commerce and merchants from within Nigeria and Europe flocked to the Niger Delta states for trade. Apart from goods that were brought into the territory that boost the economy of the region, the Amayanabos collected comey and their citizens participated in the palm oil trade, which replaced slave trade. The economic boom that attended the introduction of the palm oil trade affected their socio-political life in very profound ways...The search for oil markets meant the intensification of relationship with their Igbo neighbours from whom they received most of their supplies. Such vigorous interaction resulted in marriages and attendance of social and ceremonial functions.



The importance of the above observation is that women in the Niger Delta area had also been pivotal to the development and economic sustainability of the area, before the period of the gradual degradation of the area which led to economic deprivation and the relegation of women to the background.

7. Environmental degradation and economic deprivation: Effects of oil spillage and gas flaring and the toils on women

Despite the efforts by women to make ends meet, they have not been finding it easy as the environment has always frustrated their efforts. With the discovery of oil in the region in the 1950s, the people were completely unaware of the consequences of oil drilling and oil spillage. They had thought that the activities of the operators of the industries would bring the much-needed development to the area and as such, accommodated and embraced the oil industry. As noted earlier, the people produced much of the food that was consumed in the Niger Delta, while those they could not produce were exchanged in trade with people in neighbouring territories. As the operations of the industries began in earnest, it did not take long for the people to see that this was not to be the case. Beyond the fact that the revenues from the oil did not return to the people, the social consequences of the unleashed environmental nightmare have been unbearable. The people of the area saw their farmland being expropriated without compensation for oil extraction and they found themselves without an alternative means of survival. There were (and still are) cases of pipelines crisscrossing valuable farmland and poisonous gases flaring into the atmosphere close to communities. Due to corruption, negligence and inability to properly maintain the facilities, aging oil equipment often failed and leaked oil into the surrounding land without adequate clean-up or compensation. In most cases, the standards of clean-up and maintenance applied by the operating oil firms were completely destructive of the environment (Shell Petroleum Company Report 2003, Odjuvwuederhie et al 2006, Odubo et al 2019). This was particularly disastrous since the people were (and are still) dependent upon the land and rivers for their survival. Those who suffered most were the women and children who, unlike the young men, could not easily migrate and escape to the urban areas. An example is the Akwa Ibom area, where the agricultural production of the women has been devastated by gully erosion in the upland areas, and beach erosion along the coastal areas has attained a high degree of severity and destructiveness. Gullies are now destroying agricultural land and even forest reserves in the northern parts of the state while coastal erosion has resulted in the loss of landmass to communities located on the shorelines. In addition, oil exploration and exploitation constitute major threats to the environment of the coastal areas. Environmental pollution of air, water, soil, crops and recreational facilities are the concomitant effects of petroleum exploitation that have adversely affected the riverine ecosystem of the state. The coastal fisheries have been extensively depleted through oil spillage. Gas flaring from Mobil and Shell flow stations and oil wells has also been another environmental hazard, which has caused much damage to houses, vegetation and animal life. The major oil producing area in the state is Eastern Obolo Local Government (Sofiri 2018).



In the Isoko area, about 50 per cent of the active labour force is engaged in one form of agricultural activity or another, with yam, cassava, plantain, maize, cocoyam and vegetables as the predominant food crops. Odjuvwuederhie et al (2006) observed that owing to the hydrographic conditions of the State, only a fraction of the land size is cultivated with crops. Cropping patterns are mainly sole, mixed and intercropping, while farming practices are traditional, and the use of crude implements such as hoes and cutlasses predominate. Agricultural production is on a small and subsistence scale, with the women utilising small farm holdings. With this, the women are able to provide some money for themselves as well as taking care of the children since the men most often are in the cities or working as labourers for the oil firms. On the impact of oil spillage on production, Odjuvwuederhie et al (2006) noted that:

The environmental consequences of oil pollution on the inhabitants of Delta State are enormous. Oil spills have degraded most agricultural lands in the State and have turned hitherto productive areas into wastelands. With increasing soil infertility due to the destruction of soil micro-organisms, and dwindling agricultural productivity, farmers have been forced to abandon their land, to seek non-existent alternative means of livelihood. Aquatic life has also been destroyed with the pollution of traditional fishing grounds, exacerbating hunger and poverty in fishing communities.

Similarly, a 1995 study in the Bayelsa, Rivers and Delta states revealed that between 1992 and 1993, land area under food crop production in these states decreased by 41.7 per cent and 15 per cent respectively; due to oil-related land sequestration. According to scholars, this practice, besides constricting women's access, to land, increases land fragmentation leading to decline in crop production, which impacts women's income in these states, land requirement for oil activities, renders women's economic activities unviable, and insignificant (Odubo et al 2019). The Food Agricultural Organisation Report (2011) shows that women bear the heaviest burden of environmental changes because often, they are uneducated and poorer, thus, depend mostly on natural resources for their livelihoods. As such, oil activities have led to a myriad of socio-economic and environmental problems, soil infertility and damages to crops and marine life from pollution (Amadi and Tamuno, 1999). This led to dislocated livelihoods, rural-urban drift, and poor health (Eli 1994, Amadi and Tamuno 1999). However, despite all these, neither the state nor the oil companies have commissioned scientific studies to ascertain the adverse effects of oil activities on the region's environment since 1956. Thus, the people especially women, have continued to bear the brunt of oil operations on the environment, with no hope for alternatives.

According to Ahmadu and Egbodion (2013), studies carried out among 17 selected cassava farming communities, three oil spillage communities (Otor-Udu, Olomoro and Uzere) and three non-oil spillage communities (Egini, Aradhe and Ellu), show that in 2012, the negative consequences of the oil spillage on both farmland and cassava crop were enormous. This is because oil spillage significantly reduced the farmers' farm size, yield and land productivity by 0.61 ha, 6119 MT and 1447 mt/ha respectively. About 45 per cent of variation in land productivity in cassava production was significantly explained by the farmers' years of



farming experience and oil spillage. The effect of oil spills caused a great damage to the oil communities due to the high retention time of oil in the soil occasioned by limited flow. This prevents proper soil aeration and affects soil temperature, structure, nutrient status and pH, and ultimately crops are destroyed (especially cassava). This presents challenges, given that cassava is important and pivotal in agricultural development of the Niger Delta in particular and Nigeria in general. For the people of the Niger Delta, it has been transformed from a minor crop to a major crop, and recently it has become a cash crop for export.

Cassava production, given its potential as a money-spinning venture ought to benefit women. Although Nigeria is the highest producer of cassava in the world, she is also the world's largest consumer, leaving nearly nothing for export. This calls for concerted effort to increase the production of the commodity in the country, including combating the problem of oil spillage which is hampering its production. Lamenting the general effect of this on the women and their income, Ahmadu and Egbodion (2013:1), argued that despite the efforts by women in this area in the area of fishing, crop cultivation, the people have nothing to show for it. This is because before maturity, most of these crops are destroyed by oil spilled from crude oil pipes which criss-cross the farming areas. With this, there is high level of malnutrition, hunger and poverty. According to the National Bureau of Statistics, the incidence of poverty in the Niger Delta is alarming, increasing from 15.4 per cent in 1980 to 52.2 per cent in 2004. This is not unconnected with the constant incidence of oil spills which have destroyed the main source of income and productive activities of the region. Over 6,000 oil spills had been recorded in the 40 years of oil exploitation in Nigeria giving an average of 150 spills per annum. A total of 4,647 incidents of oil spills occurred between 1976 and 1996 resulting in the spillage of about 2,369,470 barrels of crude oil and only about 549,060 barrels were recovered 1,820,410 barrels were lost to the ecosystem. Between 2006 and 2012 alone, a total of 127,467.96 barrels of oil were spilled. These statistics are alarming.

The consequences of oil spillage on agricultural production, the environment and humans are enormous. It has been observed the negative effects of oil spillage on agriculture is on the increase, at times occurring daily. In this way, most of the farmlands are destroyed and rivers polluted leading to the death of fish; and most farmers and fishermen are rendered jobless. This is illustrated in Tables 1 and 2. While Table 1, gives an account of the effects of oil pollution on sampled fauna of the Niger Delta; Table 2 focuses on the effects of gas flares and oil spillage on common crops in the Niger Delta.



Table 1: Effects of oil pollution on sampled fauna of the Niger Delta

s/no	Fauna	Description	Nutritional Value	Economic Value	Remark
1	Epepete	A small fresh-water fish found in large schools usually at the beginning of the rain season, caught by people even with ordinary basin.	Source of protein	High market value	It is now virtually extinct as it is hardly found in the markets
2	Igieneba	A small fresh-water fish that moves in a very large school, caught usually in shallow streams and rivers	Source of protein	Of high market value	It is now virtually extinct as it is hardly found in the markets
3	Iseun	A type of small fish that moves in a very large school, caught by fishermen along with Cray fish	Source of protein	Very cheap and affordable to the larger populace	Not as common as it used to be
4	Edible frog (Okerhe)	A dark smooth skinned fresh-water frog found in natural water bodies.	Source of protein and medicinal value	Of high market value	It is now virtually extinct as it is hardly found now
5	Ohorhe fish	Large scaled fresh-water fish.	Source of protein	Of high market value	Becoming extinct in the area (especially since 1980)
6	Catfish	A common fresh and salt-water fish in the region found in natural water bodies.	Source of protein	Of high market value	The freshwater type has been very scarce since the 1990s; now found in commercial fish farms
7	Iku-ewwewe	Tiny reddish freshwater cray fish.	Source of protein	Of high market value especially among the traditional worshippers as it is a common for sacrifice (appeasing spirit of bed wetting)	Decrease in catch noticed in the early 1980s and now, it is virtually extinct
8	Electric fish	A dominant freshwater fish, found mostly in fishponds	Source of protein	High market value	Extinct since the early 1980s

Source: Compiled by authors from various sources (2021)



Table 2: Effects of gas flares and oil spillage on common crops in the Niger Delta

s/no	Crop	Economic Value	Nutritional Value	Space Requirement	Effect of Gas Flaring on Crop
1	Yam (D. rotundata)	Highly valued in the local market	Major staple food widely grown in the region; a main source of carbohydrates	Large acres of land	Gas flare (GF) continuously emitting heat radiation, light and unburnt gas drastically reduces yield, both quantitatively and qualitatively. GF attracts insects, such as variegated grasshopper (<i>Zonocerus variegates</i>) that eats up vines, and yam beetle (<i>Heteroligus</i> spp.) that attacks yam tubers.
2	Cocoyam	Although not as valued as yam, but serve as a supplementary to yam and as such, has high market value	Major staple food widely grown in the region; a main source of carbohydrates	Planted in mixed cropping system and may require large acres of land	Gas flare (GF) continuously emitting heat radiation, light and unburnt gas drastically reduces yield, both quantitatively and qualitatively. GF attracts insects, such as variegated grasshopper (<i>Zonocerus variegates</i>) that eats up vines, and yam beetle (<i>Heteroligus</i> spp.) that attacks yam tubers.
3	Cassava (M. esculenta)	Highly valued as it is used for the production of gari, fufu, starch	Major staple food widely grown in the region; a main source of carbohydrate	Cultivated on large acres of land	Gas flare attracts grasshoppers, which eat up the plants. Crude protein content was reduced by 40%
4	Mango (M. indica)	Sources of income to those who have it as it is not common to everyone	Source of vitamins	Found around home stead, but have been recently cultivated in plantations	Gas flare causes premature ripening of fruits, especially during the dry season months of December-March each year.
5	Sweet orange (C. sinensis)	Sources of income to those who have it as it is not common to everyone	Source of vitamins	Found around homestead, but have been recently cultivated in plantations	Gas flare effect is similar to that of mango. In addition, farmers believe that toxic effluents dispersed by flood water to homes and farms adversely affect the crop
6	Avocado Pear	Sources of income to those who have it as it is not common to everyone	Source of vitamins	Found around homestead, but have been recently cultivated in plantations	Affects production rate
7	Pepper	Sources of income to those who have it	Source of vitamins, potassium, folic acid and fiber.	Found around homestead	Oiled shoot of crop may wilt and die off due to blockage of stomata thereby inhibiting photosynthesis, transpiration and respiration. In fact, germination, growth performance and yield of crops are stifled by oil spillage
8	Tomatoes	Sources of income to those who have it	Source of vitamins	Found around homestead	Oiled shoot of crop may wilt and die off due to blockage of stomata thereby inhibiting photosynthesis, transpiration and respiration. In fact, germination, growth performance and yield of crop stifled by oil spillage
9	Water leaf	Sources of income to	Source of vitamins	Found usually in the forests	Ascorbic acid content of waterleaf was reduced by 36%.



		those who have it	calcium, phosphorus and iron		
	Maize (<i>Zea mays</i> L.)	Sources of income to those who have it	Contains micronutrients like starch, fibre, protein, vitamins and essential minerals.	Found around home stead, but have been recently cultivated in plantations	Crude oil also reduced maize germination and yield by 50% and 92% respectively and acutely impacted height, stem girth, ear height, leaf area and length of primary roots of the plant.
	Common vegetables	Sources of income to those who have it	Contains micronutrients like starch, fibre, protein, vitamins and essential minerals.	Found around homestead	crude oil stunts the growth of most common vegetables

Source: *Compiled by authors from varied sources (2021)*

From the tables above, it is clear that the activities of oil operators and the oil itself has devastating and long-lasting negative impacts on the environment, the people and the local economy. This is more particular to women who are the major drivers of the local economy and the main providers of the family. Unfortunately, the effect of oil pollution on the environment in general and agriculture in the Niger Delta, has made their situation worse. The attempt at making life meaningful even with the neglect of the area by the government have yielded little or no result as oil reduces soil fertility, smothers economic trees and food crops; kills them out-rightly and reduces crop yield. Ordinarily, these would have served as nutritional supplements for the people have been reduced by the effect of oil and pollution. The nutritional value of their farming products is low and have led to various kinds of illnesses, miscarriage and birth of children with deficiencies. For example, the ascorbic acid content of waterleaf was reduced by 36 per cent, while cassava crude protein content was reduced by 40 per cent. Crude oil also reduced maize (*Zea mays* L.) germination and yield by 50 per cent and 92 per cent respectively and acutely impacted height, stem girth, ear height, leaf area and length of primary roots of the plant. Similarly, crude oil stunts the growth of most common vegetables. This has partly been responsible for the fact that the Niger Delta is still enmeshed in an even deeper crisis including armed conflicts in communities. This shows clearly the need for a clearer vision or agenda for regional development and a more committed action and implementation programme that address past failure.

Research has shown that oil impacted areas are unsuitable for farming even after two decades. It has also been revealed that pollution impacts have been more severe, because clean ups are often tardy and limited and in the case of Nigeria, it has become an issue of politics. In 2011, an investigation into the issue of the government’s plan to clean up the mess caused by oil spillage and other related pollution in the Niger Delta area showed that it could take 30 years (see BBC News Report 2011).



8. Impact on the lives of women in the area

Researchers have established that the impact on the lives of the women have been devastating. This has been so since the discovery of oil in the region and the devastating impact of the oil on the economic lives of the people. Adeyemo (2002) has argued that the Urboho community alone lost over 818.08 hectares of land to oil activities, which deprived over 900 women of their farmlands. Usman (2006) opined that the environmental degradation in the area which in turn destroyed livelihoods not only posed economic and political challenges to the society but has the capability of affecting the psyche of the people to the extent of impacting negatively on their behaviour, making them incline towards social vices such as prostitution. This is because since these women have nothing to depend on after destruction of their crops and means of livelihood, (during the colonial period) the female folks were exposed to the colonial workers and officials who lured them into prostitutions in the labour camps, enticing them with money and trinkets. This was specifically the case of some camps in the then Benin Province. Akubor (2005:180), noted that in some these camps in Benin provinces, ladies were seen around colonial quarters and camps especially at night, where they were patronized by camp masters and other officials. The scholar argued that this probably marked the beginning of the loss of women dignity and the beginning of modern-day prostitution referred to as *Italio* in Benin and Delta states (Asenime 2000:221).

Other scholars and experts in the area tend to agree with the views above. For example, Okoko and Ibaba (cited in Okoko 2000), noted that the people of the Niger Delta area with specific reference to women are now giving up the traditional occupation which for centuries have sustained the area. According to the findings, these traditional occupations like farming and fishing have been relegated to the background and abandoned in place of violent criminal activities, because their land and rivers have become their liability with spillages and gas flaring killing their greatest assets. This is considered a serious health and environmental hazard, when seen in the light of the fact that 76 per cent of gas flaring impact on the environment with negative consequences. This is in line with the World Bank Report (cited in Nwogwugwu et al 2012:26) which argued that the Niger Delta region is the most polluted area in the world and the most environmentally fragile in the country (Okoji 2012).

9. Women reactions and state responses

The available evidence among historians have established that the struggle against economic deprivation and environmental degradation in the Niger Delta area of Nigeria, have not gone unchallenged by the state. This in turn have for long exposed women to all forms of dehumanizing situations in the hands of the state which have often employed brutal and naked force. It is a well-known fact as established by reports of the various oil firms operating around the area that the exploration and exploitation of oil resources in the Niger Delta has resulted in particular economic and environmental conflicts, with women bearing the brunt of the situation (Obaseki 2001, SPDC Report 2003, Akubor and Akubor 2018). This is because



(as noted earlier) in the area, the women are the ones engaged in the real production of the means of livelihood through farming, while the men are known to always go in pursuit of oil contracts, a condition which started since the discovery of oil at commercial quantity in the area. However, over the years, the pollution caused by both the forceful taking away of farmlands from the women, oil spillage and gas flaring have led to a situation in which crop yields have greatly declined. These lands have been used for laying oil pipelines which criss-cross the area and contaminate it. With this situation, there is acute shortage in arable land for agriculture, hence, the attendant food shortage. The direct impact is that it has led to situation within the region where the already impoverished women must import food from other parts of the country leading to high cost of food. It is also worth noting that despite the agony of these women, 90 per cent of them still rely on the use of other crude implements like cutlasses, hoes, knives to carry out their farming activities (Akubor 2011).

The lives of the women and their children depend largely on this line and any attempt to tamper with it, disturbs their lives. Consequently, women constantly rise up to engage the state and the multinational corporation, making their grievances, especially their economic plight and that of their children known to them. Often, they have sent delegations to both the government and the oil firms, but the response has been negative. It was this nonchalant attitude of the government that have led to the formation of various groups by the women to push forward their grievances. An example is the formation of the Federation of Ogoni Women's Associations (FOWA), an umbrella organization for all women's groups in Ogoni, the oil rich Niger Delta region of Nigeria. This came into being on the April 25, 1997, out of the frustration experienced by the women in the area and it advocated for a non-violence posture. However, the negative response from the government led to mass protests. Historicizing this as well as commenting on the organisation of the protest, Barikor-Wiwa (1997), wrote:

Women played a key role in organizing that massive protest. FOWA was set up in 1993, along with eight other units which make up the Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP). MOSOP is the democratic organization which represents the voice of the Ogoni people in the Niger Delta. MOSOP acts as an umbrella organization for a number of Ogoni groups, which together have a total membership of over 250,000 individuals: FOWA; National Youth Council of the Ogoni People (NYCOP); Council of Ogoni Churches (COC); Council of Ogoni Professionals (COP); Council of Ogoni Traditional Rulers (COTRA); National Union of Ogoni Students (NUOS); Ogoni Students Union (OSU); Ogoni Teachers Union (OUT); and Ogoni Central Union (OCU). FOWA, like the rest of the MOSOP units, is independent but guided by MOSOP policies. However, it is widely recognized that FOWA has grown to be the strongest component of the nine existing units of MOSOP.

The available evidence shows that the above action as well as other related ones were made by a well-organized African women's movement. Analysis of women action in the Niger Delta area played a key role in one of the largest non-violent struggles for environmental and social justice in African history. In the case of the Ogoni People, Barikor-Wiwa (1997) opined that



the era of the most intense protests began on January 4th, 1993, when the Ogoni people took their future into their hands and peacefully protested nearly four decades of environmental devastation by the Shell oil company. During this protest, over 300,000 people participated from a total Ogoni population of 500,000 and not a single stone was thrown neither were properties and/or installations destroyed. At the end of the protest, it was resolved that Shell cannot and must not be allowed in Ogoni. According to Barikor-Wiwa (1997) '...we say no to Shell as it remains Persona non grata in Ogoni... This pronouncement, amongst five other resolutions, were made and signed (those who could not sign, thumb printed) by over 300 women leaders in Ogoni who represented FOWA's 57,000 registered members.'

10. State Response: The case of brutality and violence against women in the Niger Delta

Available evidence has established that, the government has always responded with violence against women in their quest for economic freedom. In most cases, various task forces were set up to use force instead of negotiation. This has been the case since the colonial period. Tamuno (1970) had noted that, it was typical of the colonial government, instead of dealing with the issue squarely, they immediately dispatched state force on the women, a situation which aggravated the situation. According to Tamuno (1970:9), this was the case between 1929- 1930, the Abeokuta 'tax disturbances' of 1918 and the 'tax riots' in Warri province between 1927 and 1928, during which the colonial government involved the police and the military in a disturbance affecting mainly women. In all these, there were heavy casualties on the side of the women, who although harmless, were dealt with by the forces. In the case of the oil rich Niger Delta, it is on record that as a way of silencing the well-publicized campaign of the Ogoni for environmental justice, an Internal Security Task Force (ISTF) was set up by the Nigerian dictatorship to terrorize the Ogoni (Barikor-Wiwa 1997).

The earliest example of state response to women protest in the Niger Delta was what led to the women's riots of 1929-30 in parts of Eastern Nigeria (Isichei 1983:401). Although not directly linked to oil spillage and crop destruction, it was still within the space of fight for economic liberation. According to A. E. Afigbo, this was connected with the imposition and collection of direct taxes. An incidence in this direction which shows the inhumanity of the colonial government was the case of 11 December 1929 when two Ngwa women, among a crowd of demonstrators, died from wounds sustained during an accident with a car owned by the expatriate medical officer at Aba. In the cause of airing their grievance, there ensued confrontation between the armed forces and the women in Owerri and Calabar provinces from December 1929 to January 1930, during which female casualties included fifty-five dead and over fifty wounded (Akubor 2016). Closely related to this was the killing of women in 1947 for demanding economic relief. This was during the strike at Burutu in June 1947, in which workers asked for improved working condition of service. When it was not forthcoming, at one stage, women demonstrated peacefully in support of the claims made by



their working husbands. This situation angered the government which then invited the police, leading to the shooting of the men and their wives (Akubor 2016).

