

**University of Alberta**

**The Politics of Food in Zimbabwe (2000-2007)**

by

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**Dedication**

**To Rutendo, Annah and Juliet Jaricha**

## **Abstract**

Southern Africa faced a serious food security crisis after a three-year drought which started in the 1999/2000 season. In 2002, Zimbabwe and its neighbours declared food emergencies. With improved climatic conditions in 2003, Zimbabwe failed to recuperate from the crisis despite its neighbours showing signs of recovery. Instead, the food crisis in Zimbabwe intensified and has threatened the lives of many ordinary Zimbabweans. This paper argues that the land reform programme and its after effects, other government policies, international sanctions and intractable political posturing have all played a significant role in causing and prolonging the post 2000 food crisis in Zimbabwe. International and local food aid became a priority to feed the millions of hungry Zimbabweans. With severe food shortages, food aid became an important political tool used by the main players in the food distribution process to win support or discredit the other side.

Drawing from the political theories of famine, this research argues that the food crisis in Zimbabwe is largely due to the failure of political accountability by the government of Zimbabwe, and also by the international relief organizations and other stakeholders who are in and outside Zimbabwe. With a thorough review of primary, secondary and scholarly literature, helped by informal discussions with people living in Zimbabwe, the research found out that the Zimbabwe food crisis has thus far failed to be resolved due to lack of political commitment and competence by the government of Zimbabwe; and an unwillingness by the international community to work with the Mugabe government which many in the west see as a dictatorship.

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## **Acronyms and Abbreviations**

AIDS:	Acquired Human Immuno-deficiency Syndrome
ESAP:	Economic Structural Adjustment Programme
FAO:	Food and Agricultural Organization
FEWSNET:	Famine Early Warning System Network
FOSENET:	Food Security Network
GDP:	Gross Domestic Product
GMB:	Grain Marketing Board
HDR:	Human Development Report
HIV:	Human Immuno-deficiency Virus
HRW:	Human Rights Watch
HVI:	Household Vulnerability Index
ICG:	International Crisis Group
IRIN:	Integrated Regional Information Network
MDC:	Movement for Democratic Change
NGO:	Non-Governmental Organization
ODI:	Overseas Development Institute
UNDP:	United Nations Development Programme
WFP:	World Food Programme
ZANU PF:	Zimbabwe African National Union Patriotic Front
ZAPU PF:	Zimbabwe African People's Union
ZimVAC:	Zimbabwe Vulnerability Assessment Committee
ZPP:	Zimbabwe Peace Project

## Chapter 1

### Introduction to the Food Crisis in Zimbabwe

#### 1.1 Introduction

Zimbabwe is a country once hailed as a model for progressive postcolonial transformation in Africa. However, after 2000, it has become into a country marred by political violence, severe food shortages, displacement and societal destruction. In the midst of political and economic turmoil, it is the food crisis that has taken the centre stage as families struggle to put food on the table on a daily basis. From being a regional breadbasket and a net exporter of food, the country now imports food to feed its increasingly impoverished millions. Since 2000, the country has faced serious political and economic crises which are threatening the very existence of Zimbabwe as a nation state. Since 2000, reports of deaths from starvation have been on the increase in both the rural and urban areas. Before 2001, Zimbabwe was a main supplier to the World Food Programme's (WFP) Africa Relief stocks. WFP even maintained a small procurement office in Harare. Today, the WFP is appealing to international donors for food donations to feed the starving Zimbabweans. A 2006 United Nations report states that Zimbabweans have the shortest life expectancy in the world, of only 35 years.<sup>1</sup> The report also adds that Zimbabwe is the only country in Southern Africa with a negative population growth rate, although this issue of negative population growth rate could be due to massive migration. Tobacco, a commodity that once drove the Zimbabwean

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<sup>1</sup> 'Zimbabwe: Adult Population to Die Before Age 40, says report', IRIN News, April 7, 2006.

economy, has fallen to an output of only sixty million kilograms in 2005 from two hundred and thirty million kilograms in 1999.<sup>2</sup>

With food supplies increasingly scarce in Zimbabwe, many allegations and counter-allegations began circulating that food was being used for political advantage. This was occurring despite pleas from then United Nations Secretary-General, Kofi Annan<sup>3</sup>, among others, that political considerations should not affect food aid efforts in Zimbabwe. The aim of my thesis is to investigate, understand and explain the causes of what is known simply as ‘the food crisis’ in Zimbabwe. The thesis will also explore the factors that have contributed to the continuation of the food crisis for almost ten years. An important context of this exploration is Zimbabwe’s own postcolonial history, one in which the county was recognized as one that has both the resources and the capacity to feed not only its citizens, but also its neighbours in southern Africa. Central to the discussion will be the role of politics in the food crisis and how intractable political posturing has become a major obstacle in finding long term solutions. Given the protracted political contestations between the two major political parties in Zimbabwe, which I argue has aggravated the food crisis, this thesis also explores how the ordinary people in Zimbabwe have managed to cope and survive one of the worst food crises in the country’s history.

Although Zimbabwe has been teetering on the brink of a famine, I will argue that the food crisis in the country is not a famine. There are competing conceptions of what constitutes a famine, including those put forward by scholars like B. Golpalkrishna

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<sup>2</sup> Renson Gasela, in NewZimbabwe.com, 06 November 2006

<sup>3</sup> United Nations Press Release, ‘Secretary General Appeals for Continued Humanitarian Assistance to Southern Africa: Expresses Particular Concern About Zimbabwe’, SG/SM 8493 AFR/514, 14 Nov. 2002.

Kumar, Amartya Sen, and Moore, et al.<sup>4</sup> Central to the dominant definitions of a famine have been three main elements; first, severe food shortages; second, starvation; and, third, excess mortality. They also seem to agree that famines often affect the most vulnerable, marginal and least powerful groups in the community. In Zimbabwe, although the number of people dying every week is estimated at around 3000 to 3500<sup>5</sup>, it is not clear that food shortages are directly responsible for most of the deaths, although it may be a contributing factor. In Zimbabwe, the major cause of death is HIV/AIDS, followed by malaria and recently, cholera<sup>6</sup>. In addition, food produced in Zimbabwe is easily and cheaply available in neighbouring countries. With an economy near collapse, shortages of basics such as health care, good housing and poor sanitary conditions all contribute to making ordinary people more vulnerable and their lives more difficult and uncertain. In addition, the food crisis in Zimbabwe has affected not just the poor people, but also professionals and business people who enjoyed very comfortable lives before 2000. That said, the political theories of famine offer a useful point of departure for my discussion about the food crisis in Zimbabwe because they manage to capture the political, economic and social complexities in Zimbabwe. Although there are many definitions of what constitutes a food crisis, this thesis will discuss the food crisis as defined by the World Food Programme (WFP). The WFP defines food crisis as the incidence of serious food shortages across a country; where hunger deaths are rare; the incidence of acute

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<sup>4</sup> B. Golpalkrishna Kumar, 'Ethiopian Famines 1973-1985: A Case Study', in Jean Dreze and Amartya Sen, (eds.), *The Political Economy of Hunger, Vol 2: Famine Prevention*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1990; Amartya Sen, *Poverty and Famines*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1981; Moore, et al, 'Mortality Rates in Displaced and Resident Populations of Central Somalia During 1992 Famine', *Lancet* 341 (8850), April 1993, p 936.

<sup>5</sup> Tom. Woods, Roger Bate, and Marian L Tupy, 'New Hope for Zimbabwe', CATO Institute, February 6, 2008.

<sup>6</sup> Alex Bell, 'Zimbabwe: Cholera Statistics Rise Again as New Malaria Fears Grow.' *AllAfrica.com*, 4 February, 2009.

malnutrition is less than in a state of famine; however, there is a significant incidence of chronic malnutrition and the country is still unable to achieve food self-reliance and is significantly dependent on international aid.<sup>7</sup>

There is a robust debate within the academic literature and policy community on what has caused and continues to sustain the food crisis for almost a decade now. On the one hand, the Robert Mugabe government in Zimbabwe has been quick to blame the continuous drought, unpredictable rains witnessed in Southern Africa over the past six or seven years and, above all, the impact of international sanctions<sup>8</sup>. On the other hand, critics of the Mugabe have blamed his government and policies for the severe food crisis gripping the country, particularly policies and practices related to the land reform programme, price controls on basic goods, and the erosion of good governance and the rise of nationalistic dictatorship.<sup>9</sup>

## 1.2 The Politics of Food in Zimbabwe

The use of food for political reasons in Zimbabwe is not an entirely new ‘political weapon’. It is a successfully proven political tactic. However, recent literature on the politics of food in Zimbabwe often does not make this historical connection. Zimbabwe gained independence from Britain after a bloody and long liberation war. Contemporary studies and reports on the food crisis in Zimbabwe often do not mention that food was used as a political weapon by the Rhodesian government as a way to weaken the

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<sup>7</sup> Amnesty International, AFR 46/026/2004, 15 October 2004

<sup>8</sup> Ben Cousins, “The Zimbabwe Crisis in its Wider Context: The Politics of Land, Democracy and Development in Southern Africa” in Amanda Hammar, and Brian Raftopoulos, (Eds.) *Zimbabwe’s Unfinished Business - Rethinking Land, State and Nation in the Context of Crisis*, Weaver Press, Harare, 2003, p 275

<sup>9</sup> (ibid); Also see ‘Basildon Peta: Mugabe’s Lust for Power is at Core of Nation’s Crisis’, The Independent (UK), 9 March 2002.

liberation insurgency. The Rhodesian government's 'Operation Turkey' restricted food supplies in rural areas until days before independence<sup>10</sup>. This created widespread hunger in rural areas where the liberation movement enjoyed most of its support. The rural population was the support system for those fighting for independence often called the 'comrades'. Rural communities provided food, new clothes and information to the 'comrades'. With hunger in rural communities, the Rhodesian government knew well that it would impact the effectiveness of the liberation movement.

After 1982, the relations between two main political parties, the ruling ZANU PF and the main opposition Zimbabwe African People's Union (ZAPU) descended into a civil war. The years 1982 and 1983 witnessed poor harvests throughout the country. Matabeleland, where ZAPU had its support base, was the worst affected because of its geographical location. Kriger notes that a 1986 report by Lawyers' Committee for Human Rights concluded that food was used a weapon of political coercion in Matabeleland and noted similarities with the Rhodesian government's 'Operation Turkey'.<sup>11</sup> According to Kriger, the army controlled all the movements of food in the region between 1983 and 1986 and most people ended up surviving from wild fruits.<sup>12</sup> During the same period, government provided abundant food aid to the rest of the country. ZANU PF and ZAPU signed an agreement to unite in 1987 and for the next twelve years, there was no viable opposition in the country. Surprisingly, even without any opposition to talk about, accusations and allegations that ZANU PF used food for

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<sup>10</sup> Kevin Danaher, 'The Political Economy of Hunger in Rhodesia and Zimbabwe', in *The Recreation of Zimbabwe: Prospects for Education and Rural Reconstruction* Issue, A Journal of Opinion, Vol. 11, No. ¾, 1981, p 21.

<sup>11</sup> Norma Kriger, "ZANU (PF) Strategies in General Elections, 1980–2000: Discourse and Coercion" in *The Journal of African Affairs*, Oxford Journals 104(414): 2005,p 12,.

<sup>12</sup> Norma Kriger, p 13.

electoral advantage never went away. A *Financial Gazette* article of 28 April 1994 gave a documented report of how the government was using drought relief to gain political support and encourage voter turnout. In the 1995 general election, ZANU PF won 118 of the 120 contested seats. The other two seats, Chipinge North and Chipinge South, were won by ZANU (Ndonga) because the leader of that party, Ndabaningi Sithole, came from that region. In 55 constituencies, ZANU PF candidates won unopposed.<sup>13</sup> The point here is that despite no viable opposition party, ZANU PF was aware of the growing public discontent and that was why they wanted a resounding victory and a higher voter turnout to prove that they still had the mandate from the majority. Also, there were some in government who wanted power without accountability because of their corrupt practices. Therefore, after 2000 when its fortunes were on a freefall, ZANU PF resorted to political survival skills that have a proven record. Therefore as the country moves forward in trying to resolve the food crisis, it is important to understand that the use of food as a political weapon has been part of the Zimbabwean politics for decades.

Food is a basic human need without which life is not normal. The UN Charter on the International Convention on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR, Article 11) stipulates that all member states adhering to the Convention have a mandate to recognize the right to adequate food and to ensure equitable distribution of world food supplies in relation to need. Article 11 is very clear that food should not be used as an instrument for political and economic pressure. The Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) in its constitution emphasizes raising levels of nutrition and standards of living as

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<sup>13</sup> Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), 'Elections Held in 1995', Zimbabwe Parliamentary Chamber, Parliament, 1995, found at [http://www.ipu.org/parline-e/reports/arc/2361\\_95.htm](http://www.ipu.org/parline-e/reports/arc/2361_95.htm), accessed on May 7, 2008.

means to ensure that humanity is free from hunger. Zimbabwe is a member of FAO and a signatory to the ICESCR and so is obligated under international law to ensure that food distribution is based on need and not politics. This applies to all those involved in the food aid regime in Zimbabwe. From the literature, there is a consensus that political and ideological factors, and not need, often determine a household's entitlement to food. The disagreement comes on 'who' is using food for political gain. The government blames the opposition party and western powers. For their turn, the international aid organizations and local independent civic groups blame the government. This thesis aims to understand how and by whom, food has been deprived to the need for political reasons. Although the evidence against the government is enormous, the NGOs and other food aid groups are not blameless. The politics of food in Zimbabwe is evidence that 'Right to Food' as a human right championed by the UN has been neglected as a practice in some parts of the world. As Ahluwalia notes, even in countries like India where enough food is produced locally, there are social and political obstacles to the realization of the 'Right to Food'.<sup>14</sup>

Sobhan offers an interesting theory that in cases of food scarcity political decisions often determine individual entitlement to food.<sup>15</sup> The fact that the government takes a central role in the distribution of food means that politics becomes a factor. Sobhan adds that governments that are mainly concerned with regime survival give preference to their interests rather than citizen needs.<sup>16</sup> In Zimbabwe, the government has been accused of favouring certain groups or communities they view as pro-Mugabe.