In 1984 as a result of constant destruction of their land and crops, women in the area took to a mild protest. This was the first of massive non-violent protests by women from several communities in the Niger Delta. The 1984 Ogharefe Women Protest was against US Pan Ocean. The tactics and determination of the women forced the chevron oil company to send their representatives to negotiate with the women. During the negotiation, the women made clear their position, in which they ask the oil companies to make concrete efforts at improving the economic, environmental and social conditions of the people. However, at the end, no concrete attempt was made by the oil companies, and they did not implement their Memorandum of Understanding. Instead, Pan Ocean Company bluntly refused to pay the people any compensation, despite the series of protest carried out by the Women between 1984 and 1986.

This was also the case of Shell in 1999, which refused to compensate the community despite the protests both in Nigeria and in London particularly against gas flaring. These indeed are glaring manifestation of the rights of the women and outright denial of compensation for taking the source of livelihood and the destruction of the environment. This has been adverse, relegating women in the area to the background despite the immense contribution to the economy of the area especially in the area of food production (Jones 2006, Akubor 2010). This position of subordination, lack of opportunities as well as their exclusion from decision making makes them more vulnerable to poverty; this is apart from the fact that most of these companies have refuse to offer them employment in the firms. Apart from this humiliation, those often sent to keep peace in the area in time of conflict, treat the women as spoils of war, raping them and looting their properties (Azubike 2008). Scholars have noted that in the Ogoni area, women (since the grand protest of January 4th, 1993), women have experienced, first-hand, the violent reprisals instigated by the Nigerian military and their Shell counterparts.

11. Women in the 21st century in the Niger Delta: Any change?

Scholars have argued that apart from the economic deprivations the rural women in the Niger Delta area suffer, those who are able to find their ways to the cities are not faring better. It is embarrassing to state that till now, women in the Niger Delta have been victims of gender based discriminatory practices and the economic crisis. They are underrepresented in the strategic heights of politics, government, economic and educational institutions and employed labour particularly in the oil industry. It is an indisputable fact that society regards women as inferior to men. In the rural areas, even to this day, women are only supposed to be seen and not heard.

From the above analysis, it is clear that women in the Niger Delta area are the main driver of the economy, the pillars of most families as well as the victims of oil exploration and exploitation. In this way, they have been exposed to so many dangers and hazards including



rape, torture and police brutality, yet they have not been so recognised by the society. Apart from the fact that the Ogoni woman (as a wife) is entitled to a piece of land in which to farm, the laws of the land are yet to recognise women as owners of properties. By this, the inheritance laws of most of the groups in the Niger Delta area favour the men against women who are subjected to inhuman widowhood practices and other cultural bias.

It is also important to note that apart from the hostility women experience from the oil firms, within the local setting, despite the efforts by the women, they have always been victims of violent militia and cult-related violence in the region. In time of crises, the human cost of conflicts is high and are borne principally by the “civilian” population especially women and children frequently viewed as targets by warring parties and criminal gangs. In most cases, violence and kidnapping relate to women, the government is often slow to respond, and this is not good for a society where they are the economic backbone. Unfortunately, the few successful women in these communities have become targets of most criminal groups, taking them hostage and demanding for ransom. For example, on Monday, February 22, 2008 Mrs. Oluwatoyin Nkwo, a senior staff of the Elf Petroleum Nigeria limited (EPNL) was kidnapped by gunmen from Port Harcourt and taken to one of the communities in Khana Local Government Area of Rivers State. In the early hours of Sunday, April 20, 2008 Margret Idisi, wife of chief Humphrey Idisi, Chairman/Chief Executive of Lonestar Drilling Nigeria Limited (a well-known oil services company) was abducted by a group of kidnapers who invaded the family house of the oil magnate at Rumuokwrushi in Port Harcourt, Rivers State. On the same day at 12:30pm Mrs. Rose Deemor, mother of former caretaker committee chairman of Tai Local Government Area of Rivers State was kidnapped by gunmen in her home. March 27, 2008 was the turn of Delta State as heavily armed gunmen struck the home of Mr. Stanley Oforegbu and kidnapped his pregnant wife.

In line with the above, studies have shown that within the communities, the recent surge in the number of kidnapped children have in one way or the other increased the agonies and affected the productivity of women.

12. Conclusion

From the discourse, it is clear that although women in the Niger Delta area have contributed and are still contributing meaningfully to the economic development of the area, no meaningful attempt is being made by both the government and oil industries to benefit them. The relegation of these women to the background and their quest for survival in what has been described as a male dominated world, women and young girls have devised other means for survival. Although this had been noted earlier, (Akubor 2005, 2021), the new dimension of the survival pattern has been documented by Ahanihu (2000), when discussing the specific case of Eket (Akwa Ibom state). Ahanihu (2000), specifically noted thus:

Prostitution (has) entered the lexicon of the social life in Eket (in Akwa Ibom state). Some of the young school leavers are desperate to survive and nothing can be more alluring than the



whiff of dollars flaunted by oil workers. Being seen in the company of strangers is no longer a taboo as it was in the past. And the society no longer frown at seeing their girls in the company of white men drinking in beer parlour...The result of environmental/ecological degradation is the increasing indulgence in crime and prostitution. A lot of the youth in the area are no longer keen in going to school. Most of them will rather work as helpers in the service companies. Even those with university degrees in the area prefer to do such menial jobs instead of going to the ministries to seek for a career as civil servants.

It is in line with the above that the paper suggests that there is the need for the society to rethink the situation of women in the Niger Delta area, especially in term of being exploited on the one hand and relegated to the background on the other. Some of those obnoxious laws that do not recognise women as those entitled to own properties, land and even economic investments should be reconsidered to make these women develop in their own ways and possible compete with men in the economic arena.

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Research Article:

Sustainability of urban agriculture as a poverty alleviation strategy in Zimbabwe: A case study of Harare

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Abstract

The contribution of Urban Agriculture (UA) to poverty reduction among poor households in African cities has been recognized for many years. Urban agriculture involves the production of plant and tree crops and animal husbandry on-plot and in open public spaces or private rented land within the city and in the peri-urban zone. In African cities, the most cultivated crops are leaf vegetables and maize (which is the staple crop in southern parts of the continent). The case study suggest that it has become a major livelihood strategy for poor households and the newly urbanized across Africa. The cities of the South are growing fast as people move from the countryside to seek a better future. They are growing so fast that the municipalities cannot keep up with the influx. There are too few jobs and limited facilities. Many of these new arrivals face poverty and malnutrition, often spending three-quarters of what little income is available to provide just one meal a day. To improve their situation, many of the urban poor use any available space to grow more food. Some even manage to grow enough to sell the surplus, providing much needed income. The research discovered various positive conclusions about the actual and potential impact of expanded urban cultivation on the food security of poor households. The households producing some of their own food appeared to be more food secure and have better nutritional status than non-farming households of similar socio-economic status. In addition, production for consumption and sale could generate revenue and reduce monthly household expenditures on food, leaving more cash available for other basic household needs (such as health, housing, education, and clothing).

Keywords: *expanded urban production, food security, income, household needs, nutrition, urban agriculture*

1. Introduction

Urban poverty represents one of the greatest and most urgent challenges that modern society is facing. The criticality of this global issue is represented by a rapidly growing body of academic literature which aims to explain the dynamics of urban poverty and promote effective and enduring solutions. Urban poverty has been a low priority on development and research agendas. Studies of poverty have been dominated by rural development and rural poverty. The renewed interest in urban issues has been sparked by various factors. In the first place, there is the widespread idea that urbanisation is speeding up. Africa's urban population



is growing faster than that of any other regions. By the end of the current decade, 24 of the world's 30 fastest growing cities will be African (FAO 2018). Globally, the rate of increase in urban land cover is predicted to be at its highest in Africa until 2030 (Seto et al 2015). In 2015, an estimated 54 per cent of the world's population resided in urban areas and the urban population is expected to increase to 6.3 billion by 2050, when 66 per cent of the world's population is projected to be urban (UNDESA 2014). By 2030, the number of Africans living in towns and cities will increase by a further 345 million. Urban growth will only increase the number of highly vulnerable urban communities, with the urban poor being most at risk.

The urbanization process brings indeed a wide range of unwanted consequences, which go from the reduction of fertile lands to deforestation, air and water pollution, reduced drainage of rainfall, and the creation of peri-urban areas where socio-economic constraints are exalted, and poverty is condensed (Baud 2000). Brodjonegoro (2018) argued that urban agriculture favours social improvement since the poor spend up to 85 per cent of their income in purchasing food and most urban farmers belong to the poorest populations. With the global population anticipated to reach over nine billion by the year 2050, the role of urban agriculture in global food security has become an important discussion topic to alleviate poverty (Smith et al 2016). Urban poverty is now becoming more significant than rural poverty in most cases. There is therefore a paradigm shift in that poverty must be viewed from an urban perspective unlike the traditional focus on rural areas. It is against this background that urban and peri-urban agriculture is considered as a strategy that can bring multiple benefits and help to build resilience to urban poverty at the city region level.

2. Background to the study

Urban Agriculture is not a recent phenomenon to occur in urban areas. For many years, urban farming has served as a vital input towards livelihood strategies of urban households worldwide (Bairwa et al 2014). Brand et al (2017) argued that, since the end of the 19th century, the expansion of the agro-industrial productivist model has contributed to distancing the city from the agricultural areas that feed its inhabitants. Cities were closely linked to their food until the advent of the Industrial Revolution in the 19th Century. Town centres were laid out to enable close access to locations judged to be of strategic importance: buildings symbolizing political, legal, and religious power, but also markets. The market, just like the slaughterhouse, made visible to townfolk the processes by which supplies from farming were turned into food. In this model of the 'organic city' (Steel 2008), town centres were literally shaped by food. Conversely, globalization and the rise of global cities around the turn of the 20th century had the effect of distancing cities not only from their national economy but also from the local embeddedness, incrementally weakening the ties between the city and its food.

Urban poverty is a complex phenomenon, which is undermining the sustainable development of a growing number of cities, regions, and countries all over the world. Systemic changes and sustainable development policies are required to reaffirm equality and



eliminate the many issues that the nature of urban poverty poses for housing, natural environment, sanitation, health, education, social inclusion and security, livelihoods and the special needs of vulnerable groups (Ahmad and Puppim de Oliveira 2015, Hilson et al 2018; United Nations 2015, 2017). In recent years, due to the explosive growth of cities, food production both within the cities (Urban Agriculture-UA) and in the peripheries (Peri-urban Agriculture-PA) has been receiving increasing attention as a means of contributing to city food supplies, alleviating poverty, providing employment, improving the environment, and improving diets in both urban and peri-urban areas. This paper analyses the interconnections between urban agriculture and poverty alleviation. More deeply, it scrutinizes the possibilities and strategies of the urban and rural poor to enhance development, take part in development processes and reduce poverty through participation and self-development. The urban poor population is increasing due to rural-urban migration and fertility.

UA has existed for as long as there have been cities. As cities grow, however, the use of land for UPA activities comes into conflict with city planners and developers since the value of land for sale is generally far higher than its value for production of food. At first, agricultural production is pushed out to the periphery of the cities-the peri-urban areas. These areas then come under pressure for other uses of the land, and agriculture is gradually pushed further and further from the cities. In many cities, agriculture is banned or heavily restricted but continues to exist without controls or permits. Producers within the cities and in the city peripheries, are often not only under pressure from land development, but also often in conflict with the city authorities over the use of land and water and over health standards of production.

As for the case of Zimbabwe, UA is not a new phenomenon in all major cities including Harare. The study of urban agriculture is deeply rooted in the political economy of a country. The City of Harare in Zimbabwe is composed of Greater Harare, Chitungwiza, Ruwa and Epworth. The main focus of this paper will be on Greater Harare with an estimated population of 2 098 199 (ZIMSAT 2012: 110). Since the establishment of Harare in 1890, the city's population, UA, industrial and commercial activities have been rapidly and continuously growing to greater heights, but this growth has not been accompanied by corresponding legal land supply for urban farmers.

The colonial political economy of Zimbabwe influenced how urban areas are organized economically, and some of the policies regulating urban economic and planning activities remained remnants of post-colonial Zimbabwe. It is the colonial legacy which created African cities that depend on rural areas for food supplies as urbanites were engaged in non-agricultural activities within industries.

Salisbury, now Harare, was established by the British settlers as a site for administrative purpose and as a hub for industry and commerce. According to Makonese and Mushamba (2005:9) when settlers occupied Salisbury, the settlement gradually developed into an urban settlement and agricultural activities gradually gave way to urban developments such that by 1950, most urban centres had effectively taken shape. Extensive



UA was not allowed in Salisbury because the town was inhabited by workers. The colonial government used environmental laws to restrict free practice of UA. Salisbury (Protection of Land) by-laws of 1973 and the Municipal Act Chapter 125 forbade all cultivation on municipal land which was done without council's prior approval. Crops grown without prior approval were slashed by the local government (Mushayavanhu 2003).

At independence in 1980, the Government of Zimbabwe inherited an uneven pattern of development with the urban centres being endowed with virtually all the necessary social services, housing, safe water and sanitation, health care, education, and the opportunities for securing employment. In contrast, the rural areas were not well developed in terms of basic infrastructure and services like the urban areas. Uneven development between the rural and urban centres in favour of the latter increased rural urban drift as people were in search of better opportunities in cities. There is a big challenge as the formal sector cannot absorb many people. These migrants started to engage in petty trading, vending and some chose UA to subsidize their subsistence. Some can even diversify the source of their earnings through UA or sometimes to take advantage of tax evasion (Smelser and Swedberg 1994:429).

Since the adoption of Economic Structural Adjustment Programme (ESAP) in Zimbabwe, the economy experienced a decline in economic growth. There were massive retrenchments, rise in urban poverty (1990/91, 12%; 1995, 39%) and consequently a decline in the living standards. This meant that the urban poor were unable to meet their day-to-day basic needs (Sigauke 2002). Due to the adverse effects of ESAP, multiple factors came into play as a rationale for engaging in UA (retrenchment, liberalization of markets, devaluation of local currencies, deregulation, drastic reduction in disposable incomes, removal of subsidies on most social services and food stuffs, ineffective agricultural policies, crippled food distribution systems, unemployment, lax urban regulations, droughts of 1992-4). ESAP has been associated with the increase in uncontrolled sprawling of UA (Chingarande 1999; 2009:7). The government could no longer subsidize the public services like health, education, and agriculture after implementing the structural adjustments. A number of people got retrenched and were left in a vicious cycle of poverty that was very difficult to escape, hence the need for aid. Reduced remuneration significantly increased poverty in Zimbabwe. According to Nugget (1999), the poor are not the only people who produce food in cities and towns, but they are more dependent on it than their rich counterparts. Therefore, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) prescribed ESAP perpetuated poverty (IFAD, 2001).

Therefore, it is against this background that UA should be integrated in urban areas to complement meagre wages as poverty is closely linked to the poor performance of the economy and economic restructuring that characterized the 1990s. That was also punctuated by the political and economic crisis that resulted in rising poverty in its wake. Sustainable urban agriculture plays an essential role in addressing a city's problems in innovative ways. Through urban agriculture's efforts to green cities, environmental stewardship is enhanced. When inner city residents have the ability to grow and market their own food through



farmer's markets, providing opportunities for entrepreneurs and commercial farmers, this leads to economic development and community revitalization.

As urbanization intensifies, there is an increase in urban poverty, the livelihood of a large number of people in cities in developing countries, especially the poor and women, depends completely or partly on Urban Agriculture (UA). The agricultural activities take place in various parts of cities, both in the built-up area in backyards, long streams, and railway reservations, on vacant public or private land as well as in the rapidly changing sub- and peri-urban areas. Attention to UA is steadily increasing. Research undertaken in Beijing, China in the last two decades by Resource Centres on Urban Agriculture and Food and Security (RUAF), indicates that UA has multiple roles and functions and plays an important role in: enhancing urban food security; creating urban job opportunities and generation of income especially for urban poor groups as well as the provision of a social safety net for these poor groups; contributing to increased recycling of nutrients (turning organic wastes into a resource); facilitating social inclusion of the disadvantaged groups and community development; and, urban greening and maintenance of green open spaces. However, the potential adverse effects of UA on health (for example the risks associated with irrigation of food crops with urban wastewater) and the environment for example, pollution of underground water by agro-chemicals also need to be recognized. Balancing of the positive and negative impacts that agriculture may have in the city, depends to a larger extent on the measures taken by local authorities to enhance the benefits of UA while reducing the associated risks. There are also numerous benefits derived from UA that must be weighed against risks in a holistic overview of the activity. Potential benefits are wide ranging and include increased food security and improved nutrition for the urban poor (Cole et al 2006). City planners often look down upon agriculture as incompatible with urban development, and in most cases its economic contribution is often ignored. UA was not given any policy attention, other than restricting it as much as possible or permitting it only as a temporary or preliminary use of the sites concerned until urban functions took over its use.

Global developments now focus attention on sustainability as an explicit goal. But the concept has to be translated into the practical dimensions of the real world to make it operational. Sustainable development has become a widely recognized goal for human society ever since deteriorating environmental conditions in many parts of the world indicate that its sustainability may be at stake.

The population of Harare is expected to increase in the next 15 years at an average annual growth rate of approximately 4 per cent, reaching almost 9 million people in 2035 (UN, 2018a). However, not only is Harare expanding at a rapid pace, but growth is also taking place along the major outlets of the city into the surrounding region (Kassa 2013). This growth is expected to translate into an expansion of settlements in the city and into the surrounding areas. Consequently, farmland will continue to decline in the city's surrounding area for urbanization and industrial development (AAOIDPP 2013). The amount of farmland lost and



the impact on food supply, local livelihoods and the environment will very much depend on the mode of future urban development.

Therefore, this paper explores the importance of sustainable UA as a poverty alleviation strategy as well as an income generation activity in Zimbabwe by taking the case study of Harare. Urban land resource is critical in the development and practice of UA. Accessibility of such a resource to the urban farmers is curtailed by intense competition from other urban land uses such as housing and industrial developments hence, creating urban land conflict. Planners in most Zimbabwean urban centres view urban open space cultivation as standing in the way of urban development. Furthermore, the promotion of free markets operations in the distribution of urban land entails the poor and powerless being completely pushed out of the urban economic operations. One would expect the role of the city planner to be for advocacy, by deliberately setting aside land for urban agricultural production by the urban farmers. However, the institutional environment in which the urban planner operates is a major obstacle to responsive and innovative planning.

3. Statement of the problem

Urban poverty has been a low priority on development and research agendas. Studies of poverty have been dominated by rural development and rural poverty. The renewed interest in urban issues has been sparked by various factors. In the first place, there is the widespread idea that urbanisation is speeding up. With the global population anticipated to reach over nine billion by the year 2050, the role of urban agriculture in global food security has become an important discussion topic. Most poverty reduction strategies have invariably focused on rural areas, totally ignoring urban poverty. The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (2012) reports that 800 million people worldwide grow vegetables or fruits or raise animals in cities, producing an astonishing 15 to 20 per cent of the world's food. With the increase in urban poverty, food insecurity and malnutrition are shifting from rural to urban areas, renewed interest arises in alternative strategies for improving urban livelihoods, local governance, urban design, Local Economic Development (LED) and waste management, as well as for urban food security and nutrition. As a result of urbanisation, the number of the urban poor is increasing, at least in absolute terms. In developing countries, many citizens have turned to UA as a livelihood strategy and source of income for a substantial number of urban households. Globally, the growth of cities and urbanized centres continues at an exponential rate, with the fastest and most expansive growth being experienced in developing areas of the world. By 2050, when the world population is expected to have increased to 9.5 billion approximately 66 per cent of the world's population will be living in urban areas (UN 2014). As urban areas grow and poverty within them increases due to high levels of rural-to-urban migration. Therefore, understanding how urban food systems work and finding ways to ensure that they remain sustainable is a mounting preoccupation responsible authority in different countries. From 1991 to the end of 1995, the government of Zimbabwe adopted the Economic Structural Adjustment Programme (ESAP) which



signalled the end of its 12-year socialist economic policies (Brown 2002). ESAP also led to a dramatic and sudden increase in poverty in Harare and throughout the country. While there is a growing awareness about the role of urban agriculture in the context of food security and poverty alleviation for the urban populations, urban and peri-urban agriculture (UPA) still largely remains an informal sector that is not being integrated in agricultural policies or urban planning. This makes it vulnerable and jeopardizes its sustainability. This study looked at the importance of UA as a poverty alleviation strategy that can be used to harness food supply in the face of food shortages faced by most households in urban areas. Urban farmers in Zimbabwe have contributed significantly to the food security of the country but up to now, UA has not been recognized through reserving some land for the urban farmers under the Fast-Track Land Reform Programme (FTLRP). The World Bank (2013) acknowledged that, the role and importance of urban agriculture will likely increase with urbanization and climate change, so the integration of urban agriculture into development strategies and policy decisions would be important for long-term sustainability.

Therefore, it is against this background that, the main problem under study is the continued incidence of poverty in Harare the capital city of Zimbabwe that makes it imperative to investigate UA as poverty alleviation strategy as urban agriculture is still informal and sometimes illegal. Urban agriculture is considered an alternative agriculture movement advocating major shifts toward a more ecologically sustainable agriculture compared to the conventional paradigm of large-scale, highly industrialized agriculture. The role and importance of urban agriculture will likely increase with urbanization and climate change, therefore, the integration of urban agriculture into development strategies and policy decisions would be important for long-term sustainability.

4. Objectives of the study

- To assess UA as poverty alleviation strategy in Harare of Zimbabwe.
- To evaluate the importance UA to the urban population in Harare, Zimbabwe.
- To examine the nature of contributions which local authorities can make towards the practice of sustainable urban agriculture.
- To evaluate the contribution of UA to food security in Harare, Zimbabwe.