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<sup>14</sup> Pooja Ahluwalia, "The Implementation of the Right to Food at the National Level: A Critical Examination of the Indian Campaign on the Right to Food as an Effective Operationalization of Article 11 of ICESCR", Centre for Human Rights and Global Justice Working Paper - Economic, Social and Cultural Rights Series No. 8, NYU School of Law, 2004, p 8.

<sup>15</sup> Rehman Sobhan, 'The Politics of Hunger and Entitlement' in Jean Dreze and Amartya Sen, (eds.), *Political Economy of Hunger, Vol. 1: Entitlement and Well-Being*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1991, p 81.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

Those seeking regime change have also been accused of being reluctant or unwilling to provide food aid to those supporting the regime they seek to remove. There are other studies carried out in other countries like Ethiopia that actually support Sobhan's theory. Ethiopia has had food aid distribution for a long time. Despite Ethiopian government's declarations that food aid will be targeted towards the needy, the distribution itself was implemented by local authorities and politicians who had political favours to gain and, of course, political scores to settle.<sup>17</sup>

In Zimbabwe, historically, food came from local production and, in drought years, from food aid. With local production increasingly failing to meet local demand, food aid became more vital. From the literature, politics has also played a role in the international food aid regime. A hypothesis put forward by Shapouri and Rosen is that donor countries have political objectives too and depoliticizing the allocation of food aid, if achievable, could actually have a negative impact.<sup>18</sup> Donor countries can cut the budgets allocated for food aid if they feel that they can no longer achieve their political objectives through food aid. In Zimbabwe, the Shapouri-Rosen hypothesis can help explain the fact that as the relations between the government and the west deteriorated, international food aid through government channels also dried up. With a government no longer serving the political interests of the donor countries, food aid was redirected through channels that serve those interests.

It is very evident in primary, secondary and even scholarly sources that most of on-the-ground research on the distribution of food aid in Zimbabwe has been conducted

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<sup>17</sup> Jayne, T.S. et al. 'Understanding and Improving Food Aid Targeting in Rural Ethiopia,' USAID Number 50. 2000, p 2-3.

<sup>18</sup> Shahla.Shapouri and Stacey Rosen 'Food Security and Food Aid Distribution', Agriculture Information Bulletin No. 765-4, USDA, Washington, 2001 found at <http://www.ers.usda.gov/publications/aib7654/aib765-4.pdf> (accessed on 20 October 2008).

by implementers or sponsors of the food aid Programmes. Unfortunately, most of these groups have political objectives and that has hindered a good debate on the food crisis in Zimbabwe. Reading from various sources, it is not easy to fully comprehend the reality and severity of the food crisis. In a number of sources, the food crisis is discussed to provide evidence that the Robert Mugabe government has failed. Studies are carried out not to help in resolving the food crisis, but to provide justification for the regime change agenda. This chapter argues that although Mugabe's departure from the political scene is necessary, his departure alone will not ensure long-term food security in the country. There is need for a new approach that completely separates politics from issues of food security. This approach can be developed only by an inclusion of all stakeholders. The 'Right to Food' should be the guiding principle towards achieving long-term food security. This chapter refers to food security as defined by the Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO). FAO states that food security exists when all people, at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life. FAO identifies four conditions towards ensuring food security: adequacy of food supply or availability; stability of supply without fluctuations or shortages from season to season or from year to year; accessibility to food or affordability; and, quality and safety of food.<sup>19</sup>

### 1.3 The Zimbabwe Crisis in Context

In February 2000, there was a referendum in Zimbabwe, which required citizens to vote for or against a new constitution. Those who were in support of the draft constitution were required to vote 'yes' and those against the new constitution were

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<sup>19</sup> FAO, 'The State of Food Insecurity in the World 2001', Rome 2002.

required to vote 'no'. The draft constitution received a lot of criticism from the main opposition party, the Movement for Democratic Change, as well as from civil society organizations, such as the National Constitutional Assembly (NCA), because they saw the new constitution as an attempt by Mugabe to extend his power<sup>20</sup>. Critics claimed that the main provision of the draft constitution was to strengthen Mugabe's grip on the presidency. The draft constitution, if it had passed, would have limited future presidents to two terms. However, Mugabe would have been able to stand for another two terms. The draft constitution would also have made his government and military officials immune from prosecution for any illegal acts committed while in office. There also was a clause in the draft constitution that would empower the government to seize land held by white farmers, demanding that the British government pay compensation.<sup>21</sup> Critics saw this as a ploy by Mugabe, and his party, the Zimbabwe African National Union-Patriotic Front (ZANU PF), which had ruled the country since independence in 1980, to win the support of the rural masses, whose land had been appropriated during the colonial era. Almost thirty years since independence, over six million black Zimbabweans are still overcrowded on unfertile communal areas. In addition, after producing its draft, the Constitutional Commission that had authored it was legally required to disband. Instead, Mugabe kept the Commissioners on and transformed them into a campaign team for a 'yes' vote.

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<sup>20</sup> Amanda Hammar, and Brian Raftopoulos, "Zimbabwe's Unfinished Business: Rethinking Land, State and Nation" in Amanda Hammar, Brian Raftopoulos, and Stig Jensen (Eds.) *Zimbabwe's Unfinished Business - Rethinking Land, State and Nation in the Context of Crisis*, Weaver Press, Harare, 2003, p 1

<sup>21</sup> John Hatchard, 'Some Lessons of Constitution Making from Zimbabwe,' *Journal of African Law*, 45, 2, , 2001 pp 210–216

In a result that surprised most commentators, the vote was 578,000 in favour of the new constitution and 697,754 against, with a low turnout of just over 20 percent<sup>22</sup>. Voters in the major metropolitan cities, like Harare and Bulawayo, voted ‘no’ by three to one. In the rural heartlands, where voters were expected to vote ‘yes’, there were widespread abstentions.<sup>23</sup> Following the victory of the ‘No Vote’, the political, economic and socio-cultural sphere in Zimbabwe dramatically changed. With presidential and general elections in June 2000, the defeat of the ‘Yes Vote’ was seen as a rejection of Mugabe and his rule. For Mugabe and his party, the victory of the ‘No Vote’ was a wake-up call that marked the beginning of what is often referred to as the ‘Zimbabwe Crisis’. Although, one can argue that the Zimbabwe Crisis had started much earlier, it became official after February 2000. ZANU-PF's propaganda declared that the new constitution was supposed to be a final break with colonialism. The ‘No voters’ were labelled “sell-out Zimbabweans” who wanted to retain a colonial-style constitution because it protected the inequalities created by the colonial rule. In April 2000, despite its defeat in the February constitutional referendum, the parliament passed Constitutional Amendment Number 16 Act, 2000 that allowed land to be taken from commercial farmers without compensation for the cost of the land but with compensation for improvements.<sup>24</sup>

The Zimbabwe Crisis has become a source of much debate in the academic literature, the political arena and the media. Although not many people will deny the fact that Zimbabwe is in a crisis, there is a heated debate on what constitutes and has caused the crisis, what are the consequences, who is affected and who is to blame. Two main

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<sup>22</sup> Barbra Slaughter and Stuart Nolan, Zimbabwe, ‘Referendum Defeat for Mugabe Shakes ZANU-PF Government’, International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI), 22 February 2000.

<sup>23</sup> *ibid*

<sup>24</sup> *ibid*

schools of thought have emerged in trying to explain the source of the crisis. The first school, which I will call the redistributive school, sees the land reform process as part of the redistributive project that aims at redressing the colonial inequalities. Mugabe and the members of his government and their supporters, both local and across the African Diaspora, subscribe to this argument. They argue that the crisis has been caused by the economic sanctions imposed on the country by the capitalist west which is not happy about the land reform in Zimbabwe. Addressing the Zimbabwe Parliament on July 25, 2006, Mugabe stated that the economic challenges facing the country were ‘orchestrated by European Union, The United States of America at the behest of our erstwhile colonizers’.<sup>25</sup> The government-controlled media in Zimbabwe sells this message on a daily basis. In the streets of Zimbabwe’s major towns, the Zimbabwe Herald has earned a nickname ‘the error-ld’ because of its anti-west propaganda and continued deliberate misrepresentation of facts. Nelson Chamisa of the MDC, on numerous occasions, encouraged the Herald and the Zimbabwe Broadcasting Corporations (ZBC) to ‘appreciate that they are not political appendages and ... to simply serve the people’.<sup>26</sup> Raftopoulos notes that the land redistribution process in Zimbabwe has been seen by those who support the redistributive school as an indicator of the anti-neoliberal/anti-capitalist movement championed by Mugabe and his ruling party ZANU PF.<sup>27</sup> As a result, Mugabe’s anti-imperialist rhetoric earned him standing ovations at the World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg in September of 2002, at the SADC trade bloc summit in 2003 and Thabo Mbeki’s re-election swearing-in ceremony

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<sup>25</sup> President Mugabe Claims Victory over Our Colonizers’, the Zimbabwe Herald, July 26, 2006.

<sup>26</sup> ‘Chamisa Decries Herald Hate Speech’, The Zimbabwe Times, 22 September 2008

<sup>27</sup> Brian Raftopoulos ‘The Zimbabwe Crisis and the Challenges for the Left’ in Simon, D et al (Eds.) *Journal of Southern African Studies – Special Focus: Zimbabwe*, Vol. 32, No. 2, Routledge, Oxfordshire, June 2006, p 212.

in 2004 .<sup>28</sup> Writing in September 2002, a South African journalist Harry Mashabela argued that Robert Mugabe was ‘speaking for black people worldwide... and the ovations were tacit expressions of appreciation for his courage.’<sup>29</sup> The redistributive school and its black liberation narrative claim its legitimacy in its historical opposition to colonialism with special emphasis on the peasantry.

I refer to the second school, which challenges the redistributive school, as the neoliberal school because it defines the Zimbabwe crisis as a governance crisis. The neoliberal school argues that the Zimbabwe crisis has been caused by the breakdown of good governance and the rise of a dictator. For example, the Crisis in Zimbabwe Coalition, which is a coalition of more than 350 civic organizations, demanded an end to political violence; establishment of law and order; a transitional authority; and a return to legitimacy and good governance as basis for renewal, national healing and economic prosperity<sup>30</sup>. The coalition’s solutions to the crisis are related to the good governance agenda because it sees the crisis in Zimbabwe as the absence of democracy. The MDC, commercial farmers groups, and human rights groups and international donors, not always working together, belong to the neoliberal school because they emphasize political and human rights and promote property rights and other economic rights which is a direct challenge to the redistributive school. The good governance agenda promoted by the World Bank and International Monetary Fund in the context of a neoliberal orthodoxy aims to reduce the state and governmental intervention in the economy

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<sup>28</sup> C. Alden and Ward Anseeuw, ‘Liberalization versus Anti-imperialism: The Impact of Narrative on Southern African Land Policies since Zimbabwe's Fast-track’, *Colloque international “Les frontières de la question foncière – At the frontier of land issues”*, Montpellier, 2006, p 3.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> ‘Crisis in Zimbabwe Coalition – Statement on the Memorandum of Understanding’, Crisis in Zimbabwe Coalition, Harare, 21 July 2008.

although, paradoxically, it also calls for greater democratic participation through voluntary and greater civic participation. However, since 2000, there has been increasing government involvement in the economy and limited civic participation mainly due to increasing government oppression, thereby increasing the democratic deficit in Zimbabwe and undermining core values of the good governance agenda. The authoritarian way in which both the land reform and the democratic process have been handled by the Mugabe government has caused a lot of concern for many observers and it provided the anti-Mugabe groups with a lot of argumentative ammunition.

The schools discussed above are both useful in explaining the causes of the Zimbabwe crisis. However, they are not adequate if taken separately. Neither of the two schools fully captures the reality on the ground on its own. The problem is that each school tends to focus on one side of the story and to reject the argument being made by the other school. For example, those who support Robert Mugabe place more emphasis on the arguments of the anti-imperialist agenda and, thus, deliberately turning a blind eye to the democratic decay and increasing human rights abuses in Zimbabwe. Raftopoulos argues that those who oppose Mugabe tend to ignore the seriousness of the land question and its ramifications.<sup>31</sup> The land question in Zimbabwe is for real and that is why Mugabe has managed, for some time, to use it to justify his actions and to stay in power.

The land question became a central issue towards the end of the 1990s because of a number of factors. The Economic Structural Adjustment Programme (ESAP) adopted in 1991 created a dilemma for the Zimbabwean government. Shaped by the dominant neoliberal orthodoxy promoted by the Ronald Reagan administration in the United States and Margaret Thatcher in Great Britain, the ESAPs demanded reduced government

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<sup>31</sup> Brian Raftopoulos in David Simon et al (Eds), June 2006, p 216.

involvement in the economy, privatization, outsourcing, deregulation and retrenchment. The ESAP did not bring about the intended economic results. Instead, it functioned to increase poverty in the country and, at the same time, undermined the government's capacity to deal with the increasing social and economic challenges because it had few economic options at its disposal.<sup>32</sup> The government became trapped between SAP conditionalities and rising popular dissatisfaction. This, in turn, created a crisis of legitimacy and raised questions about the competence of the ruling party. This growing dissatisfaction and dissent gave rise to the formation of a viable opposition party in 1999. The Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) was formed from a coalition of broad-based social forces, which were critical of the democratic inadequacies of the ruling ZANU PF party. The MDC emphasizes political, civic and human rights as its ideology. With increasing economic challenges in the country especially in urban areas and a general increasing frustration towards the ruling party, the MDC managed to capture a ready support base in urban areas and some civil servants, like teachers, in rural areas. Despite violence against the MDC by the government, and criticism by the ruling party that the opposition party is an extension of the neoliberal west, the MDC has remained a viable and relevant political player in Zimbabwean politics.

For the ruling party to stay relevant, it made the issues of black empowerment and land redistribution its main, if not the only, policy focus. Land reform became the main signal for national economic redress, hence the 2000 election campaign slogan: "The Land is the Economy; The Economy is the Land".<sup>33</sup> The land reform process became racialized. It soon became framed as a 'black versus white' issue and those blacks who

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<sup>32</sup> John Makamure et al, 'Liberalization of Agricultural Markets', SAPRI/Zimbabwe, March 2001 p 50-1.