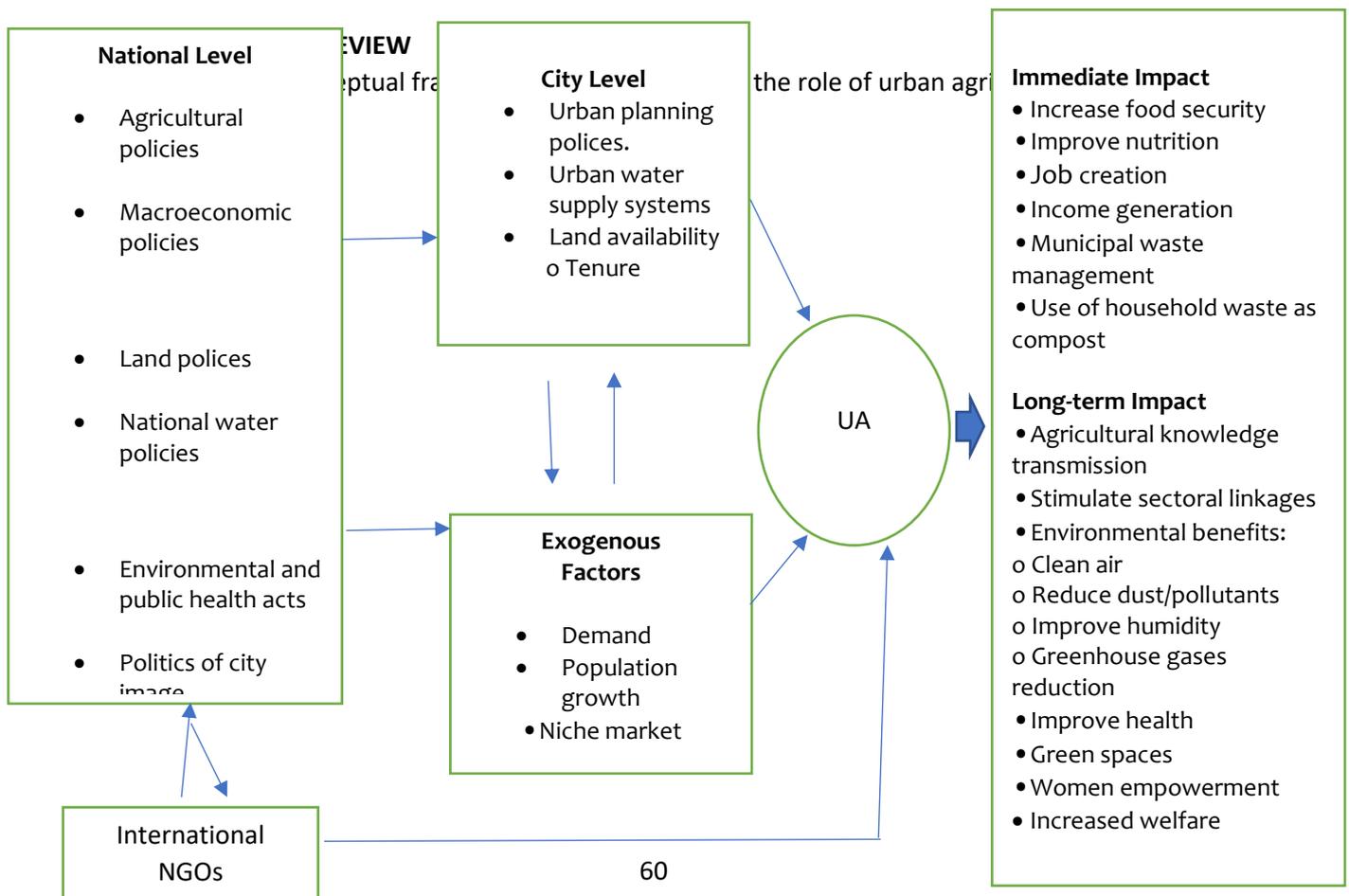
5. Significance of the study

The paper will significantly improve the livelihoods of the generally marginalized urban population. The development of UA is strongly influenced by the dynamics of the urban social, economic, political, ecological, and spatial systems with which it is connected. UA adapts to new economic and spatial conditions. Consequently, there is a great variety in Harare, people involved and their relations. These systems adapt to the continuously changing local conditions of the city where UA takes on new functions. A major function of UA is and will always be food supply and income generation in the cities, but increasingly, UA also plays a



role in environmental, landscape and biodiversity management and in providing recreational services, among others. This flexibility and multi-functionality of UA will likely determine its sustainability in the long-term. It is estimated that, in 2030, 40 per cent of the world population will live in rural areas and another 23 per cent in settlements with less than 300 000 inhabitants. It is estimated that 9.8 per cent will live in ‘small’ cities with between 300 000 and one million people (The Economist 2015). The fastest-growing urban centres will be small and medium-sized cities with less than one million inhabitants, which account for 59 per cent of the world’s urban population and 62 per cent of the urban population in Africa (UN Habitat 2016). Zimbabwe will not be an exceptional case; hence, urban poverty will persist. Urban Agriculture seems to be a viable intervention strategy for the urban poor to earn extra income and grow their own food. However, in Zimbabwe, policy makers and governments have neglected this veritable sector. There is need to highlight the potentials and constraints to its development to capitalize on the potentials and integrate it into the city system in a more viable and sustainable way. The recommendation of this study contributes to the economic growth of the cities in Zimbabwe based on the case of Harare. Furthermore, this study is an eye opener to the responsible authorities as far as sustainable UA as a poverty alleviation strategy is concerned.

Figure 1: Conceptual framework for mapping the role of UA.





Source: Arku, G. et al (2012) in Africa's Quest for Food Security: What Is the Role of Urban Agriculture? Africa Capacity Indicators Report (ACIR) - Capacity Development for Agricultural Transformation and Food Security.

6. Importance of urban agriculture

Urban agriculture (UA) in world cities is not a new phenomenon and is today a current issue to be considered as an integral part of urban land management (Friedmann 1987:47, Lynch 1990:536, Drescher et al 2000, Drescher 2003). The urbanization process is accompanied by a phenomenon referred to as the 'urbanization of poverty': rural-to-urban migration combined with limited employment opportunities in cities, which lead to a shift in the locus of poverty from rural to urban areas. In addition, the recent global financial crisis and rising food, fuel, and energy prices have affected developing countries, with a disproportionately large effect on the urban poor. Urbanisation is a process accompanied with demographic transition and economic expansion of cities. The process includes migration and industrialization that tend to influence spatial city expansion, and increases demand for land for housing, investment, and food. The expansion of the city engulfs rural land mainly used for agriculture-based livelihoods. UA has gained popularity in cities all over the world. The research provides insights into the chances and challenges of UA for sustainable city development by making use of Harare as a case study to show how UA can contribute to the social, environmental, and economic pillars of sustainable city development. However, there are limitations which should be taken into account for cities that want to invest in urban agriculture.

The urbanization process in many developing countries goes closely together with increasing urban poverty and growing food insecurity and malnutrition especially of the urban poor. Their situation is particularly difficult in the context of volatile food prices and financial, fuel and economic crises, since urban consumers are almost exclusively dependent on food purchases and the urban poor are the most affected. There are many external pressures that will cause changes in UA and the design of cities. First, there is growing acceptance that the structure and function of cities must change rapidly to respond to various drivers, for example., resource scarcity, population pressure (urbanization) and climate change (van Ginkel 2008). This implies an opportunity for UA, as a component of cities, to effect this change through the UA–built environment interface. Second, as cities become very large, issues such as the increasingly complex and costly food transport chains (in financial, infrastructure and energy terms), and the negative effects of the built environment, for example., heat islands, cause researchers and policy makers to review the outputs from UA and perhaps place more emphasis on their benefits or modify UA, to minimize dis-benefits that arise from it. Third, there is a growing call for changes in the practice of agriculture itself to create systems that are integrated and deal with the by-products from food transformation and consumption (see Pearson 2007).



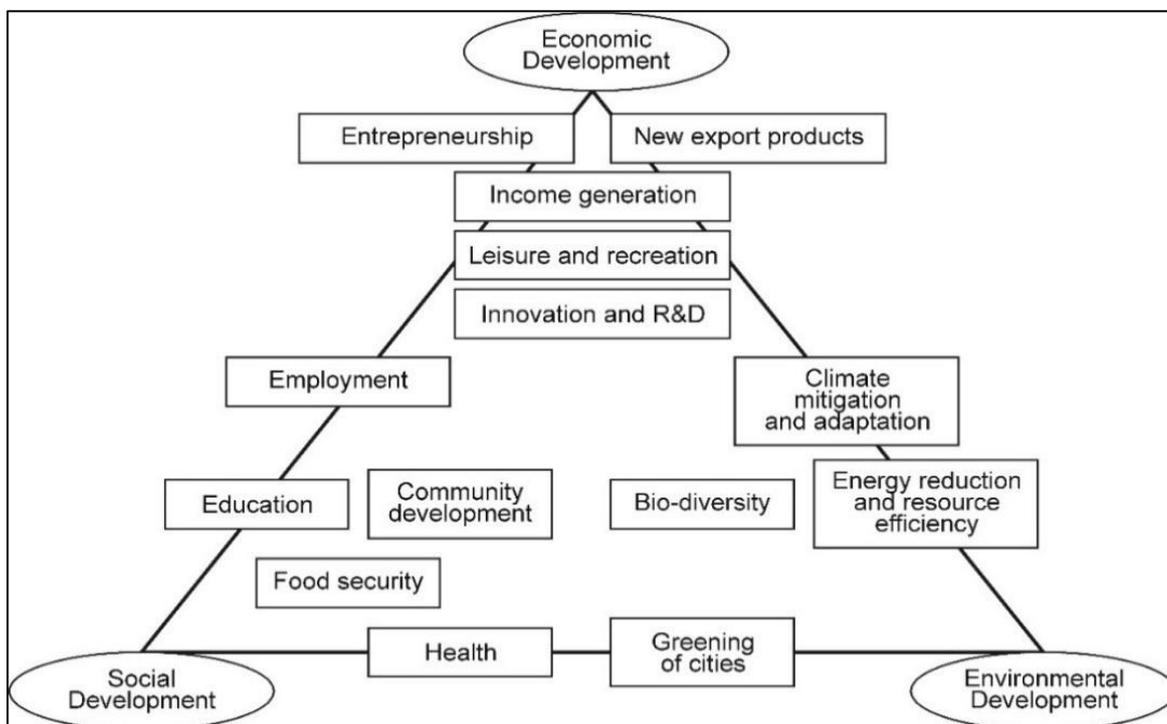
UA and food security cannot be separated. The food sector is an important urban economic activity often overlooked by planners and economists. As cities expand, so do the food needs of urban families. Urban agriculture has great potential to enhance the wellbeing of urban residents, including meeting the food needs of a burgeoning Africa's urban population. Africa's urban population is projected to increase from 39 per cent in 2005 to 53 per cent in 2030. This rate will translate into a dramatically high increase in urban population in developing regions. Such growth is expected to significantly increase household food demand in urban areas at the same time as rural-urban migration is contributing to a declining rural agricultural productivity due to loss of farm labour. It is within this context that urban agriculture stands to play a strategic role not only enhancing urban food and livelihood security, but also in meeting overall national food self-sufficiency. The scale of UA and its magnitude in providing food for the majority of urban residents, employment alternatives to a decreasing employment in the formal sector, environmental conservation, and ongoing civil service reforms in Zimbabwe and other Sub-Saharan Africa countries is supra. In only a few cases, urban agriculture should have been integrated into policy making, and in urban planning and management practises in developing countries, including Zimbabwe. Despite its importance as a major food provider sector, employment generator and its importance in sustaining livelihoods for the urban poor and for environmental resources, urban agriculture practice seems hardly integrated in land use planning processes and structures.

Urban agriculture is an all-important step in this direction. It can generate new employment opportunities such as urban farming, production and distribution of resources for urban farmers, horticulture experts, food processing, and retail of local foodstuffs; maintain a stable municipal tax base; and create a local buffer against global food shocks. A thriving local food industry can reduce unemployment and poverty and improve food security thus, enhancing the overall quality of life in urban areas.

In figure 2, the researcher plotted the potential contributions of UA to the different pillars of sustainable city development. UA can be beneficial for social development in the form of urban food security (to prevent hunger as well as to provide access to fresh and healthy food), community development for example, to increase social cohesion and crime prevention) and for educational purposes. Regarding environmental development, UA can be used for the greening of cities, climate mitigation and adaptation, increasing biodiversity, and for pollution reduction. UA also has the potential to apply new closed-loop systems with other urban activities. From an economic standpoint, UA offers potential for the generation of new income, entrepreneurship, knowledge development and innovation, and for new export products. However, the research stressed that the 'success' of UA in a city is far from being guaranteed, as clearly indicated by the limitations to the concept and challenges ahead, like legal barriers, high costs, a lack of space, conflicts with other urban functions, and health risks regarding food produced on urban farms.



Figure 2. Urban agriculture and the potential for sustainable city development



Source: Van Tuijl et al, (2018)

7. Conclusion

UA must be understood as a permanent and dynamic part of the urban socio-economic and ecological system, using typical urban resources, competing for land and water with other urban functions, influenced by urban policies and plans, and contributing to urban social and economic development. The integration of UA into the urban land use system and the creation of a favourable policy environment are critical steps in the development of the sector. UA can bring important environmental benefits, such as retention of stormwater. If UA is properly managed, it can be a wonderful tool for boosting cities’ resilience and sustainability. In addition to food production, urban agriculture also offers a wide range of other functions such as energy conservation, waste management, biodiversity, nutrient cycling, microclimate control, urban greening, economic revitalization, community socialization, human health, preservation of cultural heritage, and education.

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Research Article:

Guidance and counselling for child and community development in Zimbabwe: Schools in focus

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Abstract

The wellbeing of children and their contributions to the current and future societies are increasingly being prioritised at various levels internationally. Despite challenges and in some cases, failure to convert development policy and governance blueprints into practice, comprehensive child development remains pivotal for sustaining societies. While this thrust can be achieved through various ways, this paper is restricted to guidance and counselling. Using a school in Masvingo urban as a case study and applying explorative research, the paper shows that school guidance and counselling is being recognised by the majority of the participants as central to the wellbeing and development of the child, and in producing multiplier effects to families and communities. However, several challenges are militating against the effectiveness of school guidance and counselling. These include the perception of guidance and counselling services as secondary, inadequate school resources, lack of specialist knowledge and skills by some school teachers, and low support from stakeholders. Accordingly, the paper recommends the development of obligatory guidance and counselling framework, policy and legislation, school counsellor training, adequate resourcing and multi-stakeholder networking and collaboration in order to enhance school guidance and counselling.

Keywords: *child wellbeing, guidance and counselling, multi-stakeholder networking, resources, schools, Zimbabwe*

1. Introduction

Guidance and counselling are crucial for child and community development in Zimbabwe and broadly, at global level. Guidance and counselling are applicable to all aspects of human life including the physical, mental, emotional and spiritual, and in all stages of development from infancy to old age (Dhal 2017). The main objective is to help individuals to utilise their basic potentialities to the maximum for adequate adjustment in the environment (Thompson 2020). Schools are a pivotal institution worldwide, and they fulfill both manifest and latent functions (Giddens 2013). Despite being marginalised in scholarship or being subsumed under adults in development interventions, children and broadly, young people are a vital group whose wellbeing is fundamental to current and future development globally (see Bastien and



Holmarsdottir 2020, UNICEF 2009, Yates et al 2010). In addition, drawing from sociology, children belong to families, households and communities (Sharma 2013). Accordingly, child wellbeing through guidance and counselling, or other interventions will have implications on other social institutions. In this context, school guidance and counselling is therefore important in child and community development.

Using schools in Masvingo in Zimbabwe, this paper advances the central view that focusing on child wellbeing through guidance and counselling is important in three ways. Firstly, guidance and counselling ensure the wellbeing and functionality of children. Secondly, 'healthy' children and youth are an unparalleled force in securing the future of society. Thirdly, child wellbeing is consistent with national, regional and international frameworks for good governance and sustainable development. This dimension has led to the emphasis on child-sensitive policy at national, continental, and global levels (see selected policies and frameworks of various countries, the African Union and United Nations). Scholars and renowned institutions focused on child-sensitive policies (Watkins and Quattri 2020, UNICEF and World Bank 2016, United Nations 1989). In this context, this paper seeks to contribute to ongoing efforts for enhancing the wellbeing of children through guidance and counselling particularly in a school system, and its spillover effects on families, households, and the community. In the next section, the core concepts underlying the paper - guidance and counselling – are highlighted to establish a basis for discussion.

Guidance and counselling in schools and beyond

Guidance and counselling are topical in contemporary societies and may be used in various ways. There is general convergence among scholars and practitioners on the importance of guidance and counselling (Wrenn 2012). However, the significance of these in schools is often overlooked. Through guidance and counselling, the student can understand herself/himself; make the most of her/his capacities, interests and other qualities; adjust herself/himself satisfactory to the varied situations within his total environment; and develop the ability to make her/his own unique contribution to society to the fullest possible extent (Dhal 2017). The essence of guidance and counselling is increasing in the modern world due to various factors including escalating socioeconomic and political problems and opportunities, demands and tensions, change and uncertainty, distress and complexities, innovation and technological development, multiculturalism, varied abilities and aptitudes, multiplicity of interests and so forth. In this regard, school guidance and counselling are pivotal in addressing the various problems and opportunities of life (Uzoeshi 2002).

According to Jones (1970) in UNESCO (2000), the purpose of guidance has been to assist the individual through counsel to make wide choices, adjustments and interpretations in connection with critical situations in her/his life in such a way as to ensure continual growth in ability for self-direction. Furthermore, guidance is also described as counselling service to assist the individual in achieving self-direction, and educational, vocational and personal adjustment, and to take positive steps in light of new orientations. In schools, guidance is



helping the pupils or students to adjust to their present situation and to plan their future in line with their interests, abilities and social needs. Guidance services are meant for all pupils at all stages. Guidance can be offered to students from entrance into school and should continue throughout their school life. In addition, guidance services may continue even after the pupil or student exits school. The main aim and purpose of guidance in schools is to help the child to understand herself/himself, his/her needs and his/her environments, and to tap potential for growth and achievement. The current understanding of guidance places much emphasis on the individual and her/his all-round development as a person rather than her/his intellectual or vocational training alone. The individual (in this case a school child) is also considered as a part of a wider group (Dhal 2017).

Counselling is a personal face-to-face relationship between two people, in which the counsellor, by means of relationships and her/his special competencies, provides a learning situation in which the counsellee is helped to know herself/himself and her/his present and possible future situations so that she/he can make use of her/his characteristics and potentialities in a way that is both satisfying to herself/himself and beneficial to society, and also can learn how to solve further problems and meet future needs (Rogers 2012). School guidance is the overall framework of personal services within the school, but school guidance is only one particular service. The two words - guidance and counselling - generally take on different meanings. In relation to schools, the former refers to helping students' whole-person development. It is that area of the school's provision that is specifically directed towards helping pupils to realise their full potential in preparing for adult and working life, while the latter is frequently targeted at helping students with problems. Guidance work is preventive and developmental in nature whereas counselling is more of supportive, remedial work (Zimbabwe School Psychological Services 2006). The global trend seems to have moved from a casework and remedial approach to a preventive, developmental approach in providing guidance and counselling (Mutie and Ndambuki 2000, Schmidt 2006, Nwachukwu 2007). The aims of guidance and counselling service in schools is to assist the students to fulfil their basic physiological needs, understanding themselves and developing associations with peers, balancing between permissiveness and controls in the school setting, realising successful achievement, and providing opportunities to gain independence (Egbo 2013, Heyden 2011). The purpose of guidance and counselling therefore provides emphasis and strength to educational programmes. Overall, guidance and counselling are an indispensable services to school children.

Research methodology

The diverse themes of research methods in the social sciences are explored in scholarly literature (see Neuman 2003, Nardi 2006, Creswell and Plano-Clark 2017). Accordingly, this section merely highlights pertinent aspects of preparing for fieldwork, sampling, data collection and analysis. Preparing for fieldwork included assessing key institutions and individuals to be targeted; seeking approval from the Ministry of Primary and Secondary



Education, the headmaster and education-oriented non-governmental organisations; assessing the resource requirements of the study; and preparing a budget. The sample was made up of 50 secondary school pupils (23 boys and 27 girls), 14 secondary school teachers (nine males and five females), 10 parents/guardians, one specialist counsellor, and two NGOs.

Data collection was executed using mainly qualitative methods (key informant interviews, in-depth interviews and observations), complemented by questionnaires. The collection of data adhered to ethical standards of social science research (see Nardi 2006) including informed consent, avoidance of harm and fair reporting. Thematic and discourse analyses were applied to qualitative data while basic descriptive statistical methods were used to analyse quantitative data.

Discussion

Focus on guidance and counselling in schools, and its significance can be explored through various thematic areas. However, this section is based on three themes: the state, significance and spillover effect of school guidance and counselling; support received from various stakeholders; and lacunae and areas that should be improved if school guidance and counselling is to have enhanced impact on child and community development.

The significance, state and spillover benefits of school guidance and counselling

The majority of the participants understood guidance and counselling, the importance to pupils/students of these services, and supported their provision in schools (and other spheres including churches and workplaces). This is an acknowledgement that guidance and counselling are important to school children and have broader application beyond schools. Consistent with Giddens' (2013) argument that schools are fundamental institutions in every society, a cross-section of the participants reiterated that schools are an important arena for guidance so that students understand both opportunities and constraints, are focused on positive goals, and are helped to unleash their potential. Similarly, there was wide consensus that students experience various problems that justify the need for counselling in schools. For example, the students emphasised the importance of counselling in behaviour change (12), problem solving (4), reducing distress (4), decision making (5), avoiding drug abuse (11) and managing peer pressure (15). However, problems were raised on the state of guidance and counselling including limited availability, inadequacy of time allocated to these essential services, lack of specialist skills by some school counsellors and low support by various stakeholders.

Schools and surrounding communities were understood as open systems that interact in both positive and negative aspects. The implication is that problems in any one of these have effect on the other. This also applies to positive change. All the participants reiterated that the benefits of school guidance and counselling will have multiplier effects on families and other institutions in the community where the students belong. For example, if a student



is appropriately guided by a school counsellor in terms of career path and succeeds in life, the benefits are not restricted to the student but may also improve the economic wellbeing of the family and community. Correspondingly, the effectiveness of school counselling guarantees the child's understanding of and capability to address problems at school, home and in the community. The effectiveness of home interventions in ensuring child wellbeing also influence the child's relations and performance at school. The need for complementary approaches between the school and families or households was emphasised on the understanding that schools and other social institutions are interdependent on various aspects and particularly on guidance and counselling, and child wellbeing. Child development and wellbeing therefore require collective effort. This systematic thinking is also applied by renowned social scientists (see Ritzer 2012; Henslin 2001). A recurring view is that school guidance and counselling are central to child development and have high chances of spilling over and influencing family and community development. However, the importance of other factors was acknowledged.