<sup>33</sup> David Pottie, 'Parliamentary Elections in Zimbabwe – 2000', Electoral Institute of Southern Africa, Vol. 21, Issue 3, September 2002; 485

oppose the ruling party were labelled ‘puppets’. The racialization of the land reform processes have more to do with the fact that by 2000, Zimbabwe, South Africa and Namibia’s commercial farms were still largely in the hands of the white minorities, who had gained this land in the context of colonial appropriation and white minority rule and apartheid. The failure of the postcolonial states in Zimbabwe and neighbouring countries to change these racial patterns of ownership and production provided Mugabe with a powerful political argument that the post-2000 fast track land resettlement Programme was going to symbolize the end of the colonial legacy in Zimbabwe.

It is difficult to argue that the Zimbabwe crisis is about a single issue such as land and the history behind the land question in Zimbabwe; however, this chapter does place significant emphasis on how the issues of land were used by the Mugabe regime as foil for their authoritarian tendencies, hunger for power and for its failures as government. The land issue, and the need for redistribution, is a pressing matter and the people of Zimbabwe have cause to be aggrieved. That said, the farm invasions after February 2000 were not instigated by ordinary citizens, in some kind of spontaneous uprising against land inequity. Rather, it was, in part, a political tactic used by a regime facing a political demise. Pottie, for example, states that the war veterans and youth militia used in the land invasions were on ZANU PF payroll<sup>34</sup>. Some of the leading war veterans who led the farm invasions later become ZANU PF candidates in the June 2000 elections. Chenjerai Hunzvi, the chairperson of the Zimbabwe War Veterans Association (ZWVA) won the seat in Chikomba in the 2000 election after large-scale political violence against the opposition party members.

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<sup>34</sup> David Pottie, pp.488.

The response of the international community did not help matters. In September 2001, Zimbabwe was declared ineligible to use IMF funds and could not borrow funds under the Poverty Reduction Growth Fund (PRGF) facility because of its arrears.<sup>35</sup> After the 2002 elections were challenged by the opposition MDC, amid widespread reports of electoral fraud, the European Union (EU) and the United States saw the government of Zimbabwe as illegitimate and targeted sanctions were imposed on an initial number of seventy high ranking officials and their families.<sup>36</sup> This number has been increasing ever since; there were more than two hundred people on the list by 2008<sup>37</sup>. These people are not allowed travel to EU countries or the US, and they cannot hold property and money in the EU or US. This move by the international community was used by Mugabe to argue that the economic crisis in the country is a result of the sanctions imposed on Zimbabwe by the international community because of its actions to redistribute land. The issue of sanctions is a contentious issue. The EU, for example, has been very adamant that it is not imposing economic or trade sanctions against Zimbabwe, the country, but against an illegitimate Mugabe government, its economic policies, the manner in which it was carrying out its land reform, the breakdown of the rule of law, and ongoing human rights abuses.<sup>38</sup> The US also makes the same argument that these are ‘smart sanctions’ targeted against certain individuals in the government. Yet the results on the ground prove that these sanctions are anything but ‘smart’. The targeted individuals have, in

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<sup>35</sup> ‘Zimbabwe Must Clear Arrears, says IMF’, *Financial Gazette*, 20 September 2001

<sup>36</sup> David Moore, “Zimbabwe: Twists on the Tale of Primitive Accumulation”, in Malinda S. Smith, ed. *Globalizing Africa* (Trenton: Africa World Press, 2003); and David Moore, ‘Democracy is Coming to Zimbabwe,’ *Australian Journal of Political Science*, 36, 1 (March 2001).

<sup>37</sup> Australian Government, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, ‘Zimbabwe: Targeted Sanctions Regime’ found at [http://www.dfat.gov.au/un/unsc\\_sanctions/zimbabwe.html](http://www.dfat.gov.au/un/unsc_sanctions/zimbabwe.html) (accessed April 15, 2009).

<sup>38</sup> Southern African Regional Poverty Network (SARP), ‘Position of the European Union on sanctions against Zimbabwe’, 2003 found at <http://www.sarpn.org.za/documents/d0000530/index.php> (accessed, 29 July 2008).

many instances, managed to circumvent these sanctions. Instead, it is ordinary Zimbabweans who are actually feeling the effects of the smart sanctions because their impact goes well beyond the targeted individuals. The fact that the leadership of a country is targeted has a ripple effect on the country as a whole. The targeted sanctions also affect how others perceive and deal with the country in regional and international relations. When the government of a country can no longer do business with other countries, the populace of that country is bound to be affected. In the June 2007 Monetary Policy announcements, the Chairman of the Reserve Bank of Zimbabwe, Gideon Gono, admitted that inflation has been caused more by the fact that they can no longer buy anything on credit. Therefore, whenever they have to import something they have to print money to buy foreign currency on the black market. Food is the largest contributor to the inflation basket and the government has to mobilize significant amounts of foreign currency to import food alone.<sup>39</sup> Business people with no connection to the government have been complaining that doing business outside the country has become a nightmare and more costly because their export goods are being held at the airports or ports until they prove that they are not connected to the government.<sup>40</sup> For ordinary Zimbabweans, the experience of applying for a visa or just trying to enter another country has become extremely difficult, if not impossible especially for the majority.

The biggest challenge faced by the opposition in Zimbabwe is its lack of emphasis on economic rights and social well-being. On the one hand, ZANU PF supporters argue that the human rights agenda in Zimbabwe and other African countries

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<sup>39</sup> Gideon Gono, Governor for the Reserve Bank of Zimbabwe, Monetary Policy Statement, Government of Zimbabwe, June 2007

<sup>40</sup> BBC, World Debate (Live Broadcast), 2007

only serves to protect the beneficiaries of the colonial economy that was, and still is, unequal and unjust. On the other hand, the ruling party ignores the civic and political rights that were equally important during the liberation war. Jonathan Moyo is seen by many as a 'political turncoat' because he was an avid critic of Robert Mugabe in 1990s, then became Mugabe's Minister of Information, in fact, the government and Mugabe's chief propagandist (2000-2005) and, now, since 2005, an independent MP. Moyo wrote in 2000 that 'The Human rights NGOs supporting the MDC...are well known for using equal political and civil rights to justify unequal economic rights' and that the British wanted to see a 'spectacle of getting the black majority to use political rights to defend unequal rights between blacks and whites under the guise of democracy'<sup>41</sup>. Raftopoulos argues that all over the world, opposition political parties challenging authoritarian regimes often tend to turn to neoliberal economic programmes and that has its own limitations.<sup>42</sup> In Zimbabwe, the leader of the opposition party, Morgan Tsvangirai, has spent much of the last decade trying to prove to fellow Africans that he and his party are not extensions of the western powers. The credit for this rests with ZANU PF, for its ability to raise and sustain doubts about Tsvangirai and his party, both within Zimbabwe and across the African continent and the global African Diaspora.

Under Mugabe's rule, an independent press has been successfully silenced in Zimbabwe. Reporting in Zimbabwe without a government license is a criminal offense. Information that comes in and out of the country has to be approved by the government. Several laws were enacted since 2000 to control information flows in and out of the country. These laws include the Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act

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<sup>41</sup> Jonathan Moyo, 'Observers Impartiality in Doubt', The Sunday Mail (Zimbabwe), 11 June 2000.

<sup>42</sup> Brian Raftopoulos in David Simon et al (Eds.), p 216.

(AIPPA) of 2004, the Public Order and Security Act (POSA) of 2002, and the Broadcasting Services Act (BSA) of 2001 which, when applied, functions to criminalize the profession of independent journalism. With control of information, the ruling party embarked on a deliberate misrepresentation of facts in telling the history of the nationalist-liberation movement of the 1960s and 1970s. The government official and state-controlled media refers to the ruling party as the only legitimate agency of liberation and therefore the sole arbiter of the national interest and patriotism. The Mugabe regime used the anti-colonial and anti-imperialist ideology for mobilizing, and this ideology has a wider appeal to Africans and the larger African Diaspora in other parts of the world. This, in part, explains why the land reform process became racialized even in global discourse. In the eyes of many Africans, Mugabe is a champion of Pan-Africanism and a defender of African sovereignty. He appears to be a strong leader who is capable of standing up against the hypocrisy of western powers and international financial institutions. However, as Timothy Scarnecchia argues, Mugabe's popularity outside Zimbabwe is based on the misunderstanding of the distinction between nationalist political discourse and the realities of the political powers as exercised in Zimbabwe.<sup>43</sup> Mugabe's political rhetoric is the opposite of the political reality on the ground. Scarnecchia even goes to make a connection between the fascist Italy under Mussolini and the post 2000 Zimbabwe.<sup>44</sup> The fascist ideology placed an emphasis on the strong nationalistic and xenophobic definition of a 'true Italian'. In Zimbabwe, ZANU PF used the comparable rhetoric of the true 'sons of the soil'. The word patriotism has been used

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<sup>43</sup> Timothy Scarnecchia, "The 'Fascist Cycle' in Zimbabwe, 2000 – 2005" in David Simon, et al (Eds.), *Journal of Southern African Studies – Special Focus: Zimbabwe*, Vol. 32, No. 2, Routledge, Oxfordshire, June 2006 p 223.

<sup>44</sup> Timothy Scarnecchia, pp 221 – 237

exclusively to refer to Mugabe supporters. Those who are against Mugabe are seen as unpatriotic and the whole country is being encouraged to fight and eliminate the unpatriotic elements of the society. There is also an unwritten rule in Zimbabwe that Mugabe is always right. Those who do not obey his rule are denied access to land and other basic needs such as food. They are often told to ‘go to Britain and get food as they are your leaders’.<sup>45</sup> Violence has been used openly against opposition supporters.

It has been argued by a number of scholars and media outlets, and I subscribe to this argument, that the fast track land reform in Zimbabwe has been used as a form of accumulation by party elites of valuable land and real estate. The argument is that land reform has been used in three ways namely to buy votes of the frustrated voters, to appease the elites in army and government, and to justify and cover-up for this illegal form of accumulation. Political violence perpetrated by the militia and war veterans became a cover-up as the business and political elites loot the country’s resources and wealth. It opened up and expanded their ability to accumulate and defend their right to accumulate wealth. As Scarnecchia puts it, the war veterans and the youth militia also became accumulators and defenders of the ‘true’ Zimbabwean.<sup>46</sup>

The mentality for using state resources for personal gain goes a long way back in Zimbabwean history. A new regime of accumulators has been in the making since independence. In the 1980s, it consisted mostly of high ranking government and army officials. After 1991, it began to expand to include the upcoming leaders of the ruling party, often called the ‘Young Turks’ in local media, and other members in the military and police. With the group of accumulators increasing, there obviously was a need to

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<sup>45</sup> ‘Since I was born, I have never seen such hunger’, Guardian online UK, 7 Nov, 2002

<sup>46</sup> Timothy Scarnecchia, p 234.

expand the sphere of influence. Zimbabwe's involvement in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) war, for example, was more for personal gain of the political and economic elite, rather than for national gain or regional security. Mugabe intervened on behalf of Zimbabwean business interests, who wanted to get control of the vast mineral resources such as diamonds, copper and cobalt in the DRC before South African business interests could, and to prevent the regional expansion of Ugandan influence. Ugandan and Rwandese initial interventions in the DRC had strong American support. Whilst official British policy has been increasingly vocal against Mugabe and sympathetic to his opponents, there are still powerful British business interests close to the Mugabe regime. Masipula Sithole argues that it was the British and the French business people with interests in the Central and Southern African region who encouraged Mugabe to intervene on Kabila's side.<sup>47</sup> They feared that the expansion of Ugandan influence in the Congo could pave way for American businesses thereby threatening their own interests.

When discussing the Zimbabwe crisis, it is significant to point out that the impact of the crisis goes beyond the borders of Zimbabwe. There are illegal migrants from Zimbabwe in many African countries and as far as the United States and Britain. Also, as Ben Cousins notes, there are concerns that authoritarian political practices can be contagious, and may spread from Zimbabwe to its regional neighbours.<sup>48</sup> The absence of the rule of law and property rights is discouraging foreign investments into the region and the other areas of the continent. In South Africa and Namibia, commercial farmers fear Zimbabwean-style farm invasions. The New Economic Partnership for Africa's

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<sup>47</sup> Masipula Sithole in Jo-Ansie van Wyk, "The Saga Continues – The Zimbabwe Issue in South Africa's Foreign Policy", *The Turkish Journal of International Relations*, Vol. 1, No. 4, 2002.

<sup>48</sup> Ben Cousins in Amanda Hammar and Brian Raftopolous (Eds.), 2003 p 263

Development (NEPAD),<sup>49</sup> which was partly premised on obtaining donor support for Africa's economic development by promoting democracy and good governance, has suffered a major blow with the increasing political crisis in Zimbabwe and the failure of the African Union (AU) to bring about a lasting solution to the crisis. The *Business Day* of 21 March 2003 reported that South Africa was paying a heavy price for the crisis in Zimbabwe. It reported that between 2000 and end of 2002, the South African gross domestic product's growth fell by 1.3 percent due to reduced foreign investment, tourism drop, failure by Zimbabwe to service its debt and reduced agricultural output as some South African farmers fear for 'copycat' land invasions.

There are also lessons and important questions that have arisen from the Zimbabwean crisis. The land issue is an important aspect of the Zimbabwean society and it has to be resolved. So far, it remains unresolved due to the politicization of the whole process. However, as I have suggested earlier, the Zimbabwean crisis is not simply about land. The solution to the crisis will require building a culture of political tolerance, respect for human rights and food security, including hunger relief. The challenges will be on how to strike a balance between rights and redistribution efforts. Further, resolving the issue of land is not unique to Zimbabwe. It is a challenging issue to other African countries notably Namibia and South Africa. With increasing poverty in South Africa, a solution has to be found sooner rather later or else one day, South Africa will find itself in a similar position as Zimbabwe where some politicians or a political party will use issues of land for political gain. Even for South Africa and Namibia, the challenge will be on

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<sup>49</sup> Malinda S. Smith, Ed., *Beyond the 'African Tragedy': Discourses on Development and the Global Economy* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006).

how to correct political imbalances while at the same time demonstrate respect for property rights and the rule of law.