Support by the various stakeholders

The effectiveness of school guidance and counselling is dependent on several factors (Mutie and Ndambuki 2000), including those that are internal and external to the school. The experiential issues were elaborated by the students, school administrator and teachers, expert counsellor (not based at the school) and representatives of NGOs. For example, these issues were topical in an interview with a school administrator:

At this school, we value guidance and counselling. We understand its importance to the psychological and social development of our students along with its influence on the families and communities where our students come from. We are doing our best to provide guidance and counselling but in a constrained environment particularly due to critically low support from other stakeholders especially pertaining to training of the teachers, financial resources and study material for both students and the teachers. Guidance and counselling are not a priority in the allocation of resources by our key providers because it is not an examinable subject. To date, NGOs have only erratically supplied counselling and guidance flyers. We will not achieve the desired goal without appropriate and sufficient support.

This excerpt provides important insights on limited availability of various forms of support by the stakeholders. Such a status quo militates against effective service provision to the students. Government schools are already operating with a constrained resource base in terms of fulfilling their direct mandate. Diverting the meagre resources to guidance and counselling is a major sacrifice which in most cases is impossible. Particularly during this time of macroeconomic woes and government limited capacity to fund public schools (see Tofa 2020), and COVID-19 (see Ministry of Health and Child Care, MoHCC 2021), stakeholder



networking and collaboration are most appropriate to enhance school guidance and counselling in particular and social provisioning and wellbeing in general.

Identified gaps and areas to be improved

Based on the views of the participants, numerous gaps and areas to be improved in school guidance and counselling emerged. Meaningful suggestions on how to enhance school guidance and counselling were also provided by the participants. The teachers, school administrator, specialist counsellor and representative of the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education explored the absence of substantive counsellors at public schools and the problems associated with the exclusion of guidance and counselling from the formally recognised/examinable subjects. School counsellors and students were concerned with non-allocation of time on the timetable for guidance and counselling, with teachers providing service during 'spare time'. Some counsellors brought to the fore the lack of specialist skills that are pivotal for effectiveness. The NGOs, school counsellors and administrators, education officers, parents and guardians recommended improved material and financial support, training of (more) teachers in guidance and counselling, provision of refresher courses, and sensitisation programmes to improve knowledge and reducing negative attitudes on guidance and counselling. For example, nine education officers and seven teachers indicated negative attitudes to guidance and counselling. Given that they have major influence on peers and the students, the negative attitudes they hold are a challenge to the provision of school guidance and counselling. In other contexts, missing aspects and areas to be improved in school guidance and counselling are acknowledged (see Dhal 2017, Nwachukwu 2007, Egbo 2013). Overall, the various gaps largely retard the provision of guidance and counselling in schools and are an obstacle to child and community development through these essential services. Addressing the gaps should therefore be a priority for the various stakeholders, led by the government.

Conclusion

The paper explored and suggested ways for advancing the significance of school guidance and counselling to the pupils, families and households, and communities. This is in a context where children and generally the young population guarantee the future of all countries. Children and their contributions to the current and future societies are increasingly being prioritised. This thrust is notable at national, continental and global levels notwithstanding the challenges experienced in turning development policy and governance blueprints into practice. Comprehensive child development is pivotal for sustaining societies. This goal can be achieved through various ways, but this paper is restricted to guidance and counselling.

Drawing evidence from a school in Masvingo urban, the paper brings to the fore several insights and recommendations. The importance of guidance and counselling is recognised by the majority of the participants, yet they reiterated the need for the subject to be examinable in attempts to improve positive perceptions on and its significance. While the



role of the school counsellors is vital, most lack specialist knowledge and skills. The stakeholders including the government through the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education, non-governmental organisations and other civil society organisations are providing paltry support to the schools. This is in a context where schools have inadequate proper materials, time, finance, physical and curricular resources to implement effective guidance and counselling. Obligatory guidance and counselling framework, policy and legislation, a comprehensible mission statement, school counsellor training, adequate resourcing and certification requirements, a school national model, and multi-stakeholder networking and collaboration are core priorities for effective guidance and counselling. In addition, research focusing on school guidance and counselling, and child and community development should be ongoing.

Notes on contributor

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Research Article:

Rural livelihoods and theileriosis in Zimbabwe

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Abstract

A livelihoods approach to the impact of livestock diseases particularly theileriosis (January disease) is largely missing in Zimbabwe's rural development literature. This tick-borne disease resulted in widespread decimation of cattle in Zimbabwe and is a current major burden to the farmers in both communal and resettlement areas, and the government. The paper adopts a Sustainable Livelihoods Approach (SLA) and qualitative methodology to explore how rural livelihoods have been affected by theileriosis. Four themes are prioritised – financial burden to the farmers and government; loss of main livelihood source and related benefits; loss of wealth and income; and insecurity and loss of future socioeconomic wellbeing. Addressing the livelihood impact of theileriosis requires concerted effort by the various stakeholders, with the government advancing livestock health as a policy priority.

Keywords: *livestock, sustainable livelihoods approach, theileriosis, tick-borne disease, Zimbabwe*

1. Introduction

Agriculture is the mainstay of Zimbabwe's economy (Chambati and Mazwi 2020). Its pivotal relevance as a livelihood source is widely recognised in most parts of the world. In Zimbabwe, agriculture is among the major socioeconomic activities that contribute significantly to the gross domestic product (GDP) (Murisa and Helliker 2020). Agriculture is thus, significant to the country's economy but several factors are constraining its contribution to community and national development. In this context, the paper explores the impact of *theileriosis* on rural livelihoods in reference to Zimbabwe.

Three central aspects of this paper should be understood from the outset. Firstly, livestock diseases are diverse therefore the paper focuses on *theileriosis* which is a major and topical disease that is decimating cattle in Zimbabwe's communal and resettlement areas. Secondly, the paper is not about the scientific aspects of *theileriosis* and the related interventions but the livelihood dimensions. Thirdly, such focus is essential for establishing a firm foundation for transforming rural livelihoods that are, in Zimbabwe, mainly based on both crop and livestock production (Zimbabwe Ministry of Lands, Agriculture, Fisheries, Water and Rural Resettlement 2020). The importance of agriculture also spans other parts of the Global South (Zimbabwe Democracy Institute 2020).



Theileriosis is red water, heart water and gall sickness (Musisi and Lawrence 1995). It is a tick-borne disease that is caused by *theileria parva* and is usually expected between the months of December and March, but often peaks in January and February. However, in Zimbabwe, it has been reported throughout 2020 and the first quarter of 2021 (Ruzvidzo 2021). The main cause of tick-borne diseases is failure to adhere to dipping calendar by the Department of Veterinary Services, resulting in failure to control tick populations. Farmers have not been adhering to dipping regulations because of the unavailability of government-provided dipping chemical (*acaricides*) and failure to mobilise levies for community sourcing. The disease has a fatality rate of up to 90 per cent (Lawrence, Sibeko-Matjila and Mans 2000). The devastating impact of the disease has been experienced in most rural parts of Zimbabwe, with Matabeleland provinces and parts of Dande Valley in Mount Darwin being least affected (*The Herald*, 6 January 2021). Dipping is the most and only effective documented way of managing the disease. In the next section, the conceptual underpinning of this paper - livelihoods approach – is briefly explained.

2. Sustainable livelihoods approach to livestock production and rural development

The impact of *theileriosis* on rural livelihoods and broadly rural development can be analysed using the Sustainable Livelihoods Approach (SLA). Tackling poverty and disadvantage is a major priority for different levels of government in Zimbabwe (Government of Zimbabwe 2020), and globally (United Nations 2019). The SLA is a method of understanding the lives of people experiencing poverty and disadvantage. It is a participatory approach that is based on the belief that people experiencing poverty have abilities and assets that can be used to help them to manage and improve their lives (Saunders 2020; Oxfam 2018). The SLA was developed by organisations in the Global South and owes much to the work of Amartya Sen, the United Nations' Human Development Programme and Robert Chambers' work on the 'wealth of the poor' and participatory methodologies. According to Chambers (2019), a livelihood 'comprises the capabilities, assets (including both material and social resources) and activities required for a means of living.' A livelihood is sustainable when it can cope with and recover from stress and shocks, and provide sustainable livelihood opportunities for the next generation, and which contributes net benefits to other livelihoods at the local and global levels, and in the short and the long term.' In the context of this paper, cattle, other livestock and crop production form the livelihood base of the communal farmers. The sustainability of livelihoods linked to cattle are being decimated or eroded due to *theileriosis*.

There are two dimensions to SLA. Firstly, building up a picture of the various livelihood strategies that people adopt, along with the level of assets they have as individuals and within their communities. Secondly, exploring whether these livelihood strategies link and relate to the wider institutions and policies that impact upon their lives. The ways in which people combine their assets to support themselves and their families coupled with the decisions and choices they make within the context in which they live, are what determine their livelihood



strategy and how they manage to get by (Chambers 2019). The SLA starts by looking at the day-to-day experiences of people's lives. It believes that in order to make ends meet, people draw on a range of different assets depending on which ones are available to them. This varies with each individual, household and community. The assets are divided into five interlinked categories and together, these assets allow people to adopt different livelihood strategies in order to achieve their livelihood objectives. These are human, social (social capital), financial, physical and public assets. In the communal area under consideration, livestock is a central livelihood asset.

Krantz (2011) explores the significance of the SLA. It provides a systematic, proven approach to analysing and understanding poverty from a community and individual citizen centred perspective. It helps people (for example, the communal area farmers) to understand and address poverty from a holistic, whole life perspective, rather than simply addressing in isolation the surface problem. As well as the practical help it offers to individuals, the SLA brings a reality and a human face to the experiences of people living in poverty, which can broaden the understanding of local circumstances and subsequent solutions. The SLA is also a useful tool in explaining how policy makers and others can inadvertently misunderstand poverty and as a consequence, implement unhelpful and counterproductive policies to deal with it. It has an essential role in developing appropriate policy responses based on an insightful understanding of the strategies and choices people make on a daily basis in order to survive. The SLA has significant potential to build on community level work already being undertaken by a range of third sector and statutory agencies and can offer a bridge between the work supporting communities and support directed at individuals by the government and other institutions. It is therefore relevant for projects aimed at individuals, families and entire communities. In general, and specifically to livestock diseases, the SLA is not without pitfalls. For example, the approach fails to expose and address the core causes of poverty, inequality and marginalisation, resulting in the development of alternative perspectives on how transformation can be achieved.

3. Highlights of the approach and research methods

Shamva is among the districts that constitute Mashonaland Central Province (Zimbabwe National Statistics Agency, ZIMSTAT 2012). Three villages - Chigombe and Kamudyariwa (Ward 7), Munava (Ward 26) – were selected for the study. The selection of these villages was particularly guided by confirmed reports of *theileriosis*. The researcher applied an interpretive research approach and qualitative research methods (see Creswell and Creswell 2018 for detail) due to the need to explore the impact of the disease on livelihoods of the communal farmers. Fieldwork was executed in the January-March 2021 period.

Sampling of the wards and villages was done purposively based on confirmed cases of the disease. The Agricultural, Technical and Extension (Agritex) officer (1), village heads (3), councillor (1) and farmers (30 with 10 coming from each village) who had lost cattle to the disease were also selected purposively. Other villagers (15 - 5 from each village) who had not



yet lost cattle to *theileriosis* were sampled on the basis of convenient availability to complement the main participants. Face-to-face interviews, focus group discussions (FGDs) and participant observations were conducted while fully observing COVID-19 prevention regulations (see Zimbabwe Ministry of Health and Child Care, ZMoHCC 2021), and other ethics of social science research including informed consent, non-coercion, avoidance of harm in its diversity and the right to feedback. Detailed exploration of sampling, data collection and ethics is done by various scholars (Scott-Jones 2015; Creswell and Plano-Clark 2017).

4. Results and discussion

This section is composed of selected dimensions of how *theileriosis* is affecting livelihoods in Shamva district. Priority is given to financial burden to the farmers and government, loss of main livelihood source and related benefits, loss of wealth and income, and insecurity and loss of future socioeconomic wellbeing. These feed into the recommendations (included in the conclusion) on how to reduce the impact of the disease.

Theileriosis as a financial burden to the farmers and government

The lived experiences of *theileriosis* in Shamva district revealed high levels of financial burden being borne by the communal farmers. This is occurring in a context where the farmers (in both communal and resettlement areas) are already bearing the brunt of diverse production constraints and poverty (Mazwi 2020). Most of the communal farmers in the study sites are already living in poverty. Moreover, the farmers reported that most of the livestock vaccines are charged in United States dollars, yet most of the farmers are paid in Zimbabwe dollars for selling crop produce to the Grain Marketing Board (GMB). The local currency is used in most local markets. When the Zimbabwe dollar equivalent is accepted for purchasing the vaccines, the rate is inflated. In this context, *theileriosis* has increased the farmers' financial outlay on livestock health against a context where the farmers cannot sustain the cost of the vaccines. The problem is aggravated by the low chances of recovery in affected cattle. Using the SLA, the disease is an obstacle to sustainability of the communal farmers' livelihoods.

The financial burden of the disease is not only experienced by the farmers but also by the Government of Zimbabwe. Instead of channelling financial resources to other community development problems, these are being directed to addressing the disease. In an interview, the Ward Agritex Officer expressed these issues:

January disease is a burden to the government and other development partners. The United Nations through the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) with support of the Japanese Embassy in Zimbabwe is working with Government to implement a US\$300 000 emergency response project. This money could have been directed to other pressing community development projects.



Loss of a main livelihood source and related benefits

Decimation of cattle has direct and indirect effects on rural livelihood sources and the associated benefits. Zimbabwe's Ministry of Lands, Agriculture, Fisheries, Water and Rural Resettlement (2020) reported that agriculture is a major source of rural livelihoods and the national economy. The Zimbabwe Democracy Institute (2020) also emphasise the importance of agriculture to livelihoods and development in Zimbabwe. Cattle and other livestock are pivotal sources of income, food and related benefits.

Crop production in communal areas is primarily based on cattle draught power. Other household activities also require draught power. Given that about 90 per cent of the country's nearly 5.5 million cattle are owned by small-scale farmers in both communal and resettlement areas (see Mtembo 2021), the decimating impact of *theileriosis* is largely compromising the main livelihood sources of the communal farmers. Overall, both the main and related livelihood sources are being threatened by the disease against a context of intensifying poverty induced by enduring macroeconomic underperformance.

High cattle mortality signifies erosion of wealth and income

Application of the SLA with full acknowledgement of its weaknesses as an analytical tool portrays cattle as a major wealth and income generation asset for the communal areas. The importance of large livestock such as cattle as a form and measure of wealth to Zimbabwe's farmers, along with sale of small livestock in facilitating a sustainable flow of income are documented (see Chibwana 2016). Cattle and other livestock are therefore an important dimension of sustainable rural livelihoods. Threats to this livelihood base due to *theileriosis* imply a detrimental impact on the wealth base of the communal farmers. One of the villagers summed this argument.

Cattle are our major source of wealth, food and income for school fees, clothing and meeting household needs. The disease has claimed approximately 75 per cent of cattle in this village. Everyone is in a panic mode, and some are selling their cattle for as little as US\$40 each or less. They consider this to be better than losing the cattle to the disease. We are poorer than we were before the disease. We are fast losing our wealth and the government is not assisting us. It will take us many years to accumulate cattle.

Insecurity and loss of 'estate' and future socioeconomic wellbeing

Deriving livelihoods from cattle (and other livestock), and inheritance have been, and continue to be practiced in most African countries (Freeman et al 2008). In rural Zimbabwe, cattle are an asset for current use, an 'estate' and an inheritance asset. These livelihood dimensions were unanimously emphasised by the communal farmers. Yet, they argued that *theileriosis* has eroded the sustainability of livelihoods based on cattle. Bearing on Chambers' (2019) conceptualisation of the sustainability of a livelihood as when it can cope with and recover from stress and shocks, and provide sustainable livelihood opportunities for the next generation, and which contributes net benefits to other livelihoods at the local and global



levels and in the short and the long term, the situation of the study sites shows serious livelihood challenges due to the disease in the current and future.

5. Conclusion

The paper brings to the fore the impact of livestock diseases on rural livelihoods with particular focus on *theileriosis*. While acknowledging that the disease may have multiple effects on livelihoods, the focus of this paper was restricted to four areas. These are: the burden of the disease on the farmers and government; decimation of cattle as erosion of mainstream livelihood and related aspects; reduction of wealth and income; and insecurity and loss of future wellbeing. Despite this restricted focus and use of a single case study, *theileriosis* has devastated rural livelihoods that are anchored on or linked to cattle.

Reducing the impact of *theileriosis* on livelihoods is an urgent priority. Various interventions can be applied. In Zimbabwe, *theileriosis* is a notifiable disease therefore when cases are suspected, the farmers must report to the Division of Veterinary Services. This is closely linked to farmer educational campaigns. The disease is generalised, therefore awareness and sensitisation programmes on the signs and symptoms, prevention methods and treatment protocols should target all provinces. Livestock health educational campaigns should be centred on *theileriosis* but also target other diseases and re-emphasise the importance of livestock dipping and immunisation. Quarantine (prohibition of cattle movement in or out of their areas of habitation) should be enforced by both the Veterinary officers and the Zimbabwe Republic Police (ZRP) to curb regional transmission. While these interventions are important, cattle dipping is the single most important tick control intervention. Accordingly, dipping chemical should be available if the disease is to be effectively controlled, and its impact on livelihoods is to be reduced or curbed. The shortage of dipping chemical is largely attributed to macroeconomic underperformance and inadequacy of foreign currency in a context where the majority of communal farmers are unable to sustainably provide for themselves. The government of Zimbabwe can, therefore, engage both local and international partners for assistance to ensure adequacy of dipping chemical. This is important in complementing the farmers' initiatives for example, cattle levies and associational sourcing of acaricides. Cattle and other livestock are a major component of rural livelihoods therefore, their health should be a policy priority.

Notes on contributor

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Opinion:

Equity and justice for ethnic minorities: A case of Matabeleland (Zimbabwe)

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Abstract

In the past four decades, ethnic minorities in Matabeleland, Zimbabwe have been facing a humanitarian crisis. In this article, I argue that this current state has been caused by the negative effects of the Gukurahundi atrocities in post-independent Zimbabwe, the economic structural adjustment program and the fast-track land redistribution programme. Policies and regulations that are currently in place have not been relaxed to open up space for minorities to participate in dialogue and setting the national agenda. This paper will outline the causes of the current humanitarian crisis while presenting a current perspective on the status quo. It goes to great length to outline solutions to the problems faced by ethnic minorities. It is envisaged that the suggested policies and legal framework will ensure that ethnic minorities in the Matabeleland region are guaranteed civil liberties and are meaningfully economically included.

Keywords: *ethnic minority, suffrage, justice, civil, development, inclusion, affirmative*

1. Introduction

The Ndebele speaking minority group in Zimbabwe has for decades been disadvantaged in public policy planning. I would argue that this has been due to historic events like the post 1980 civil disturbances in the region popularly known as the *Gukurahundi* in 1982-1987, which I posit was a genocide against the Ndebele people as it saw the death of an estimated 20 000 people as the army was unleashed on citizens accused of sheltering dissidents who were allegedly robbing, killing and damaging property (Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace in Zimbabwe (CCJPZ) & Legal Resources Foundation (LRF), 1997). It took a unity accord between the warring political parties, the Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU) and Zimbabwe African Peoples Party (ZAPU) for the hostilities to cease. The Economic and Structural Adjustment Programme, Operation Murambatsvina and the fast-track land reform programme are other state-driven policies which I believe have in different ways, negatively impacted on the Ndebele-speaking people. The failure by the state to openly discuss and address the pertinent issues and events faced by ethnic minorities has negatively impacted on them if one compares this group to rest of the population. There is no doubt that it has contributed to the inequalities, inequities and injustices which have continuously faced the ethnic minorities. The *Gukurahundi* genocide which occurred in Matabeleland and some parts



of the Midlands Province marks a very dark period in the country's history over which victims have not had closure. The event politically neutralised the region leading to reluctance by its inhabitants to participate in national politics. On the other hand, land alienation in the region has to a large extent impacted on the economic participation of minorities, and its unequal distribution in the region has to a large extent perpetuated already existing inequalities. This is in a context where in pre-colonial Zimbabwe, land was important for socio-economic, political and cultural significance for the indigenous people. Colonialism negatively impacted on this relationship as the colonialists forcibly took land from the indigenes. Despite the country gaining independence in 1980, land redistribution has been largely unfair, and it has continued promoting inequality while undermining the cultural identity of the minorities. A consequence of the side-lining of ethnic minorities has been systematic and structural tribalism. Given the challenges outlined above, I would argue that historic disparities must be addressed, and equality fostered in the government framework. If inequalities continue being unaddressed, they have negative effects on democratic processes in Zimbabwe, resulting in social instability and lack of social cohesion which I believe negatively impact on economic growth.

2. Education policy

By looking at education policy, I argue that it is an area which highlights the persistent inequalities and marginalization that ethnic minorities have faced for decades in Zimbabwe. The employment policy of teachers and the traumatic events of the Gukurahundi genocide have had a long-term impact and have negatively affected the education system in the Matabeleland Province. Since 1990, the region has witnessed a decline in school pass rates at all levels. Employment policies which I believe are very unfair and exclusionary of qualified locals, has seen them being denied teaching opportunities. A communication barrier has existed between teachers who are not conversant with the mother tongue and their pupils. This, I believe, negatively affects academic performance and child development. (Savage, 2017) has argued on the importance of mother tongue in the education for young children. This puts into perspective the challenges that arise if there is reliance, as in the Matabeleland case of the employment of teachers from other regions who are not conversant with local languages. It results in communication failure which becomes a learning barrier in schools. In the region, recently, this issue has become topical and there is an urgent need for it to be addressed. Recent examples include a protest by parents at Nkankezi Primary School in Insiza District, Matabeleland South Province, where parents staged a protest against non-native speakers (Tshuma, 2021). This led to a reconsideration of the employment status of five new teachers, with the government carrying out an investigation on their 'unprocedural removal.'

I also posit that, the *Gukurahundi* genocide has also impacted on the education sector in different ways. The descendants of the victims of *Gukurahundi* have for decades failed to access education as a result of the denial and bottlenecks which they encounter due to lack of identity documents like birth certificates. Birth and identity registrations have not seen



policies being relaxed to accommodate victims of *Gukurahundi*, and this has created generational challenges. Infrastructural development in the district has been lagging behind and some of the infrastructure destroyed during the days of *Gukurahundi* continues to be in disrepair. This has impacted on access and quality of education. This has been in a context where I believe reparations need to be paid to victims of the *Gukurahundi* with developmental funds being also availed to rebuild damaged infrastructure. Unfortunately, this has never been the case resulting in poor educational performance by children in the marginalized region.