The Zimbabwean crisis has dramatically highlighted basic questions on how liberal democracy and the good governance agenda are to be strengthened in a society where poverty, hunger and human rights abuses are on the rise. It is clear that the western form of democracy has faced problems in Africa and the blame for its failures is often dumped on the leaders. In Zimbabwe, Mugabe knew after February 2000 that he would have a tough time winning a free and fair democratic election. Instead of playing nice with the electorate to win their support, he unleashed violence against the ordinary people. On the other hand, the western assumption that economic hardship can compel the citizens to bring about regime change is wrong. In Iraq, despite the economic hardships caused by the sanctions in the 1990s, Saddam Hussein only grew stronger. In Zimbabwe, hunger, starvation and the general economic difficulties have thus far failed to topple the Mugabe government from office or inspire widespread revolt. What the economic difficulties manage to do is to weaken civil society and force people to adapt to the hardships. As will be discussed in Chapter Four, the people of Zimbabwe have become consumed with finding food; they do not have time to engage in politics. People have adjusted to hardships such that spending the whole day in a queue or having one meal a day has become normal. To make matters worse, ruling officials do not care about the plight of the ordinary people. Instead, they are manipulating scarce resource like food for political gain. The truth, as exposed by the Zimbabwe experience, is that democracy does not flourish in poverty.

Another lesson that Zimbabweans and other African countries should learn is that politicians are not angels. They are people whose primary objective is power. Seeing them as saviours has dangerous repercussions. When Mugabe came to power, the people of Zimbabwe invested all their trust in him and gave him a free reign. For two decades elections were just a formality. When they realized that Mugabe was not what he seemed to be, it was too late. However, it is my belief that when Mugabe finally leaves office and the dust settles down, Zimbabwe will be one of the more democratic countries in Africa. Ordinary Zimbabweans now understand what human rights are and they will demand and fight for them on any given opportunity something they cannot do now because of massive political repression and hunger.

#### 1.4 The Theoretical Framework

In Zimbabwe, human suffering continues due to severe food shortages. In this thesis, I argue that the food crisis in Zimbabwe could be overcome if there was political will from all stakeholders, which include the government of Zimbabwe, humanitarian groups, civic groups, SADC and the United Nations. As Alexander de Waal argues, humanitarian action is political action in some way and, therefore, the political will of donors and their benefactors is very important in finding long-term solutions to the Zimbabwean food crisis.<sup>50</sup> In the short term, there is need to stabilize the local political terrain. A return to a democratic political system of government where there is a respect for the rule of law, free and fair election under a new democratic constitution should be the primary action undertaken to solve not only the food crisis in Zimbabwe, but also the

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<sup>50</sup> Alexander de Waal, *Famine Crimes – Politics and the Disaster Relief Industry in Africa*, Africa Rights, London, 1997, p 4.

political and economic crises. Another central argument of this thesis is that an effective political system that allows for greater civic participation and government accountability is the only way Zimbabwe can recover from the political, economic and food crises. The country has the resources, both natural and human, to solve the food crisis. However, there is need for a political solution before the economic solution can be found.

Drawing on the theoretical contribution of scholars like Alex de Waal and Amartya Sen,<sup>51</sup> my thesis argues that the food crisis in Zimbabwe is largely a failure of political accountability by the Zimbabwean government to a larger extent, and also by the international relief organizations, and other stakeholders in and outside Zimbabwe. De Waal discusses the ‘political contract’ model of famine prevention where there is a political commitment by government to the people and the people have the power to hold the government accountable in enforcing the commitment.<sup>52</sup> Where there is an effective political contract, famine is a political scandal that can have a government overthrown. Giving the cases of India and the South Asian region and the complexities and paradoxes of how famine was conquered in the region as examples, de Waal concludes that human rights abuses are often a cause for famine.<sup>53</sup> Violations of farmers’ property rights and suppression of civil rights that prevents civil organizations to protest against famine, all contribute to continuation of food shortages and can lead to famine. De Waal adds that liberal civil rights and the existence of independent institutions like free media and free political associations allows people to fight for these social and economic rights.<sup>54</sup> The free press and the opposition in a multiparty democracy can provide early warnings for

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<sup>51</sup> Alexander de Waal, 1997: Amartya Sen *Development as Freedom*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1999.

<sup>52</sup> De Waal, 1997, pp 1-6

<sup>53</sup> *ibid*

<sup>54</sup> *ibid*

impending famines and the public can use their voting power to put someone with better solutions into office or at least to make the sitting government more accountable in providing solutions.

This is true about what has happened in Zimbabwe since 2000. Farmers have been evicted from their farm and replaced by incompetent group of farmers who have little to no experience and expertise in agricultural production. Even those still producing well on farms cannot make long-term developments on the farms because there is no respect for property rights in Zimbabwe. Businesses have been forcibly seized. Civic groups and the independent press have been suppressed. The 'right to food' is a good example of the political contract between the government and the people.

Amartya Sen also discusses the close link between basic freedoms and protection from starvation and famine and this link is absent in Zimbabwe right now.<sup>55</sup> Sen argues that liberal democracies do not suffer famine because the tenets of democracy practiced in liberal democracies such as regular elections, independent media, freedoms of speech and association, are linked to freedom to escape starvation and famine.<sup>56</sup> Sen adds that hunger relates beyond food production or agricultural expansion but to the whole socio-economic and political environment that can influence one's ability to provide food for the family.<sup>57</sup> The government plays an important role in this environment because it has a role in how the economy works and obviously in the political institutions that governs the economy. Therefore, when the government fails, its institutions fail and hunger can occur. Sen also believes that preventing or ending famine relies heavily on government

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<sup>55</sup> Amartya Sen (1990, 1999)

<sup>56</sup> (ibid)

<sup>57</sup> Sen (1999)

ability to protect economic entitlements of many groups.<sup>58</sup> A viable economy can be helpful in ending the food crisis in Zimbabwe because it will provide employment and a stable currency. Employment can turn victims of the food crisis from being passive recipients of food handouts into active economic agents with purchasing power.<sup>59</sup> In Zimbabwe, as the situation stands, the economy will be difficult to stabilize without stable politics.

The ‘Zanufication’ of all government institutions, where they become extensions of the ruling party, means that their independence is almost non-existent. Government officials whose loyalty to ZANU PF is in doubt often lose their jobs. Internal political decay has become a major obstacle to constructing a political contract that can bring about food security in the country. Pressure from external forces, be they regional or international, has failed to yield any results. In fact, external pressure has only made the situation more complex. ‘Smart sanctions’ and tied aid, like much of the neo-liberal agenda have weakened the government’s capacity to deal with economic and social problems at home. With economic problems threatening the government’s political power, the government became only more authoritarian. I also want to argue here that it is very easy to blame Mugabe’s government in the political decay in the country. However, the IMF and World Bank aid has made the political contract difficult to strengthen because the conditionalities attached to the aid forces the government to be more accountable to the international financial institutions than to its people.

The power and influence of the humanitarian groups has complicated the Zimbabwe situation. De Waal includes relief workers, officials of donor agencies,

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<sup>58</sup> *ibid*

<sup>59</sup> Sen, 1999, p 112.

consultant academics and the institutions for which they work, journalists and the media that advances the humanitarian worldview, as part of what he refers to as the 'Humanitarian International'.<sup>60</sup> He argues that the international humanitarian groups' dedication is towards hunger and famine alleviation but do not operate in a way that makes their goals achievable. Instead, they operate in a way that weakens the political accountability necessary for the prevention of famine. Humanitarianism, argues de Waal,<sup>61</sup> sees famine more like a failure of food policy that can only be solved through food aid. With more resources poured into a country, aid organizations became very much involved in the society and often undermine the ability of those affected by the famine to reclaim moral ownership. In Zimbabwe, humanitarianism is still very important in ending the food crisis. The problem comes when it sees itself above or against politics. Humanitarian groups have been clashing with the government of Zimbabwe for nearly a decade now. Their argument that they do not want their food to be used for political gain is valid. As will be discussed in Chapter Three, they have also been accused, wrongfully or rightfully, of using the food aid for political reasons thereby intensifying the level of suspicion from the government.