3. Challenges in participating in electoral processes

In the past decades, Zimbabwe's political landscape or constituencies in particular have undergone changes and have been delimitations by the electoral regulators. When I look at the delimitation process in retrospect, I believe that it has contributed to the political exclusion of the people of Matabeleland by reducing the number of representatives in the legislature and government. With high out-migration from the region due to lack of opportunities especially by the youth, using the criteria of population to allocate parliamentary seats for example or representatives, has become unfair and skewed in favour of other regions. This is in a context where voter identity registration which has been traditionally exclusionary for ethnic minorities as it involves national identity cards (which many do not have) has pushed minorities to the fringes, denying them opportunities to participate in politics.

The disenfranchisement for citizens in this marginalized region is a serious reality which I believe needs to be seriously looked at as it is a reality which is a product of the regions dark past. Some citizens cannot participate in voting processes, and they do not have identity documents. This is exemplified by incidents during the run-up to the 2018 harmonised elections in Zimbabwe where interviews were conducted in a Tshwao village in Tsholotsho. It was observed that the marginalized communities of the Tshwao or San community (who are subjected to systematic neglect and suffering by the state) had some villagers who could not participate in the elections as they did not have the requisite identity documents (Ndlovu, 2018). This, to some extent, supports the argument which I am presenting that the prevailing situation is not favourable for ethnic minorities who are disadvantaged and failing to participate in electoral processes despite voting being their constitutional right. This is closely related to the challenges faced by Zimbabweans from Matabeleland living in the diaspora who for decades have been denied the right to participate in electoral processes by the state. A large number of indigenes from this region now live in the diaspora but for years have expressed interest in participating in local electoral processes and development initiatives, but for a long time they have been denied the opportunity. This has further entrenched marginalisation, suspicion, and stalled development as they are not keen to invest in areas where they are denied the right to choose local political leaders at all levels.



Delimitation processes, voter registration bottlenecks and disenfranchisement of Zimbabweans in the diaspora can thus, be seen combining and denying ethnic minorities their rights to fully participate in electoral processes. This is an impediment to their development and exercise of their constitutional rights.

4. Economic disparities

Persistent economic inequality in Zimbabwe can be traced to unresolved colonial injustices and have negatively impacted on minorities. This is a common phenomenon in most post-colonial states. In Matabeleland, political instability in the post-independence period, recurrent failed economic policies have left many people unemployed, and families have not been spared, being negatively affected and torn apart.

Parochialism has led to the propelling of a very narrow definition of who is seen as an 'indigenous' person. In the many so-called indigenisation programs, I would argue that many ethnic minorities have not benefited. This is exemplified by the land reform programme up to the youth development fund in which ethnic minorities were underrepresented and many failed to benefit from them. This is attributable to the narrow view by the state on who the indigenous people are. It lays credence to the observation by Muzondidya, cited in Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2015) that ethnic minorities are also marginalized in the indigenisation narrative, and this is despite the fact that some like coloureds were also disadvantaged under colonial rule.

5. Socio-economic Injustices

When I consider socio-economic injustices facing ethnic minorities, I take into consideration three developments in the region. These are:

The Economic Effects of Gukurahundi: In the report by the Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace in Zimbabwe & Legal Resources Foundation, (1997) placed the death toll of two districts (Tsholotsho and Kezi) at 3 500. There was also a food blockade which was imposed during the genocide, and it affected 40 000 people. Events during this time forced many to seek asylum and become political refugees in South Africa and Botswana. The impact of this had ramifications on the region's demography and economic performance. The Centre for Innovation Technology, a civic organization in Matabeleland, estimated that of the three million Zimbabweans in South Africa, a majority are from the Matabeleland region. The migration of this important human resource led to brain drain during the early years of postcolonial Zimbabwe and this has become a generational challenge. It left the region underdeveloped then and it has not recovered. The children of these migrants have not been able to contribute to its development as would have been expected.

The Economic Structural Adjustment Program: Despite its shortcomings, the colonial government left the region with a booming industry and a developing city with amenities.



Development was reversed by ESAP. The program was implemented at an unfortunate time as it came after Gukurahundi which had disrupted local economic activities as well as vocational training and education. Migration and brain drain had left the region with cheap and unskilled labour. Consequently, a global recession in 1991 and 1992, coupled with the adoption of the flawed ESAP resulted in de-industrialization which caused unemployment (Brett & Winter, 2003). The social sector was negatively affected with budget cuts, and this affected ethnic minorities who were dependent on these. Poverty levels in the region can be seen as having increased. The development index of the three Matabeleland provinces is lower because there was no concerted effort to develop an economic policy uniquely tailor-made to focus on the region.

Fast track land redistribution in Matabeleland: Land in precolonial Africa had important economic and socio-cultural significance. Consequently, the colonial expropriation of land had far reaching implications and it included the violation of the cultural rights of indigenes. In post-colonial Zimbabwe, land is highly politicised. Despite the country undertaking a fast-track land reform programme in the 2000's, many people in the region do not have access to the resource. Lack of access to land by people in the region has led to many political conflicts which in many instances involve the traditional leaders and political parties (Bulawayo Correspondent, 2020).

6. Justice for ethnic minorities after *Gukurahundi*

From my discussion above, I believe that it is crucial to note that underdevelopment in the Matabeleland region is a result of the effects of *Gukurahundi* which was a genocide. All other developments that have led to inequalities are secondary and stem from this atrocity. A question arises: Is justice for the Matabeleland region possible in this current situation?

For decades, the government of government has denied accountability for the genocide. The appointment of individuals who have been accused of their involvement in *Gukurahundi* to senior political positions, as diplomats and senior military offices is an indication that the state will never be accountable for the tragedy which occurred in the region. I am of the opinion that by international standards there is need to appoint a tribunal to lead a healing process.

The National Peace and Reconciliation Commission (NPRC) is available, but it is largely dependent on the Executive, hence its effectiveness is compromised. In my opinion, some of its appointees are already comprised due to the mutual relationship they enjoy with perpetrators implicated in *Gukurahundi*. There are stipulated global standards for handling the *Gukurahundi* atrocities, but I believe that the commission in its current state is too compromised and cannot fulfil any role especially that of justice for ethnic minorities. Many civic society organisations share the opinion which I have and have cast doubt on its capabilities to deal with this historical atrocity (Centre for Innovation and Technology (CITE), 2020).



Interestingly in the National Assembly, it can be noted that there has been debate on the *Gukurahundi* and calls for alleged perpetrators to account for their actions. Unfortunately, debate on this thorny issue has tended to be suppressed with only a few Members of Parliament speaking out on the reluctance of the government to decisively deal and bring closure to the subject. One of the few Members of Parliament who is on record for speaking out is Willias Madzimore of the opposition- Movement for Democratic Change, who is on record saying that ‘Patriotism would only be promoted if everyone is treated equally before the law... People still have wounds, and we are saying let us forget about it and move on...’ (Parliament of Zimbabwe, 2021).

In my opinion, I do not believe much can be gained from engaging with the traditional leadership to advocate for justice and push for equality for ethnic minorities as they are comprised politically. A number of the chiefs have over the years been beneficiaries of state sponsored initiatives and have participated in ruling party activities. They cannot be expected to advocate for accountability.

7. Devolution and the International debate on minorities

The 2013 Constitution falls short of international standards in its design of devolution in Zimbabwe. Sections 264-273 deal with devolution but lack political clauses that empower the people. The intergovernmental power balance is one-sided with the National government retaining most of the control. Without political authority, the provincial councils cannot deal with specific social policy issues like affirmative action or pushing for policies that ensure equality and empowerment for ethnic minorities. Current devolution in the world advocates for the decentralization of power, but this may not happen in Zimbabwe.

For the country, going forward I believe it is important to enshrine into national law and the national constitution a special framework for the protection of ethnic minorities. In Sub-Saharan Africa, it is only in Cameroon, Democratic Republic of Congo and Uganda that clauses exist which protect ethnic minorities in their constitutions (Gilbert, 2013).

8. How equity and justice can be achieved

Affirmative action based on addressing the specific needs of each locality can go a long way in solving the problem of marginalization in the education sector. The employment policy must not be restricted to the education sector but must be tailor-made for the private sector and other public institutions. Regulations dealing with citizenship registration need to be revised, with the specific needs of ethnic minorities taken into consideration. A robust debate on extending the vote to the population in the diaspora needs to be held and voting rights extended to this disenfranchised group. Law and policies as well as procedures on land access and ownership need to be reviewed and revised so that they cater for the needs of ethnic minorities. It is tragic that four decades after independence, ethnic minorities continue facing land access challenges and land dispossession as in the colonial era. On the *Gukurahundi*, I



believe there are three important steps that need to be followed. These are acknowledgement that Gukurahundi was a politicised ethnic genocide, setting up of a Truth Commission and a Justice Tribunal; and the state has an obligation to provide financial compensation to the victims. Compensation should also be extended to the rest of the population which was indirectly affected, and the region has to benefit through special policies, aimed at bringing it to the level of development as other regions.

9. Conclusion

The promotion of equality and recognition of the rights of ethnic minorities is critical in the nation-building process. Intersectionality must be employed in policymaking to promote the inclusion of ethnic minorities whose historic experiences are different from the rest of the population. Gukurahundi impacted the pace at which the region develops leading to a humanitarian crisis. Focusing on Matabeleland when dealing with minority rights does not give the region a privileged position but this is a recognition of its vulnerability. By advocating for the rights of Ndebele speaking ethnic groups in Zimbabwe, the country might avoid unnecessary armed conflict or violent civil unrest. The 2020 summer riots in the United States of America provide an important example of the negative implications of ignoring minority rights and their demands for justice.

Notes on contributor

Rabhelani Mguni was born in Bulawayo, a metropolitan city in the western region of Zimbabwe. The author is currently a high school graduate taking a gap year. He is a young minority rights advocate and spends his time highlighting issues affecting minorities in Zimbabwe and showing support to social movements that promote liberal policies and opinions. Rabhelani Mguni is an ardent supporter of progressive social policies and opinions. In his spare time, he writes short stories on a wide range of topics and non-fictional essays. The author reads books about socio-political issues in Africa and also ventures into African literary works for inspiration.

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Opinion:

Politics, security and international relations: The contemporary challenges faced by the Global South

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Abstract

Countries in the Global South have for decades faced challenges which have included natural disasters, pandemics, weak health systems, gender-based violence as well as economic, cultural, and religious challenges. This has been in a context where these countries have been lagging in development when compared to countries in the Global North, a gap which they have found difficult to fill. This paper explores some of the challenges faced by countries in the Global South, drawing from the experiences of Zimbabwe. It is integral not only in identifying the challenges, but also in critically analysing lessons learnt and proffering recommendations which are important for socio-economic development and human wellbeing. Contributions to enhance social and economic policies and reform are also presented in this paper.

Keywords: *contemporary issues, development, Global South, politics, reforms, Zimbabwe*

1. Introduction

Since the 1980's, the world has been perceived as being roughly divided into two poles, the Global North and the Global South. This was according to the Brandt line, with the Global North and south named by Jeremy Bentham who coined the words and the relations governing states. The world was thus, seen as being divided into two broad 'economic worlds.' The Global North was seen comprising of the richer, more economically and technologically advanced countries, located mostly in the northern hemisphere with the exception of Australia and New Zealand. The Global South on the other hand, was seen as comprising of poorer countries located mostly in the southern hemisphere and the tropical regions (Dados and Connell 2012). The classification of the world was seen as denoting stages of economic development towards modernity, with the idea of modernity being strongly associated with the idea of progress or evolution (Ballestrin 2020). In terms of international trade and political economy, the Global South has been perceived as being controlled by the Global North in a skewed and dependent relationship. It has to be noted that the Global South does not merely refer to non-developed, non-modern countries localised in the former colonial zones of the world, but it refers to a subaltern geopolitical identity not confined to a geographical or territorial sense which presents a country's location in the international



system (Ballestrin 2020). The division of the world into a binary system has seen the Global South being perceived as facing several developmental and economic challenges and being socially, economically, and politically dependent on the Global North creating challenges. What are some of the challenges in specific country contexts? This is a question which this article addresses, drawing lessons from a country in the Global South, Zimbabwe with reference to other countries in the Global South.

2. Politics: instability and violence

Zimbabwe has a history of political violence which usually escalates during the pre- and post-election period (ZADHR Report 2018), and this has serious implications on economic development, and is a sign of political challenges which have bedevilled the country since the dawn of independence. In present day Zimbabwe, I would argue that the country's political challenges have grown. Since the ouster of the late former President Robert Mugabe in November 2017 in what many see as a coup, but what the incumbent government defends as a democratic transition, there are signs of political challenges which have continued to escalate at an alarming rate. This is exemplified by a striking incident as the country's harmonised election process was being concluded on 1 August 2018, when the military shot and killed six people and injured 35 during opposition protests in the capital city, Harare (note that the military has denied this, with the state accusing the opposition of the deaths and damages done). The protests resulted in extensive damage to property. It was later established that those killed were not part of the protests but just unarmed civilians, some who were going about their business, oblivious of the danger that was going to cost them their lives. This raised serious questions on the role of the military and police in maintaining law and order as well as their respect of human rights and crowd control tactics. There is consensus that the deaths of civilians could have been avoided, and the act itself highlights the difficulties associated with democracy and maintenance of law and order. This is a persistent challenge in authoritarian African countries.

In order to address concerns on the shootings raised in different quarters, the President of the Republic of Zimbabwe, Emmerson Mnangagwa established a commission of inquiry in terms of section 2 (1) of the Commissions of Inquiry Act [Chapter 10:07], through Proclamation Number 6 of 2018 published in Statutory Instrument 181 of 2018. The terms of the reference were simple, it was to look at the post-election violence. The commission was chaired by the former South African President Kgalema Motlanthe. The Commission did not directly accuse the military of any wrongdoing, but it seemed that the state, opposition and security services had contributed in different degrees to the tragic outcome of that day. It had four broad recommendations which included compensation of the victims' families, electoral reforms, political co-existence and security sector reforms. This was in addition to an acknowledgement that the problem in the country stemmed from political differences, hence, the need for a political platform for all the major actors to discuss political as well as



other issues affecting the country. This recommendation gave rise to the highly controversial Political Actors Dialogue (see Towindo 2020).

These shootings portray the political challenges the country is facing and lack of consensus by political actors on social cohesion in the post-election period which have included lack of acceptance of POLAD by the main political opposition, highlighting the nature of Zimbabwean society which is polarised. The country's security forces have been shown as being impartial and as a ruthless instrument that can be used to crush dissent among citizens by the political elite. The deployment of security institutions to settle political scores, and as an instrument of authoritarian consolidation and the by-passing of democratic processes with civilians being abused by ruthless state machinery highlight an issue which is of major concern globally and by human rights defenders. It can be found existing in many countries in the Global South which are exemplified recently by Uganda, Myanmar, the Republic of Sudan and Chad.

With Zimbabwe being politically polarised, with a ruling elite who are focused on consolidating and retaining power at all cost, to the detriment of the economy and the wellbeing of citizens, questions arise on how this impasse can be broken and the country moves forward and attain economic development which is not retarded by divisive politics. I would argue that there is need to go back to 2015, when the United Nations General Assembly adopted the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDG's). The SDGs were premised on a universal call to action to end poverty, protect the planet and improve the lives of people everywhere. A 15-year plan was adopted to achieve the goals (UN 2015). For this paper, the goals are of particular significance highlighting what should be addressed in order to achieve sustainable development. This is important for countries in the Global South which have faced perennial challenges. Goal 16 is particularly significant as it addresses the promotion of peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development. It highlights the importance of states providing access to justice and building effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels. This is particularly important for Zimbabwe, where I would argue that there has been the politicization of state institutions with the selective application of the rule of law and justice. This has been problematic. As a matter of urgency, the government of Zimbabwe should address the 1 August shootings in a transparent process that provide justice to the civilians. In addition, a reconciliatory process needs to be undertaken to address all historical incidents of injustice perpetrated during periods of political violence which resulted in death, injuries and the destruction of property. One can never underestimate the power of a true and conciliatory national healing process. This should be in a context where there is concerted effort by ...the authorities...(to)...immediately put an end to security force abuses and allow for peaceful protests as part of the democratic process...that would signal that there is indeed a new dispensation of respect for rights and the rule of law in Zimbabwe" (Dewa Mavhinga, Southern Africa Director at Human Rights Watch, HRW 2018). Political challenges, fear of persecution, lack of respect and capture of state institutions, subverting democratic processes and authoritarian tendencies all pose serious political challenges which retard



development, and the situation is worsened by Zimbabwe's weak economy and a multitude of food insecure, precariously employed and vulnerable citizens.

3. Power struggles within the ruling party and its implications

Proponents of realism theory like Thucydides, argue on the importance of power in politics and see human nature as a starting point for classical political realism. Realists view human beings as inherently egoistic and self-interested to the extent that self-interest overcomes moral principles. At the debate in Sparta, described in Book I of Thucydides' History, the Athenians affirm the priority of self-interest over morality. They say that considerations of right and wrong have 'never turned people aside from the opportunities of aggrandizement offered by superior strength' (Thucydides, Finley and Warner 1972). What is the importance of this view? I am of the opinion that it helps us understand the reasons why human beings pursue power, which in essence is to be stronger and to dominate the weak. Hans J. Morgenthau (1904–1980) further developed realism into a comprehensive international relations theory. He was influenced by the protestant theologian and political writer Reinhold Niebuhr, as well as Hobbes. Morgenthau places selfishness and power-lust at the centre of his view of human existence. The insatiable human lust for power, timeless and universal, which he identifies with *animus dominandi*, the desire to dominate, is for him the main cause of conflict. As he asserts in his main work, *Politics Among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace* (1954), that '...international politics, like all politics, is a struggle for power.'

Why is this of relevance to the Zimbabwean context? If we look at Morgenthau's argument, all politics is struggle for power. Both national and international actors falling into his realism. This is applicable to the domestic politics of Zimbabwe. The Zimbabwe African National Union-Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF) was one of the African-led political wings which waged the country's armed struggle and resoundingly won the elections in 1980 to form the first African government. Since then, it has managed to stay in power in spite of disputed elections especially over the past two decades. Despite managing to overcome its political opponents, a major challenge to the ruling party has been factionalism, which is not a new phenomenon to the party as it was born after a factional breakaway from the Zimbabwe African Peoples Union (ZAPU), which was the other party that fought the country's war of liberation. Over the years, the party has experienced factional fighting which intensified after 2010. Factional fighting in ZANU (PF) has seen the jostling for positions, smearing campaigns, blacklisting and underhand dealings as the factions and people have fought for political supremacy. This has been detrimental to governance, democratic processes and development. The economy has also been negatively affected. In the past few years three main political factions have emerged in the country with the current military backed 'Lacoste' faction which is loyal to President Mnangagwa being dominant. There was also another faction commonly referred to as the 'Gamatox' which was loyal to the late General Solomon Mujuru (a war commander of note) and his wife and former Vice President in the Mugabe government, Joyce Mujuru. This faction went into oblivion following the dismissal of its



principals by Mugabe during a faction purging spree with Joyce Mujuru being the most prominent victim. The last dominant faction which was aligned to Mugabe's wife Grace was the 'Generation 40' which was made up of the party's young politicians and was canvassing for a Grace Mugabe succession. Following the ouster of Mugabe, the members of this faction were purged, and some fled to exile with those remaining facing persecution and arrest. While current ZANU (PF) members do not openly acknowledge their sympathies to this faction, the presence of its sympathisers in ZANU (PF) is still very much strong, with some feeling that the Lacoste faction betrayed Robert Mugabe. Factional fighting within the ruling party is problematic as it affects the performance of those in government who at times fear labelling and are restricted in serving citizens fearing stereotyping and concentrating on political battles at the expense of service delivery. It impacts on governance, economic performance, long-term planning, policy making and other issues which are critical for sustainable development. Political instability in such situations is a real challenge and the factional fighting in the ruling party can be seen as having derailed. In some contexts, for example, in South-East Asia, factions have been shown as having a deleterious effect of inhibiting the authority and effectiveness of leaders, causing party volatility, party fragmentation, and a lack of party cohesion (Chambers and Ufen 2020). This can be a serious challenge for countries in the Global South which already have a multitude of other challenges and are desperately in need of political stability for them to develop.

4. Natural disasters and the pandemic

In the past few years, Zimbabwe, just like other countries in sub-Saharan Africa has faced climate-induced environmental challenges which have contributed to food insecurity and a precarious humanitarian crisis. Food insecurity has become a reality due to failure by the government and local communities to respond to shocks, build resilience and mitigate the impact of the natural disasters. Natural disasters are a serious challenge faced not only in Zimbabwe but also in many countries in the Global South, posing a serious challenge to humanity. In 2020, Zimbabwe's challenges were compounded by the effects of Cyclone Idai which had hit the country in 2019 and the catastrophic COVID-19 pandemic.

Cyclone Idai: In March 2019, Zimbabwe was hit by the tropical Cyclone Idai, which was a result of a tropical depression originating on the east coast of Mozambique. It swept through Mozambique, Zimbabwe and Malawi as a category two storm that was moving at above 105 miles per hour, leaving behind a trail of destruction including loss of human and animal lives and massive destruction to crops and property in all these countries. In Zimbabwe, the cyclone and subsequent flooding destroyed homes and latrines, contaminated drinking water, washed away roads, dams and bridges and other infrastructure as well as crops among other serious damages. With a country already suffering from economic challenges, the situation became dire especially for populations living in the Eastern parts of the country. The United Nations estimates that in the region, 100 000 homes were destroyed



with US\$773 million worth of buildings, infrastructure and crops being destroyed with deaths in excess of 1 200 (World Vision 2019). The cyclone highlighted shortcomings when it comes to disaster preparedness, timeous response by disaster management agencies, and lack of preparedness by local communities in disaster response. It also exposed the precarity of local communities in the face of major shocks and the decay of infrastructure which is easily destroyed if confronted by major environmental shocks. This is a situation which is not unique to Zimbabwe but can be found in other countries in the region.

COVID-19: Whilst the southern African region was still trying to recover from the impact of Cyclone Idai, recurrent droughts and other climate-induced natural disasters, a new corona virus later renamed COVID-19, emerged. COVID-19, which was declared a global pandemic by the World Health Organisation in January 2020 was seen as being caused by a severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2). It had originated in Wuhan, China and had spread at unprecedented speed to other parts of the world. By the end of 12 April 2021, COVID-19 had seen 135 646 617 confirmed positive cases being reported globally with 2 930 732 fatalities (WHO 2021). To contain the spread of the virus, the world witnessed national lockdowns, the closure of national borders, the restriction of unnecessary travel, the closure and partial opening of non-essential businesses and the informal sector. At some point, only medical professionals and other workers classified as essential were the only ones allowed to continue operating as a containment measure. Since COVID-19 started, it has undergone various cycles each with a different intensity and affecting different countries and geographical regions. Although there were fears that Africa would face many fatalities compared to other regions in the world, this has fortunately not been the case. It has however revealed hitherto serious challenges in the health sector across the continent. If one looks at the continents response and plans to counter COVID-19, what is clear is that the continent already had a struggling health care system which has been underfunded for years, hence health facilities are poor and dilapidated.

In Zimbabwe, COVID-19 has been seen as presenting a societal, health and economic crisis. By 22 April 2021, the country had reported 38 018 confirmed positive cases and 1 555 deaths (MoHCC 2021). The high number of cases and deaths was considered a serious challenge with fears that COVID-19 would also ravage the country as it has done in Italy, the United Kingdom, India, Brazil and other countries. This was in a context where over the past few years, Zimbabwe's health care system has been largely underfunded and has faced crippling resource constraints, a demotivated and poorly paid workforce and crumbling public health infrastructure. High morbidity and mortality trends show that the population continues to be ravaged by infectious diseases such as HIV and AIDS, lung diseases, tuberculosis, diarrheal conditions including nutritional deficiencies, and non-communicable diseases such as diabetes.

The COVID-19 pandemic has exposed the inequalities and inequities between the public and private health sector, and health access challenges especially by the poor. It has



shown the serious implications of lack of health care equipment including PPEs, shortage of therapeutic drugs, and overworked and underpaid health care workers, and there is need to relook at the public health funding model. The Zimbabwean situation broadly resembles what is occurring in many African countries. The closure of national borders and lack of access to health facilities abroad has exposed the necessity of building local health care facilities which are currently missing in African countries (Dandara et al 2021).

The negative economic implications of COVID-19 are discernible in the country's tourism sector. For Zimbabwe this sector is key in the economy, generating an estimated US\$1.4 billion (3.3 per cent of GDP) in revenue in 2018. Over the years, it has become key for generating foreign currency. COVID-19 and its attendant lockdown presented challenges for the tourism sector and this was not unique to Zimbabwe, but it impacted on other countries in the Global South whose economies have the tourism sector contributing a sizeable proportion to the economy. With COVID-19, most countries have been entering and exiting national lockdowns with strict travel restrictions being put in place and gatherings prohibited. This has seen a number of tourists cancelling their bookings, with major events being cancelled as well. In Zimbabwe, tour operators and hotels in the resort city of Victoria Falls for instance, had reported 80 per cent cancellations by early March 2020. Recently, indications are that most hotels have either restricted their operations or shut down altogether. A consequence of this has been loss of revenue, jobs and income leading to loss of jobs and income (UNDP 2020). The economic cost of the pandemic on the tourism sector which is a key sector in the economy is still to be seen but early indications point that it was catastrophic, and the sector will take years to recover.

5. Gender-based violence

Studies show that globally, domestic violence has negative impacts on human health and wellbeing. This is also confirmed in Zimbabwe for example, by research undertaken locally for example by Professor Rudo Gaidzanwa of the University of Zimbabwe over the past decades. Studies in different countries have shown that the scourge of domestic violence has had widespread social and economic implications and it also affects people of various cultural backgrounds. Interestingly it was noted that experiences of violence tend to decrease with an increase in education. A study by ZIMSTAT (2011) in its Zimbabwe Demographic and Health Survey 2010-11 showed that forty per cent of uneducated women and women with only primary school education reported that they had experienced physical violence since the age of 15. This was compared with 15 per cent of women with more than secondary school education (ZIMSTAT 2011). Thirty-one per cent of women in the lowest wealth quintile, and 26 per cent of women in the highest wealth quintile experienced physical violence (ZIMSTAT, 2011). This is confirmed by the UNFPA (2015) and the SAFE (2020) which notes that in Zimbabwe, one in three women aged 15 to 49 (39.4 per cent of all women) have experienced physical violence, and about one in four women have experienced sexual violence since the age of 15. These statistics are disturbing as they demonstrate that physical violence against



women is prevalent across all socio-economic strata in Zimbabwe. It shows that the quality of women's lives may not necessarily be determined and guaranteed by their incomes or those of their husbands or their access to material goods and services. The most frequent perpetrators of violence against women were current husbands and partners (57 per cent) and former husbands and partners (20 per cent) (ZIMSTAT 2011). The implications of gender-based violence are multiple and not only do they deny women the fulfilment of their basic rights as enshrined by local and international legal statutes, but they also impede on their important roles in social reproduction and production.

In countries in the Global South including Zimbabwe, I would argue that violence is largely negative as it sees women losing workdays hence, lower productivity and income. It is also problematic as it makes some women lose out on educational and employment opportunities as well as participating in socio-economic and political issues. All this ultimately negatively impacts on livelihoods and the role of women as primary care givers who play very critical roles in the household and local communities. The normal functioning of women is disturbed as they suffer from physical injuries. Psychologically it has negative effects which include depression, mental illness, post-traumatic stress disorders which can lead to them failing to function normally and in extreme cases, can lead to social marginalisation and even suicide. The implications of gender-based violence cannot be underestimated as they impact on development, the economy and social cohesion. It can be seen as contributing to developmental challenges facing countries in the Global South and at times it is challenging to deal with as it is supported by regressive traditional and cultural practices, norms and values which are embraced and never questioned by some communities.

6. Land reform and its implications

Some countries in the Global South that experienced colonialism can be seen as facing challenges of redressing historical legacies. Land reform is one route which countries have taken aimed at redistributing wealth from the descendants of the former settlers to the indigenous people. In Zimbabwe, land reform was undertaken from 1980 with limited success but was implemented in a more radical form in 2000, with land being forcibly acquired without compensation for the land and promises of compensation for improvements only. The land reform programme which was chaotic and characterised by nepotism, patronage, capture of state institutions and benefited mainly the ZANU (PF) political elite and its supporters, has in the past two decades caused serious negative effects on Zimbabwe's economy. It also contributed to the country's economic collapse and hyperinflation in the 2000's (Richardson 2004). There was witnessed a significant drop in total farm output if one compared output from the former large-scale commercial farms with the resettled farms. This, coupled with recurrent droughts, lack of farming experience and capital, contributed to low output compromising the country's food security, making starvation and famine a common occurrence in the country (Dancaescu 2003). Increasing poverty levels combined with the increased informality of farming operations amongst the resettled farmers has led



to poor working conditions among farm workers, a dysfunctional agricultural value chain system and in some instances, it can be seen as having led to an increase in the use of child labour especially by farmers in sugar cane production (Chingono 2019).

Zimbabwe's macro-economic environment which has faced challenges since 2000, characterized by hyperinflation, collapse of the banking sector, shortages of foreign currency and key commodities such as fuel and agricultural inputs (see Kanyenze 2005) cannot be separated from the dynamics of land reform. It presents contemporary challenges facing countries in the Global South where attempts to redress historical injustices become intertwined with poor governance, poor public policy choice trajectories as well as neo-patrimonial tendencies. This has seen the emergence of new challenges as attempts are made to redress historical inequalities. In Zimbabwe, the land reform programme exacerbated already existing inequalities while creating new ones as it decimated the economy. The damage which it caused will take years to solve and there are high chances that it has been a catalyst for intergenerational poverty as the economy continues facing serious challenges.

7. Recommendations and Conclusion

The discussion above has touched on a number of contemporary dynamics which impede development in the Global South with Zimbabwe providing insights on challenges. Internal and external political subtleties, natural disasters, social challenges like gender-based violence and the recent ramifications of the COVID-19 pandemic all contribute in different ways to the challenges faced by developing countries. While remedies for each challenge faced are country and context specific, I believe that for the Zimbabwean case a lot can be done to remedy the challenges. Political reform, tolerance, respect of the rule of law and justice, respect for political institutions and democratic tenets are key considerations to take into consideration. These will help to deal with some of the country's political challenges which unfortunately have impacted on economic development and the citizens wellbeing. The COVID-19 pandemic and natural disasters faced in the country have exposed the need for an increase in social service funding especially in health care, social welfare and disaster management. The social service ministries were found wanting when they were confronted with challenges and in some instances failed to cope. It is important for this sector to be supported and be able to cater for challenges that may arise. In the health sector, investments need to be made in the health services infrastructure and workers need motivation so that they continue to discharge their responsibilities professionally. As noted earlier, for Africa, COVID-19 was not as bad as was anticipated. Epidemiological, scientific and governance responses to the pandemic were modelled along responses from Europe. With the continent's large informal economy. This impacted on citizens welfare. For the future, it is important for governments in the Global South to have responses which are context specific, and that take into consideration local dynamics rather than a 'one shoe fits all approach.' Small businesses for example, should be allowed to continue operating during national lockdowns during this ongoing COVID-19 pandemic era, with observance of the World Health



Organisation (WHO) coronavirus regulations. The economic and welfare cost of mimicking lockdowns undertaken in other contexts has been shown as being detrimental. Over the past few years, natural disasters have become a perennial challenge for countries in southern Africa. This has impacted on economies, livelihoods and resulted in unnecessary loss of life. It is time for the region and other regions to look at the feasibility of setting up a Disaster/Emergency Fund and not to be over reliant on donor support during emergencies. Alternatively regional governments in African need to capacitate the region by making sure each country establishes a disaster emergency fund and they implement it, and more importantly it serves its purpose. Saving money for emergencies is now imperative given that countries in the Global South are facing regular climatic catastrophes and unprecedented events like the COVID-19 pandemic whose ramifications are detrimental to economies and citizen's livelihoods. The last important recommendation is for economic and policy reforms which decisively deal with the challenges of different countries in the Global South. These need to be explored and implemented to improve people's lives in the future.

Notes on contributor

Nothando Petra Magwizi was born in 1986 in Nyanga, Zimbabwe. Her father was an educator at Emmanuel Secondary School and her mother was a housewife who later became an educator. Growing up, she was fascinated by reading different books from bedtime to biblical storybooks. Nothando considers family as the most important aspect of life, hence, spends most time with family. She graduated with a Bachelor of Arts degree in 2010 at the University of Zimbabwe and later graduated with a Master of Science in International Affairs with Midlands State University, Zimbabwe. During her studies in International Affairs, her interests in national and international development grew bigger to the point where concepts of international relations give her pleasure to write, read and talk about. She submitted a dissertation entitled "*An analysis of the effects of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) conflict in the African Region from 1996-2006*" in 2017.

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Editors' Article Contribution:

Zimbabwe political manoeuvrings and authoritarian consolidation during the COVID-19 pandemic: Reflections on the year 2020

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Abstract

Zimbabwe, just like other countries, has not been spared by the ravages of the COVID-19 pandemic. While the number of confirmed positive cases was initially low, they increased radically, posing a serious threat to the citizens living in an already fragile economy and underfunded public health system. While focus has been mainly on the negative impact of COVID-19 on people's already precarious livelihoods, this article explores political developments in the country during the pandemic. It notes that political manoeuvrings by the main political actors escalated, and this was aided by lockdown and statutory conditions in place to minimise the spread of the virus. In the article, we argue that the ruling ZANU (PF) party used the pandemic as a cover to entrench its political power and control, while attempting to decimate the political opposition. We locate this behaviour in a historical context, showing that it is not new and has been a part of the country's post-independence political trajectory. The deployment of repressive security apparatus, the recall of opposition parliamentarians, the push for constitutional amendments, demolition of markets, threats and arrests of citizens, enforcement of travel restrictions and a curfew are some of the examples cited as representing increased repression against Zimbabwean citizens during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Keywords: *authoritarianism, COVID-19, democracy, national lockdown, repression, Zimbabwe*

1. Introduction

In December 2019, a strange pneumonia of unknown cause was reported in Wuhan, China to the World Health Organisation (WHO). Later renamed the COVID-19 virus, it was discovered to be a new corona virus strain or SARS-COV-2 that affected humans resulting in death (Haddout et al 2020). In January 2020, COVID-19 was declared a Public Health Emergency of



International Concern due to its highly contagious nature and high morbidity and mortality rates. When COVID-19 first emerged, no one had ever envisaged that the pandemic would become one of the greatest threats to humanity and the global economy in modern history. The virus easily spread among humans and it was not long before it had spread globally. Despite China having made significant progress to contain the virus, in 2020, it hit hard on countries like the USA, Brazil, the United Kingdom, Italy, South Africa, Spain, Russia, France, Germany, Turkey and others. The context has somehow gradually changed due to the development of vaccines, yet a third wave has already hit some countries thereby making the pandemic an enduring global problem (WHO 2021).

The high number of those infected and needing intensive care, and others needing specialised care, and deaths saw advanced healthcare systems being overwhelmed and struggling to cope, especially during the peak phases. Countries had to put in place extraordinary measures to curtail the spread of the virus and these included national (and localised) lockdowns, border closures, restrictions on unnecessary movements and the operations of non-essential businesses. With western countries being ravaged by the disease, there were fears that Africa and other parts of the developing world would be vulnerable with health systems at risk of being overwhelmed (UNECA 2020). This was attributed to an ill-equipped and underfunded health care system and high levels of human contact and interaction especially in Africa's large informal sector. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the whole world has been in turmoil, as it has negatively impacted on national economies becoming more than just a public health crisis, but it has had socio-economic implications which are likely to increase poverty and inequalities at a global scale.

With COVID-19 ravaging countries and having unprecedented social and epidemiological ramifications that have exposed inequalities and vulnerabilities (see Adesina 2021, Chipenda and Tom 2021), there has been concern on the implications of the COVID-19 pandemic on Africa's democracy, peace and security. It is seen creating conditions that have threatened the continent's socio-economic and political architecture especially in the areas of peacebuilding, conflict and social cohesion. This is particularly important in a context where the declaration of state of emergency, lockdowns, curfews and the need for adherence to social distancing measures have necessitated heavy policing by security forces to ensure compliance. In this article, we posit that in Zimbabwe, the COVID-19 pandemic has not only posed a threat to public health and the economy but has seen political manoeuvrings by political players who have taken advantage of the lockdown situation to score political points, posing a serious threat to the country's already fragile democratic processes. In 2020, while most activities grounded to a halt due to COVID-19, political contestations in the country did not stop. We argue that the jostling for space and relevance by the main political players did not only threaten social cohesion and democracy, but it was an unfortunate development which occurred during a life-threatening pandemic. In a background where for the past two decades, the country has been politically polarised due to contestations between the ruling Zimbabwe African National Union Patriotic Front (ZANU PF) and the opposition - the



Movement for Democratic Change (MDC), we use the figurational sociology concept to look at how contestations between the parties escalated during the COVID-19 pandemic. We provide critical insights and analysis of state-society relations to understand political manoeuvrings which occurred, and how these reflect a worrying trajectory towards authoritarianism.

This article comes in a background where in the past two years, the country has undergone a dramatic political transformation with the country's political strongman for almost four decades, the former late President, Robert Mugabe being deposed of in a 'soft coup' and being replaced by his former deputy Emmerson Mnangagwa (Chikowore and Davis 2017). With the country under a 'new administration', its political actions and responses to the opposition during the COVID-19 pandemic are of interest, and we explore these using a historical perspective as a foundation for understanding contemporary issues. The thrust of the paper is thus two-fold. Firstly, it explores political trajectories in post-colonial Zimbabwe using the concept of figurational sociology to show the emergence of authoritarianism and militarisation of the state. Secondly, it explores contemporary developments in Zimbabwe's political landscape during the COVID-19 pandemic, an area exhibiting a dearth of knowledge. In the next section, we briefly highlight the conceptual and methodological framing of the article. This is followed by a brief history of political contestation in Zimbabwe over the past two decades, COVID-19 pandemic responses by the government, political contestations during the pandemic and their implications.

2. Conceptual and methodological notes

How can one understand Zimbabwe's post-colonial political trajectories and contemporary state-society relations in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic? To get insights, we used a process sociological approach that sought to understand Zimbabwe's post-independence political trajectories by way of figurational analysis. The concept of figurations was developed by Norbert Elias (1978) with the aim of overcoming the differentiation between structure and actors. It directs the analytical scrutiny towards the interdependencies that connect actors (Elias 1978, 1987). We considered the concept of figuration to be useful in understanding patterns of interaction and the network of interdependencies which are framed by individuals and groups in a society. For Elias (1987), figuration has to be understood as the constellations of actors with their relationships, processes of interaction, power asymmetries and their effects being of central concern. When it comes to politics in post-colonial Zimbabwe, we detect several layers of interdependent groups, their interactions and power asymmetries which have in different ways actively contributed to the country's political trajectory over the past decades. As shall be shown in this article, the individuals, political parties, civil society organisations, capital owners, competing groups within the political bureaucratic state apparatus, the military, legislature, judiciary and other actors have all contributed, acted and opined on Zimbabwe's political trajectory and state-building. We explore these dynamics in a context where from a figurational sociological perspective, individuals and groups compete



for power, status and capital (see Munch and Veit 2018). For the study, the concept was considered useful in providing an analytical frame. Methodologically, the paper is based on an interpretive research paradigm, and a heavy reliance on secondary literature.

The COVID-19 pandemic made research challenging as it was undertaken in 2020 with the researchers needing to observe social distancing rules and ensure strict COVID-19 control measures. Undertaking 'traditional research' especially 'face-to-face' data collection was not practical, and the researchers had to rely on secondary sources to compile the article. This entailed a heavy virtual presence and modification of data collection and analysis methods to ensure that data which were collected suited the study.

3. Zimbabwe's post-colonial political contestations: Understanding the historical context

What has been Zimbabwe's post-independence political trajectory, and has there been a steady entrenchment of authoritarianism and militarisation of the state? This was a pertinent question which confronted us as we grappled to better understand the contemporary Zimbabwean state. In this section, we extensively explore political dynamics in post-independence Zimbabwe. Since 1980, Zimbabwe has had a complicated and interesting political history. While the main focus of article is to look at political contestations during COVID-19, it is important to take note of some important political milestones in newly independent Zimbabwe which allow us to contextualise contemporary political developments. Zimbabwe was born out of a protracted liberation struggle. The liberation movements, the Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU) and Zimbabwe African People's Union (ZAPU) pursued the liberation struggle. They purported to represent the interests of social groupings that included the peasants, women, youth, workers, students and religious organisations, and they pushed for a nationalist populist ideology (Sachikonye 1995). They promised to establish a people's state that represented the interests of different social groups hence, they waged the 'peoples struggle' (Nzongola-Ntajala 1987:75). As the nationalists waged the liberation war, Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2003) notes that there emerged the Zimbabwean state ideology and dominant party-political rhetoric from hegemonic and authoritarian circumstances. This was cemented by the rise of Robert Mugabe who led independent Zimbabwe for almost four decades. Mugabe was a leader who could combine political and military attributes hence, the conflation of the operations of the nationalist movement and quasi military operations in his leadership. More importantly, in 1976, Mugabe was a leader who had a conviction that:

Our votes must go together with our guns. After all, any vote we shall have shall have been the product of the gun. The gun which produces the vote should remain its security officer-its guarantor. The people's voice and people's guns are always inseparable twins (Zvomuya 2017).



It was this conviction that was to find expression in Zimbabwe for many years. The protracted war of liberation was settled at Lancaster House, but an estimated 80 000 Africans and 1000 whites had been killed, while 450 000 Africans suffered injuries of various intensities (Tshuma 2018). With independence, there was high expectation that the country would embark on a path where there was an expanded democratic space, the realisation of human rights, human security and the building of democratic institutions which would put people first (Alexander and McGregor 1996). Unfortunately, this was not the case as post-colonial Zimbabwe failed to break from its nationalist authoritarian past which became increasingly intolerant and brutal with militarism and violence becoming evident. Early signs, however, were promising. The Mugabe government embarked on a policy of reconciliation after a resounding victory in the 1980 elections, pledging to create a just, equitable, non-racist and violence free society (Saunders 2000). There was the amalgamation of the liberation armies and Rhodesian army to create the Zimbabwe National Army (ZNA), but there were challenges. An uneasy post-independence relationship existed between the nationalist movements despite there being a government of national unity. The relationship deteriorated following an alleged discovery of arms on ZAPU properties, which led to the party's expulsion from government as it was suspected that it intended to stage a coup. According to De Waal (1990) and Mhandara (2018), this culminated in civil war in the southern parts of the country in a period referred to as *Gukurahundi*. Civilian populations bore the brunt of the fight between the army and ZAPU aligned dissidents. Conservative estimates place the number of killings at 20 000 with atrocities like rape, torture, intimidation, sexual harassment and murder being undertaken by the ZNA's notorious North Korean-trained Fifth Brigade (CCJP 1997). Most of those who were killed were of the Ndebele ethnic group residing in the Midlands and Matabeleland Provinces. Up to today, national peace and reconciliation in the country remains elusive as the nation has still not found closure due to the *Gukurahundi* atrocities.

A Unity accord between ZANU (PF) and PF ZAPU was signed in December 1987, bringing an end to the conflict. This culminated in the formation of a government of national unity that saw an end to the *Gukurahundi* and the 'dissident problem' in the Midlands and Matabeleland provinces. However, the state had been divided. There was monolithic unity under Mugabe, which was an important legacy of nationalist authoritarianism and it saw the co-option of PF ZAPU under ZANU (PF) structures, and overnight, ZANU (PF) no longer faced any formidable opposition. For Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2003), it was a top-down authoritarian strategy that strengthened the regime and did not entrench a culture of democracy and peace. The country took a trajectory towards a 'one party state' (Saunders 2000). In its pursuit of political domination in the 1980s, some important aspects stand out as we look in retrospect. The Zimbabwean state was a product of violence and intolerance. This was due to a toxic combination of brutal settler intolerance and violence, as well as African nationalist authoritarianism and intolerance which were underpinned by populist ideology that was appealing to the populace's aspirations and interests (Bhebhe and Ranger 2003, Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2003).



Despite these early political challenges, it is important to note that the post-colonial government made impressive strides towards addressing inequalities which were a legacy of the brutal settler colonial regime. Investment in health education and social services went a long way in addressing inequalities and the impoverished majority benefitted. In the public services sector, there was a deliberate acceleration and advancement of Africans. The challenge, however for the new state according to Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2003), was that the Zimbabwe society failed to demilitarise in line with the new political realities. This was considered essential so as to inculcate peace, democracy, the realisation of human rights and human security. It heralded the beginning of a period where the state was seen as being prepared to use the security forces and violence in particular, to crush dissent and opposition. Peace, democracy and human rights were soon to be replaced with fear, suspicion and insecurity as there was a realisation that atrocities committed in the country had the blessings of the ruling elite led by Mugabe and the then State Security Minister and now President, Emmerson Mnangagwa, and Enos Nkala, the then Home Affairs Minister (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2003). Moyo (2020) has taken the argument further emphasising that in order to understand contemporary Zimbabwe's political landscape after the liberation war, there is need to understand that 'the military has never been in the barracks', and it has always been involved in politics. From a figurational perspective we need to keep in mind that the military has been a prominent 'behind the scenes' actor in the country's political trajectory.

From 1980, ZANU (PF) scored election victories in 1985, 1990 and 1996. During this period there were a number of actors who actively participated and shaped Zimbabwe's political trajectory. In the early 1990s, ZANU (PF) faced formidable opposition from the Zimbabwe Unity Movement (ZUM) under the former ZANU (PF) senior member and former Cabinet Minister, Edgar Tekere. He was expelled from ZANU (PF) for being too vocal and critical of Mugabe's leadership and corruption. He was particularly against the country's trajectory towards a one-party state. He said '... a one-party state was never one of the founding principles of ZANU (PF) and experience in Africa has shown that it brought the evils of nepotism, corruption and inefficiency' (Tekere quoted by Samukange 2013). In the elections, Tekere managed to get 16.75% of the presidential vote while Mugabe won 83.05%. The 1996 elections were interesting as Mugabe faced his old enemies, in the form of former Zimbabwe-Rhodesia Prime Minister Abel Muzorewa of the United Parties and Ndabaningi Sithole of ZANU (Ndonga) whom Mugabe had replaced as ZANU leader during the liberation war. Sithole and Muzorewa withdrew from the election, but their names remained on the ballot box and Mugabe claimed a 90% victory, while Muzorewa got 4.80% and Sithole 2.44%. Sithole was later arrested and convicted of conspiring to assassinate Mugabe, and he died while on bail. From 1980 until the late 1990s, ZANU (PF) showed an obsession with retaining power at any cost, and it did this through reconfiguring and manipulating state institutions (particularly the security forces), constitutional amendments, and outright coercion and harassment of political opponents. Of note were arrests and detention of political leaders for



treason, violence as well as intimidation (Moyo 1992). This was in a context where the government was seen as being increasingly intolerant and authoritarian (Saunders 2000).

Emergence of the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC)

It was only in the late 1990s that ZANU (PF) faced formidable political opposition with the emergence of the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC). The MDC was formed in 1999 as a coalition of the trade union movement led by the Zimbabwe Congress for Trade Unions (ZCTU), civil society organisations and a multiplicity of social actors who included the intellectuals, students and churches (Maroleng 2004). It was led by Morgan Tsvangirai and it arose due to disgruntlement by ZANU (PF)'s failure to address the country's socio-economic challenges. Interestingly, the labour movement had been an ally of ZANU (PF) but over the years, the relationship had deteriorated. Initially, the relationship had been paternalistic and interdependent as ZANU (PF) claimed to have the interest of workers at heart. It had ensured that there were minimum wages and the protection of workers (Alexander 2001). This relationship gradually broke down, as the ZCTU campaigned against corruption, and it successfully opposed the attempts by ZANU (PF) to create a one-party state in the 1990's (Raftopoulos 2000). Mugabe accused the trade union of being political and in later years, he refused to attend its functions.

The Zimbabwe government found itself under immense economic pressure after adopting the disastrous IMF and World Bank-sponsored Economic Structural Adjustment Programme (ESAP) in the 1990s, which stimulated a difficult and ever-deteriorating domestic socio-economic environment. Under ESAP, there was the abandonment of the welfarist policies and a restructuring of the country's economy, state and society. Neoliberal orthodoxy was pursued with emphasis on trade liberalisation, deregulation and public sector restructuring. It also saw budget cuts in the social sector, particularly in health and education (McCandless 2011). The adoption of ESAP negatively impacted on people's livelihoods. The emphasis on market principles saw prices of basic goods and services soaring amid increasing unemployment, inflation and poverty. It was in this context that the ZCTU emerged as a force against deteriorating conditions. For Alexander (2001), the enforcement of ESAP by ZANU (PF) showed that there was a synthesis between neo-liberalism and authoritarianism. State repression became more and more visible as the social and economic cost of abandoning welfare socialism of the 1980s began to take effect. It was therefore, not difficult for the MDC to be formed and present itself as an alternative to ZANU (PF). With the rise of the MDC, Chipato (2019) notes that there emerged a broad voice that spoke on behalf of Zimbabweans who were disillusioned by the failures of the country's once radical liberation movement that wanted socio-economic and political change. The MDC immediately had impact, and in 2000, it supported the National Constitutional Assembly to thwart attempts by the state to introduce a new constitution which sought to increase the powers of the president (Matombo and Sachikonye 2010). The rejection of the constitution marked the first defeat of ZANU (PF) in a national poll, resulting in a major reconfiguration of the country's political landscape, and



it announced the emergence of ‘new’ political actors. In the 2000s, the MDC participated in four elections, and it performed exceptionally well. Political pressure from the MDC saw the government hijacking a bottom-up initiative with peasants demanding socio-economic equity or more specifically equitable land redistribution. Overnight, there was support from the government for the cause to address the country’s ‘land question’. It managed to manipulate the land reform programme to its advantage with genuine demands for land being politicised as it sought to reassert its political dominance (Alexander 2003).

Despite being demonised as anti-land reform, a puppet party for western imperialists sponsored to reject genuine claims for land reform, the MDC continued to pose serious electoral challenges to ZANU (PF). In the 2002 Presidential elections, facing insurmountable challenges and irregularities, Tsvangirai the MDC presidential candidate won 42.10% of the vote against Mugabe’s 56.6% (EISA 2002). During this period, Zimbabwe’s political landscape changed. Makumbe (2009) argues that Zimbabwe was transformed into a ‘fascist state’ with the selective application of the rule of law. Repressive legislation like the Public Order and Security Act (POSA) of 2002, and Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act (AIPPA) of 2002 were drafted and used against citizens. For Makumbe, this was reminiscent of the repressive colonial era legislation, and citing Ake (1981), he argued that the new political elite inherited repressive legislation which they were now using against the people they claimed to have liberated. In 2005, the MDC split after disagreements over whether to participate in the newly created Senate. In the 2005 elections which were criticised for not being free and fair, ZANU (PF) won 78 seats, giving it a two-thirds majority while the MDC won 41 seats. A rival faction led by Arthur Mutambara emerged with senior MDC officials and became known as MDC-M. The split severely weakened and fragmented the MDC and for Chipato (2019), it was a clear mark of a split between intellectuals, elites, civil society, and the trade union movement. This was at a time when the government was becoming more and more intolerant. In 2008, elections were held, and Tsvangirai narrowly beat Mugabe in the first round of elections, but he had insufficient votes to secure him the Presidency, forcing a second round of elections. The count down to the runoff was characterised by violence perpetrated by the security forces, war veterans and youths against the MDC-T. Tsvangirai withdrew from the elections arguing that they were compromised, and it was for the safety of his supporters. ZANU (PF) went on to win the election. Despite the victory, Zimbabwe faced an unprecedented economic and political crisis, forcing ZANU (PF) and the two MDC factions to enter into a government of national unity (GNU) under the presidency of Mugabe.

Lack of progress in key reforms during the GNU was to haunt the two MDC factions as they performed dismally in the 2013 harmonised elections that were won by ZANU (PF). During the GNU years, ZANU (PF) had rebuilt itself politically while there was disillusionment by the populace over the ability of the MDC to bring about change (Dorman 2016). During the GNU years, ZANU (PF) had built patronage networks, it created a parallel government and it used different strategies (including partisan land allocation and food distribution) to undermine the opposition (Kriger 2012). Following the elections, the MDC-T further split with



some of its leaders forming the MDC Renewal which further split with one of its leaders Tendai Biti, the former Finance Minister forming a new party called the People's Democratic Party, while Elton Mangoma, the former Energy Minister formed the Renewal Democrats of Zimbabwe (VoA 2015).

Reflections on post-colonial political trajectories (1980-2017)

The trajectory of Zimbabwean politics from 1980 has been extensively explored above with the aim of understanding the foundation of contemporary politics in the country, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic. Important highlights of the period are that from a figuration sociological perspective, the country has had different actors and interdependent groups who, in different ways, have contributed to the country's political trajectories. The post-colonial state was characterised by contestations of power, status and control. In ZANU (PF) Mugabe epitomised absolute power and control, demanding full loyalty and compliance from his comrades as he sidelined anyone whom he perceived to be a threat to his rule. Violence, intimidation, corruption, fear and mistrust were the hallmark of Mugabe's rule initially within the party, and later extended to the opposition as he pursued his vision of a one-party state. Politics in the country was ethnicised and during his rule, there was exclusion and marginalisation among the clans. Mugabe's insatiable desire to hold on to political power at all costs culminated in violence, and the undermining of constitutionalism, and was worsened by his vengeful and unforgiving character where he demanded total submission (Nkomo's ZAPU is an example). The balance and distribution of power was upset by the involvement of the oftentimes invasive security apparatus that was answerable only to Mugabe. On many occasions, they made it clear that they would not accept, support or salute '...political leaders (that did not) pursue Zimbabwean values, traditions and beliefs for thousands of lives lost in pursuit of Zimbabwe's hard-won independence' (former Zimbabwe Defence Forces Commander, the late General Zvinvashe quoted by Thornycroft and Butcher 2002). This implied non-acceptance of political leaders without liberation war credentials. It came in a context where some of the security chiefs, members of the legislature and government departments were either former liberation war fighters or unapologetically ZANU (PF) members. It was, therefore, not surprising that they favoured ZANU (PF) in the exercise of their duties, presenting an interesting conflation of interests from a figuration sociological perspective.

The 2017 coup came at a time where there was a need for urgent leadership renewal in both ZANU PF and the government. Mugabe, due to old age, had become a liability. While transition was needed, questions have arisen on the direction which the transition has taken with Mugabe being replaced by Mnangagwa, given the sense of entitlement by the ZANU (PF) political elite, and their resort to authoritarian tactics in the face of opposition. The question which then arises is the extent to which there are trajectories of change which favour Zimbabwe's political economy and its path towards democratisation. This section has been pivotal in laying an in-depth historical account of Zimbabwe's political trajectories, creating a



foundation on which contemporary Zimbabwean politics has been built. What is clear is that Mugabe left a legacy of violence, intolerance, intimidation, nepotism, patronage, rent-seeking behaviours and selective application of the rule of law and upholding of constitutionalism. It is upon this foundation that Mnangagwa's Second Republic is built, and given that the personnel of Mugabe's administration are the same personnel in the 'new' administration, can we then talk of real change? In the next section, we look at political trajectories in Zimbabwe during the COVID-19 pandemic.

4. COVID-19, public health concerns and the lockdown and security nexus

Having looked at post-colonial political trajectories, we now turn our attention to the COVID-19 period, arguing that there has been the undermining of democratic processes and increased political intolerance. In Zimbabwe, the COVID-19 pandemic has had unprecedented socio-economic impact just like in other countries. At the time of the research for the paper, the country had reported 6 070 confirmed positive cases and 155 deaths (MoHCC 2020). However, these statistics have changed tremendously. For example, on 16 February 2021, cumulative cases were 35 315, while recoveries stood at 30 979 and 1 414 deaths. From March 2021, the trajectory of the statistics shows declining infection and death rates (MoHCC 2021). When WHO declared the COVID-19 a global pandemic, it necessitated the government to put in place measures to curb its spread. The government then declared COVID-19 a national disaster which was given legal effect through the Civil Protection (Declaration of State of Disaster: Rural and Urban Areas of Zimbabwe) (Covid 19) Notice 2020 Statutory Instrument 76 of 2020. This was despite the country not having recorded a single case at the time, but it was considered a precautionary measure. The country was then put into a national lockdown with restrictions being put in place on unnecessary local and international travel and public gatherings through the Public Health (COVID-19) Prevention, Containment and Treatment (National Lockdown) Amendment Order 2020 Statutory Instrument 77 of 2020 which also spelt out lockdown regulations. To show the seriousness of the government, in 2020, there was the cancellation of the country's 40th Independence celebrations set for the 18th of April 2020 and the Zimbabwe International Trade Fair scheduled for 21 to 25 April 2020. Funds for the events were to be redirected towards fighting the COVID-19 pandemic. Since April 2020, the government has put in place numerous statutory instruments aimed at managing the national lockdown as well as co-ordinating responses to the pandemic and regulations. Due to a spike in cases, an unprecedented move was made by the government to impose a 6pm to 6am curfew to limit human movement and cross infections; this was later reviewed and set from 8pm to 6am. The regulations have been amended several times, and they continue to be changed in line with situational factors and epidemiological advice. The regulations showed unprecedented legal initiatives aimed at dealing with the crisis posed by COVID-19. In as much as they are of public health concern, some of the regulations can be seen as having had negative implications on the political and everyday freedoms of citizens.



In order to ensure compliance to the regulations, the state deployed the police and the military. While it is the constitutional obligation of the police to ensure compliance with the law and to maintain order, the military was said to have been deployed to assist the police. Since the announcement of the national lockdown, the police and army have been visible in manning roadblocks and conducting patrols in residential areas to ensure public compliance with the lockdown measures (Tshili 2020). There was a justification by the country's Deputy Minister of Defence and War Veteran Affairs that this was not new as other countries that were dealing with the COVID-19 crisis and had national lockdowns in place had also deployed their security forces to assist the police in managing the situation and ensuring efficiency (Tshili 2020). Despite the government providing reasonable justification for the deployment of the security services to ensure lockdown compliance, there was concern by Zimbabwean citizens and civil society organisations that deploying the army would result in human rights abuses. Gukurume (2020) aptly sums up these concerns by pointing out that given the recent incidents of army brutality and police heavy-handedness against civilians, the deployment of the state security apparatus especially in the low-income spaces was a cause for concern. He notes that citizens were more afraid of the police and army than COVID-19 and deployment of the repressive state apparatus was seen as being an immediate threat to people's livelihoods. Gukurume's assertions have been valid as we noted that there were numerous reported incidents of state security brutality and heavy-handedness during the COVID-19 induced national lockdown.

During the research, it was reported that the police had arrested 105 000 people for violating lockdown regulations (BBC 2020). The offences which they had committed included failure to wear face masks, liquor-related offences, unnecessary movements, illegal gatherings and the opening of businesses without the requisite documentation. The number of violators, however, has continued to decline as people are getting used to wearing face masks, yet concerns are being raised over disregarding distancing as restrictions continue to be relaxed (see Herald Staff Reporter 26 March 2021). Condemnation of human rights abuses during the national lockdown in 2020 came from the Zimbabwe Lawyers for Human Rights (ZLHR), the Law Society of Zimbabwe, the Zimbabwe Heads of Christian Denominations, the Zimbabwe Hospital Doctors Association, ZimRights, Human Rights Watch, the European Union, the United States Embassy in Zimbabwe among others (Zenda 2020, Piri 2020). The Minister of Home Affairs and Cultural Heritage had however refuted allegations of human rights abuses, and earlier on had said that the police force was just undertaking their duties and ensuring that citizens complied with the COVID-19 measures as a strategy of protecting them from the virus. He also said he had instructed the Commissioner General of Police to ensure that security officers on deployment observed the tenets of basic human rights (Herald Reporter 2020a).



5. The informal sector and demolitions during the COVID-19 pandemic: History repeating itself?

The COVID-19 pandemic has not only posed a threat to public health but to people's livelihoods. With the national lockdown, there was a call for citizens to exercise social distancing measures and to diligently practise basic hygiene. For low-income earners, adhering to basic hygiene measures proved to be practically impossible given the squalid living conditions and inaccessibility of hand sanitisers and soaps (which for low-income earners are a luxury). This is in a context where some households could not even afford basic food and lacked access to clean water. Their precarious situation was worsened as the majority of them operated in the informal sector and have been prevented from working during the lockdown. Prospects are that their situation in the post-pandemic period is likely to worsen. This comes in a background where for the past two decades, Zimbabwe has experienced a hyper-inflationary environment and deepening poverty. The GNU brought temporary relief but when it ended, poverty and unemployment have continued and are worsening. As a survival strategy, a large number of Zimbabweans work in the informal sector and have over the years built illegal informal markets in urban areas where they operate from. During the first days of the national lockdown, urban councils, under a directive from central government and with assistance from the security forces, demolished thousands of illegal roadside market stalls and buildings (Taruvinga 2020). Some of the targeted areas included Mbare, Chishawasha, Epworth, Chitungwiza, Highfield, Glenview, Mabvuku, Dzivarasekwa, Hatcliffe and Kuwadzana. The demolitions mostly affected small and medium scale enterprises (SMEs) and countless self-employed residents. Interestingly, in Harare, some of the structures which were demolished had been erected by informal traders who had been evicted from the Central Business District (CBD) in 2018, and had not been provided with alternative trading places. The demolitions were reminiscent of Operation *Murambatsvina* (Restore Order) of 2005 where the government ordered urban councils to demolish illegal structures. The Operation resulted in an estimated 700 000 families losing their homes and livelihoods and affecting a fifth of the population (International Crisis Group 2005). In the COVID-19 demolitions, the security forces were active just as they had been during the highly politicised Operation *Murambatsvina*. For many, the actions were indicative that not much has changed as the very same heavy-handed tactics and lack of empathy for citizens in already precarious situations was being repeated by the state which claimed to be charting a new governance trajectory.

In Harare, the logic of the demolitions was that the actions were necessitated by the need for the council to clean up the city and remove illegal structures while curbing illegal activities. The informal sector was considered to be a potential hotspot for COVID-19 hence of epidemiological and public health concern. This necessitated the closure and demolition of markets. The City Council was said to be looking for alternative areas where the displaced traders would be accommodated. These sites would have the requisite amenities (Kadirire



2020). The actions of the local authorities and government was condemned by vending associations and civil society organisations who noted that the demolishing of structures without providing alternatives was a threat to livelihoods made more precarious by the COVID-19 pandemic. It was seen as a flagrant violation of human rights, was unconstitutional, regressive, and was undoing years of work aimed at ensuring self-reliance and the engagement of citizens in gainful economic endeavours (Vendors Initiative for Social and Economic Transformation quoted by Kadirire 2020). For the Harare Residents Trust, the demolitions were not only illegal but arbitrary, having been undertaken in a process that lacked transparency, without a court order and destroying the livelihoods of thousands of people in the process (Kairiza 2020). For Veritas (a Zimbabwean legal organisation), it was illogical for the demolitions to be undertaken at a time when focus was on combating COVID-19. If demolitions were to be undertaken, it said that the owners had to be informed and given notice to remove their goods. For them, the demolitions were unconstitutional and had decimated people's livelihoods (Kairiza 2020). It only took court action by the Zimbabwe Lawyers for Human Rights representing informal traders for demolitions to stop. The High Court ruled that the demolitions were unlawful and not procedural (Kairiza 2020). Given the above, only one conclusion can be drawn that the 'new' dispensation has not learnt much from the Mugabe administration, and the demolition of structures during a global crisis was badly timed.

6. Political developments during the COVID-19 pandemic

While the COVID-19 pandemic has radically altered all facets of life for Zimbabweans, the same can be said of the country's political landscape which in 2020, had seen some interesting developments. On 31 March 2020, the Supreme Court of Zimbabwe made a ruling that is significantly altering Zimbabwe's political landscape. Interestingly, it was made during the COVID-19 pandemic raising questions on its timing. The ruling pertained to the long-standing dispute on the MDC-T leadership in which Tsvangirai had, in 2016, appointed two deputy Presidents in a move that was seen as unconstitutional. Earlier in May 2019, the High Court had passed a judgement on the matter when an MDC-T member had challenged the legality of the ascendancy of the vice presidents. The High Court ruled that the appointments were illegitimate and so was everything else that had been done thereafter. It ordered that the party had to revert to the structures that existed before the unconstitutional appointments (Magaisa 2020b, 2020c). The MDC-A had appealed the judgement at the Supreme Court, and it was this appeal which was dismissed during the lockdown period. Although the MDC-A argued that the disgruntled member had not exhausted all remedies in the party to have their grievances heard, the Judge had noted that Nelson Chamisa and his faction were in control of party structures and any attempt to seek redress would be futile. The court upheld Thokozani Khupe's legal rights as the Acting President of the MDC-T (as it existed before the illegal appointments), effectively handing her political power and legal recognition. She was then charged with the responsibility of holding of an Extraordinary Elective Congress within three



months. In doing so it also acknowledged that since 2016, a lot had changed, whilst Chamisa had political control over the MDC-A, by law those who had contested in the 2018 elections technically belonged to the MDC-T (Magaisa 2020b, 2020c).

The Supreme Court decision has split the MDC-A as there was witnessed an escalation of infighting after it was announced. Immediately after the ruling, Douglas Mwonozora and Morgen Komichi who had been senior party members and Senators under the MDC-A immediately announced that they were reverting to the MDC-T and taking up the positions of National Chairperson and Secretary General which they held prior to ‘the 2016 illegalities.’ They had gone on to argue that the MDC-A was not a party, but an electoral pact and members had to revert to their respective parties after the elections. The MDC-A had responded by expelling them (Kanambura and Chingono 2020). Armed with the Supreme Court judgement and supported by some MDC-T leaders (including the defectors), Khupe had assumed the Interim Presidency of the party. By 3 July 2020, she had used the powers vested in her in terms of Section 129 (k) of the Constitution to recall 21 Parliamentarians and 10 councillors of the Harare City Council including the Mayor who were said to be no longer representing the interests of the party (Municipal Correspondent 2020a, 2020b). Chamisa, in his position of Secretary of Policy and Research (as per the 2016 structures) was said to have had terminated his membership by breaching the party constitution as he had made unsanctioned appointments and redeployments (Staff Reporter 2020a). The expulsions of MPs, Senators and Councillors were done with the Speakers of Parliament and Senate and the Ministry of Local Government being served with letters of recall, and they had acted upon them. They recognised Khupe as the legitimate leader of the MDC-T and indicated that they would inform the President on the existence of the vacancies in terms of Section 39 (1) Chapter 2:13 as amended, which would later pave way for the holding of by-elections (Herald Reporter 2020a). At the time of writing, the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission (ZEC) had published a notice on the existence of 15 vacancies mainly of proportional representatives in both Houses of Assembly to replace recalled members (Herald Reporter 2020b). It had justified these actions, with its Chief Elections Officer saying that it was legally obligated to announce the existing vacancies and it was not the arbiter of who may or may not recall Members of Parliament, but it merely facilitated legal processes to fill resultant vacancies after recalls (Staff Reporter 2020b). The Khupe led MDC-T had not wasted time. It submitted a list of proportional party representatives to replace the recalled members, with Khupe ironically being on top of the list. ZEC had on 21 August, gazetted the list of names of people nominated to fill the vacant seats in terms of section 39 (6) of the Electoral Act, Chapter 2:13 (Murwira 2020). This action has led to serious moral, legal and political questions but what has been clear is that one faction of the MDC seized an upper hand and during the COVID-19 pandemic, with some of its members entering Parliament ‘through the back door.’

While it was reeling from the recall of its members from Parliament and Council, the MDC-A suffered another major setback when its headquarters was seized by the MDC-T. The MDC-A accused the MDC-T and the security forces of seizing the MDC-A headquarters. The



MDC-A spokeswoman issued a statement saying that ‘...at approximately 10 pm on June 4 2020, a truckload of armed soldiers and police officers assisted by 20 youths had forcibly gained entry into MDC-A Headquarters Harvest House and had assaulted security personnel, and the building had been taken over’ (Matenga 2020). The MDC-A vice presidents were later arrested after trying to gain entry into the building. Since then, the iconic MDC Headquarters (Harvest House, later renamed Morgan Tsvangirai House) which for many ‘...carries the multiple narratives of the party, from its birth in 1999... (and is) ... a symbol of resistance to repression and an undying desire for change’ (Magaisa 2020d), has been occupied by the MDC-T. The MDC-T refuted accusations of hostile takeover and argued that it had been a smooth and peaceful handover and takeover (Matenga and Mhlanga 2020).

There have been some responses to the political assault against the MDC-A from various quarters, especially the recall of MPs and the hostile takeover of its headquarters with the assistance of the state security apparatus. Magaisa (2020c) viewed the recalling as a weapon by the political elite which was being used to settle political scores. There was seen to be the misuse of power granted to parties to settle political differences in a situation where those elected are placed there by the people but recalled by the political elite, thus, there was clear misuse of power. There was also concerted effort by the ZANU (PF) Speaker of Parliament and Senate President, to use the Supreme Court judgement to allow for an absurd situation where a person who was rejected in the 2018 elections and fielded candidates against those who won, now had newfound power to recall them. The MDC-A complained that the recalls were an onslaught against its members chosen by the people, and it was a continuation of electoral theft that had begun in 2018 with multi-party democracy coming under siege (Mahere 2020). ZANU (PF) was accused of meddling in the MDC factional fights and it was seeking to annihilate it. The MDC-A Secretary General said that the onslaught was at three levels. Firstly, through the co-option of fellow comrades to join Khupe, perceived to be a ZANU (PF) sympathiser. The second strategy was seen as being through ‘bogus’ court rulings aimed at internally destabilising the party and weakening its parliamentary representation. The third strategy was said to be a smear campaign against the leadership of the party, aimed at painting them illegitimate and corrupt, and there was concerted effort against the party’s president, with state resources being used (Kanambura and Chingono 2020).

The attack against the MDC-A had not gone unnoticed, with the European Union and the United States Embassy pointing out that the politicisation of the security forces to conduct hostile takeovers of the headquarters of the opposition, the lack of respect for the rule of law and constitutionalism, the partisan deployment of security forces, the disrespect of property rights and the lack of proper investigation into human rights abuses was unhealthy and regressive for democracy (Kanambura and Chingono 2020). In response to these accusations, ZANU (PF) had said that it had no hand in the warring factions. Its acting spokesman, Patrick Chinamasa, said that they had to blame its late leader Tsvangirai for creating the leadership crisis. He said it was important for the opposition to learn that there was the rule of law to be



adhered to. If anyone felt aggrieved, they were free to approach the courts and they had done so and ‘...ZANU (PF) was not there when they went to court, ZANU (PF) was not there when Tsvangirai tore up the constitution’ (Chinamasa quoted by Matenga and Mhlanga 2020). The reinstated MDC-T Secretary General had pointed out that ZANU (PF) was not involved in the party issues in which they were striving to build tolerance and democratic practices within the party. It was thus, imperative that the court judgement had to be followed, otherwise it would give the impression that that the party was an anarchic and lawless outfit that was failing to follow its own party constitution (Matenga and Mhlanga 2020).

What remains clear from these political developments was that ZANU (PF) used the COVID-19 pandemic to decimate the MDC-A politically. With the judiciary, military and legislature compromised, the MDC-A lost significant political ground. We are of the opinion that the recall of parliamentarians was an assault on the oversight role of the legislature during the COVID-19 pandemic. We posit that the alarmingly high number of Statutory Instruments and Executive Orders issued, made the Executive to exercise unlimited powers in 2020 without parliamentary oversight. A weakened parliamentary opposition saw the Executive exploiting constitutional loopholes and exercising legislative functions which should be a preserve of the parliament, undermining constitutionalism, democracy, good governance, the rule of law and the principle of the separation of powers. Policy making, debate and good governance became paralysed, and so did state accountability which was very important during the COVID-19 pandemic. Ultimately it left citizens without representation and a voice in matters concerning their livelihoods. The position of the MDC-A in parliament was thus, weakened. The vacant parliamentary seats are likely to be contested in by-elections post COVID-19 and there is no guarantee that MDC-A will retain the seats. In addition, there is a likelihood that the party will split further with some MPs choosing to abandon the MDC-A to join the MDC-T in order continue to enjoy parliamentary benefits. This is in a context where the Clerk of Parliament in 2020 wrote to recalled members asking them to pay for vehicles allocated to them by Parliament in its vehicle loan scheme or face legal action (Herald Reporter 2020c). It was also in a context where ZANU (PF) embarked on a conciliatory path, readmitting seven members who included former ministers under Mugabe who had been expelled at the height of factional fighting in the party (Pindula News 2020). In 2021, ZANU (PF) continues to co-opt even senior officials from the MDCs, as it gains political mileage.

Political repression and alleged abductions

On 3 May 2020, the MDC-A reported that three of its members including a Member of Parliament (hereafter referred to as the ‘MDC-A trio’) had gone missing after allegedly being arrested by the police. They were accused of having participated in an illegal demonstration in which they had demanded government accountability in handling the COVID-19 pandemic. It was alleged that they had been abducted by security forces from police custody and had been tortured, sexually assaulted and later dumped in Bindura (Nkomo and Vinga 2020). The



case had attracted widespread attention locally and internationally, with similarities being drawn with related cases of harassment, torture and abduction that had occurred during the Mugabe era. What was worrying was that there were a number of similar cases reported in the Second Republic, with UN Special Rapporteurs (see OHCR 2020) noting that in 2019 alone, 49 cases of abduction and torture had been reported without any investigation or accountability of the perpetrators. The case had taken a new twist when the MDC-A trio were arrested and accused of falsifying their abduction. Government Ministers who included the Minister of Home Affairs and the Deputy Information Minister (who was later sacked after making inappropriate comments on social media), accused the MDC-A trio of fabricating the abduction so as to discredit the government (Harding 2020). For them, the issue of importance was that the trio had broken the law by participating in an illegal demonstration during the COVID-19 lockdown. Before they had fully recovered, they were arrested and denied bail several times as they were considered a flight risk, but later were granted bail but with strict conditions. However, in 2021, the trio still has pending cases in the courts.

Amnesty International responded to the abduction and arrest of the trio by condemning it and saying that it shows the escalation of the crackdown by the Zimbabwean state on the right to freedom of expression and criminalisation of dissent in the country (Harding 2020). The abduction has been taken to show that Zimbabwe's political landscape has not changed under the new dispensation. 'Abductions, brutality, torture and disappearances (continue to be) one of ZANU (PF)'s key modus operandi in dealing with critics and political nemesis (Gukurume 2020). The UN Special Rapporteurs had noted that there was now a disturbing pattern of forced disappearances aimed at suppressing protest (OHCR 2020). Such tactics are not new and we note that they were common during the Mugabe presidency where arbitrary arrests and detentions, heavy-handed policing, disregard of court rulings and enactment of repressive laws were common.

7. The push towards constitutional amendments during COVID-19

The public hearings on constitutional amendments set for 15 to 19 June 2020 are a deliberate move by the government to side-line the majority of the people from meaningfully contributing to the Bill. The government is fully aware that the movement of people is restricted ...The ZCTU is questioning the sincerity of the government in going ahead with the hearings amidst the deadly COVID-19 pandemic. We are fearful that some issues will be smuggled into the public hearings. The Constitution is an important document whose amendments must not be hurried (Japhet Moyo, ZCTU President 2020).

The quotation above, issued by the ZCTU President in response to the moves by the government to conduct public hearings on Constitutional Amendment (No 2 Bill) published in the Government Gazette on 31 December 2019, highlights concerns raised in some quarters of Zimbabwean society towards moves to undertake public hearings on constitutional amendments during the COVID-19 pandemic. The feeling was that the Constitutional amendments are premature considering that the Constitution was only adopted in March



2013, with an overwhelming 95% of votes in a referendum. In such a background, it was felt important that the people who voted for the adoption of the Constitution be afforded an opportunity to participate in any moves towards amending it. The move by the government came at a time where citizens and stakeholder participation was not guaranteed due to COVID-19 restrictions (these allowed for a gathering of not more than 50 people, at the time of writing). Most people were of the opinion that having the amendments during a life-threatening pandemic was an attempt to consolidate the power of ZANU (PF), while entrenching authoritarianism. This was reflected in the proposed 28 amendments to the constitution. Interestingly 20 of these were election related. When we reflect on the proposed constitutional amendments in 2020, it is clear to us that they represented negative implications on democracy and had an ulterior motive of authoritarian entrenchment. Some of the amendments were aimed at extending the powers of the President, allowing him to appoint the judiciary without public interviews and removal of the running mate clause among other progressive clauses which had been included and publicly accepted in the negotiated 2013 Constitution. Suspicion on the ulterior motive of the public hearings was that they were being pushed at a time when the opposition was fighting internally and, in the courts, with their numbers severely decimated in Parliament with the recall of its members, thus, there was no effective oversight role over the public hearings.

As indicated earlier, the proposed constitutional amendments have drawn a lot of criticism and condemnation. The timing of public hearings during the COVID-19 pandemic was questionable. As the government adamantly pushed on the public hearings, there were protests from different social actors and groups who include civil society organisations and in particular, two female activists. They openly stated that they were against the amendments and the timing of the public hearings which posed a serious public health threat. The government responded by arresting the activists as they tried to hand over a petition to the Minister of Justice, Legal and Parliamentary Affairs. They were charged with participating in an illegal gathering with the intent of promoting public violence (Machak 2020). At the time of writing the article, they were awaiting trial but their cause had received a lot of attention and sympathy locally and internationally. For most people, the arrests were seen as a continuation of the suppression of the constitutional rights of citizens as they were prohibited from engaging in peaceful protests. We note that the bigger picture in this instance is that using the COVID-19 situation, the government had forged ahead with moves to amend the supreme law of the land to reconfigure the constitutional architecture so that more powers are vested in the Executive as the 'one centre of power' concept which started under Mugabe has continued, something which the 2013 constitution had reversed.



8. Coup rumours and growing unease during the COVID-19 pandemic

The COVID-19 induced lockdown has seen interesting developments in the country's security sector. In June 2020, the Zimbabwe government, in an unprecedented move, saw the Home Affairs Minister flanked by the Minister of State Security and Defence as well as Security Chiefs holding a press conference expressing '...grave concern (on) a recent upsurge in rumours suggesting an imminent military coup d'état in the country' (Minister Kazembe quoted by Agere 2020). The Minister had gone on to say that it was all aimed at undermining the legitimacy of the President and to make the country ungovernable. The Working Committee of the National Security Council wanted to '...unequivocally debunk and dismiss the rumours' (Matenga 2020b). Former senior ZANU (PF) officials who had '...fallen by the wayside in 2017' and were in self-imposed exile, opposition leaders, civil society organisations under the control of some diplomatic missions accredited to Zimbabwe, print and electronic media houses and thousands of internet trolls' were accused of peddling the falsehoods and the narrative of a transitional authority and were warned that the law would 'catch up with them' (Matenga 2020b). The holding of a press conference on rumours by the country's securocrats was quite interesting, highlighting fears within the government of another coup. It was also important in showing the unease and mistrust that is currently prevailing in government, and fears that there is a plot to unseat the government. Whether the fears are valid or not, the holding of the press conference during the COVID-19 pandemic was important in highlighting the increasing uneasiness within the country's political establishment.

The increasing political uneasiness has become more manifest in the face of recent political developments in Zimbabwe. A call for Zimbabweans to participate in a mass action on 31 July 2020 to protest against unbridled corruption by the ZANU (PF) political elite and the deteriorating economic conditions in the country had resulted in stricter policing. Despite the COVID-19 pandemic, activists had pressed ahead for mass action to be undertaken. The call for mass action was made by Transform Zimbabwe President Jacob Ngarivhume, who was joined by other activists. Ngarivhume at that time said:

31 July is a day for your voices to be heard. Zimbabwe has been plundered by selfish, self-serving politicians who do not care how many lives they destroy...Our brothers and sisters in the police and army have been weaponised against us for too long now. We must challenge them now to consider the facts and see that those in power have committed serious crimes against Zimbabwe...31 July is not a political agenda but a people agenda (The Zimbabwean 2020).

In response to the threats of mass action, Ngarivhume and a journalist Hopewell Chin'ono (who had played a sterling job in exposing corruption by the political elite and the Mnangagwa family and its associates) were arrested. The two were accused of conspiring to mobilise anti-



Government protests. At the time of writing, they were out on bail having been previously remanded in custody and denied bail numerous times and committed to the notorious Chikurubi Maximum Prison (Court Reporter 2020). In a bizarre twist, a magistrate had barred his lawyer Beatrice Mtetwa from representing him and recommended that she be charged for contempt of court in relation to some comments posted on social media (Frontline Defenders 2020). In response to perceived threats to its rule, ZANU (PF) responded from the highest levels. At the 341st and 342nd Ordinary Sessions of the ZANU (PF) Politburo, President Mnangagwa and the party's acting spokesman Chinamasa had warned political activists, the opposition and civil society organisations supported by foreign embassies of fanning anti-government sentiments especially on social media. Addressing the Politburo Mnangagwa had warned civil society organisations against deviating from their mandates and working with foreign embassies to support the opposition. Additionally, labour unions were warned for hiding behind workers' movements to push their political agendas. He indicated that civil society organisations risked being deregistered for deviating from their core activities while foreign embassies were reminded that the country was a sovereign state, and that they were not supposed to meddle in its internal affairs or fund destabilisation activities (Chief Reporter 2020). Despite not being the proponent of the mass action and only indicating that the MDC-A would support any mass action, Nelson Chamisa and the MDC-A had been mentioned and warned against mobilising anti-government demonstrators. In the same breath, the social media was accused of providing a platform to organise violence. In typical ZANU (PF) style, Chinamasa had issued a warning against the opposition and 'social media anarchists' that:

We have noted statements from some social media platforms to plan and organise violet protests and overthrow a constitutionally elected government...Let me say to Chamisa and those who are calling for demonstrations on July 31 that what happened on August 1, 2018, and January 2019 will not happen again. We want to send this warning loud and clear to Chamisa that whatever you are threatening on July 31, we say come to the front and face the risk (Chief Reporter 2020)

At another press conference, ZANU (PF), through Chinamasa, had once again warned the US Ambassador whom he uncharacteristically called a 'thug' against engaging in acts of insurgency and warned that he risked expulsion from the country. He had gone on to tell ZANU (PF) supporters and structures to:

...remain alert and ready to defend themselves, defend our people, their property and most importantly, defend peace in their communities against these malcontents, hired hooligans and hoodlums who rejoice at burning properties and looting...ZANU (PF) unambiguously reminds our people that self-defence is a right especially when your security is under threat from these so-called violent protesters (Political Editor 2020, ZANU PF Patriots 2020).

This statement was interpreted by many as encouraging violence. As has been the usual rhetoric, the MDC-A and its 'surrogate organisations' were accused of working with western



embassies to hold illegal and violent demonstrations on July 31 which were disguised as protests against corruption (Chief Reporter 2020). The aim of the demonstration was interpreted as a subversive plot to overthrow a democratically elected Government. This was despite no evidence supporting this claim (Tshuma 2020).

At the 342nd Politburo meeting, President Mnangagwa had once again warned against those planning demonstrations. He had labelled them terrorist organisations who masqueraded as opposition parties and activists and had foreign financiers. They were seen as a threat to democracy, constitutionalism, the rule of law, independence and nationhood, and the state was ready to defend the country's independence (Madzimore and Maphosa 2020). Interestingly, addressing a press conference after the 342nd Ordinary Session of the Politburo, Chinamasa had said that the Politburo had deliberated on a security report which had indicated that there were internal forces that were fomenting discord in the party, and were working with senior officials. He also said some '...individuals were burning the midnight candle, wishing to propagate disunity between President Mnangagwa and Vice President Constantino Chiwenga, at the same time trying to psyche our unsuspecting people into thinking that the party was divided' (Herald Reporter 2020c). The accusations of factionalism are not new and the fact that they were openly discussed during a Politburo meeting showed high levels of mistrust in the party. The situation had reached a climax when two senior ZANU (PF) members were expelled from the party for fanning factionalism, withholding information and supporting the July 31st demonstrations (ZBC Reporter 2020), marking an escalation of infighting within ZANU (PF).

Despite the government denying any governance crisis in the country during the COVID-19 pandemic, in an unprecedented move, the Zimbabwe Catholic Bishops Conference (ZCBC) released a pastoral letter in which it bemoaned the multi-layered crisis in the country citing economic collapse, deepening poverty, food insecurity, corruption and human rights abuses as serious challenges facing the people and had plunged the country into a crisis. It was critical of the governments heavy-handed response to criticism, its failure to take responsibility for its failures, a shrinking democratic space, poor handling of the COVID-19 pandemic and the welfare of health workers amid scandalous COVID-19 corruption allegations. It had made some recommendations on a comprehensive national settlement framework which would help the country to move out of the crisis, but it strongly felt that:

It is not clear to us your Bishops that the national leadership we have has the knowledge, social skills, emotional stability and social orientation to handle the issues that we face as a nation. All we hear from them is blame of our woes on foreigners, colonialism, white settlers and the so-called internal detractors. When are we going to take responsibility for our own affairs? When are we going to submit to the requirements of national accountability? (ZCBC 2020).



The government, as expected, was not pleased with the pastoral letter with responses to it being issued by the Information Minister, the Permanent Secretary in the Information Ministry and the Justice Minister. In the first response issued by the Information Minister, the government had tribally attacked the head of the ZCBC and accused the Bishops of being genocidal. The pastoral letter was said to be full of generalised accusations, reckless and was a crusade against the ruling party intended to incite the public against the government (Bwititi 2020). The other response by the Justice Minister, although toned down, described the pastoral letter for being deliberately provocative, divisive, and insulting the President. The government had decided to summon the Apostolic Anuncio (the Diplomatic Representative of the Vatican to Zimbabwe) in order to ascertain whether or not such statements reflected the official attitude of the Vatican towards Zimbabwe's leadership, or it was of personal view of the individual Bishops (Mavhunga 2020, Chibamu 2020). The spat between the government and the ZCBC was unprecedented in contemporary times, and we believe it goes a long way in showing the deterioration of conditions and relations in the country.

9. Reflections and Conclusion

From the discussion above, what is clear is that in 2020, during the COVID-19 pandemic, political manoeuvrings in the country have not stopped. If we locate these manoeuvrings in a historical context, what remains clear is that the contestations between ZANU (PF) and MDC are far from over, and not much has changed in ZANU (PF) despite the leadership change. The COVID-19 pandemic has provided an opportunity for ZANU (PF) to consolidate its political stronghold over key institutions while dismantling the MDC by taking advantage of factional fighting within the party and supporting the ambitions of some of its members. An important takeaway from the article is that from a figurational sociological perspective, COVID-19 has exposed how the country's political landscape is dominated by individuals and organisations who exist in interdependent relationships and are prepared to use any opportunity to gain political capital. The COVID-19 pandemic saw heightened political manoeuvrings, and that political actors used every available opportunity to gain political mileage. In the article, what is clear is that ZANU (PF) has been strategic in using the COVID-19 pandemic to further decimate the already divided opposition. While there is no tangible evidence of it intervening in opposition factional fights, the fact that the ZANU (PF) government allowed processes which weakened the MDC-A to occur when the whole country was under lockdown or restrictions point to its covert support of happenings in the party. The move by the government to push forward constitutional amendments during the pandemic where there was limited public participation and limited representation and lobbying by the opposition in communities and Parliament blatantly point to its moves towards consolidation of power. What was alarming was that the proposed amendments had sought to increase the powers



of the President, in blatant disregard of opposition voices. This is a strong sign of a trajectory towards entrenched authoritarianism in the country.

The COVID-19 pandemic limited citizen participation, making moves towards authoritarianism easier for ZANU (PF). For Zimbabwe, the COVID-19 pandemic period will be remembered as a time where there have been moves towards undermining democratic processes, increased securitisation, obsessive control and blatant state repression of freedoms as outlined in the country's constitution. The lockdown measures increased the powers of the Executive to use force and curtail freedoms, but interestingly, they demonstrated that the state was increasingly becoming paranoid, fearful of a possible coup and wary of a possible uprising. Consequently, in 2020 there was increased surveillance and control. The challenges facing citizens were not restricted to freedoms, but the pandemic and the resultant lockdown negatively impacted on livelihoods. For those in the informal sector, restrictions to trade and the demolition of their places of businesses negatively impacted on their welfare and wellbeing. The crisis in the country as rightly pointed out by the Catholic Bishops Pastoral Letter which has received support locally, regionally and internationally; but the Zimbabwe government remained steadfast in its conviction that there was no crisis in the country. As the impact of COVID-19 is still unravelling, it remains to be seen how the politics of the country and the lives of the citizens will be affected. However, preliminary evidence shows that people's lives and the country's political landscape will not be the same after the pandemic.

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