Therefore, this thesis will seek to argue that the food crisis in Zimbabwe is a symptom of the political crisis because it is not just an issue of food demand exceeding supply where it is only the poor who are victims. Instead, victims of the Zimbabwe food crisis are often determined by their political affiliation and powerlessness. The political crisis has affected food production with farmers and farm workers being displaced. Trade, food aid flows and the economy have been disrupted by politics. Survival

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<sup>60</sup> Alexander de Waal, 1997, p 3

<sup>61</sup> Alexander de Waal, 1997, p 5.

strategies adopted by the people are undermined by politically motivated government intervention.

Although, the focus will be on politics, one cannot ignore economic explanations for the food crises that include market failure, speculation and hoarding. According to most economists, food demand is price inelastic. This means that people would pay whatever they could afford to get food for survival even to the point of making themselves destitute. Under such circumstances, traders will sell their food at the highest possible prices thereby worsening the food crisis. This has happened in Zimbabwe since 2000. This theory will explain the flourishing of the black market when no-one wants to sell on the formal market where food prices are regulated. As will be discussed in Chapter Three, the lack of information available on the severity of the food crisis, especially in the early days of the crisis, only served to increase speculation and hoarding.

## 1.5 Methodology

This thesis was inspired by the incessant media reports on how food was being used for political reasons in a country where food shortages were on the rise. As a person who was born in Zimbabwe, and grew up in a country where food was easily available for most families, the researcher developed a personal interest in exploring why a country that could provide food for its citizens had suddenly become incapable of doing so. As a researcher, I decided to put more focus on what is the role of politics in the food crisis that has gripped a country for nearly a decade. In the era where there is a global effort to eliminate hunger in the world as expressed by the Millennium Development Goals

(MDGs), Zimbabwe is a country that has the resources to help in this global effort. Instead, it has suddenly become one of the countries in dire need of food aid.

In conducting research for this thesis, I explored multiple academic sources. To have a basic understanding of the problem, one of the sources I focused on included primary research sources such as international media, independent local media, and the pro-government media in Zimbabwe. There are so many civic groups, NGOs, and human rights groups, both local and international, who have done extensive on-the-ground research work and reporting on the food crisis in Zimbabwe. Some of these groups include, among others, *Sokwanele*-Enough is Enough, Zimbabwe Peace Project (ZPP), Human Rights Watch (HRW), World Food Programme, Refugees International (RI) and the Southern Africa Regional Poverty Network (SARPN). I also sought direct information from the WFP office in Harare. However, the official I talked to refused to cooperate because he wanted guarantees that the information he gave me would not be used against his department and he could not simply take my word for it. That telephone conversation, in which even basic information would not be divulged by international aid agencies based in Zimbabwe, gave me a picture of the relationship between food aid groups and the government, and how the political environment in the country affected the movement of information. This actually best describes the limitations of my study in the sense that the period when the study was carried out was a period of intensified political sensitivity, when it might have been useful to travel to Zimbabwe and conduct fuller interviews permissible by an ethics review. In the absence of direct field research, this limited the amount of information available to the researcher.

As a researcher, I also informally talked to friends and relatives in Zimbabwe who are experiencing the crisis on a daily basis and also discussed the situation with individuals who had had the opportunity to travel to Zimbabwe for a while. While this anecdotal and personal information should not be overly generalized, it did help to provide a richer sense of what was unfolding in Zimbabwe. However, from talking to different people and reading different media outlets, it also became evident that there were clearly different points of view from most of these sources. Most of the biases were due to the political and ideological biases of individuals or media sources. The other factor I noted was that people from different regions in the country were giving different versions of the story. This research made every effort to incorporate primary research work done in Zimbabwe and published in scholarly journals. Other useful research work on the impact of the economic and food crises was actually published by academic publishers, and these gave a good description of how Zimbabweans are surviving the economic and food crises. A good example of such work is a research done by Professor Mate of the University of Zimbabwe at the border town of Beitbridge to capture the coping and survival strategies adopted by Zimbabweans and it was published as a book. Primary sources were very useful to this thesis because they were used to verify the claims made within important secondary sources.

With a general understanding of the problem, I turned to secondary and other scholarly sources. Civic groups, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and other aid groups who did primary research also published more detailed and analytical reports based on their primary research throughout the country.<sup>62</sup> Content analysis of reports from

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<sup>62</sup> There are numerous reports by Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International, Solidarity Peace Project, Zimbabwe Peace Project etc.

governmental organizations like the Grain Marketing Board and local and international NGOs working in the food aid area in Zimbabwe such as the WFP and World Vision was carried out. The validity of informal reports had to be cross-checked with information from primary sources and other formal sources to reduce the risk of utilizing information from sources that had a stated political or ideological agenda. Finally, the research turned to academic scholars and other field experts who have done extensive work in the food aid and food security areas in Zimbabwe and Southern Africa. They have published books, journal articles and reports for international organizations. I found that most of these scholarly articles were fairly balanced given the fact that they are discussing a politically charged topic. This contrasts with most commentary in both international media and the local media, which reflected problems in presenting competing voices and perspectives in Zimbabwe.

## 1.6 Conclusion

As discussed above, this thesis will argue the food crisis in Zimbabwe is a symptom of the political and economic crisis in the country. Finding long term solutions will require a united effort from all stakeholders, local and international, in solving the Zimbabwe Crisis. The challenges come from reconciling very different political ambitions towards common goal. As politicians and their benefactors continue their political tug-of-war, it is the ordinary citizens who suffer the most. The ordinary Zimbabweans have been denied their 'right to food'. Instead of this becoming a fundamental human rights concern, it has become a political issue for the government of Zimbabwe and, sadly, for the international aid regime. The remainder of this thesis draws on the political theories of famine, as they offer a useful segue into the crisis in Zimbabwe. It also suggests the absence of democracy, good governance and

transparency are major obstacles to solving the food crisis in Zimbabwe. Chapter Two discusses the background factors that have contributed to the post-2000 food crisis in Zimbabwe. Chapter Three focuses on the drought, the land reform, government policies and the international response and how each factor has caused or prolonged the food crisis. Chapter Four then explores the survival and coping strategies adopted by Zimbabweans as they face incessant food shortages. Finally, Chapter Five will give a summary of the whole thesis and a few recommendations to the stakeholders in the food security situation in the country.

## Chapter 2

### Background on Food Crisis in Zimbabwe

#### 2.1 Introduction

For most of its post-independence period, Zimbabwe was self-sufficient in food production. It even exported surpluses to other Southern African Development Community (SADC) countries and to other regions as far as Ethiopia in the Horn of Africa. The country also coped well with droughts of 1982, 1987 and 1992. Mudimu reports that between 1980 and 1999, except during the three drought years, the country had surplus and maintained a strategic grain reserve of six to nine months.<sup>63</sup> However, years of economic decline and balance of payments problems reduced the country's capacity to continue producing more food crops and cash crops that could provide foreign currency. In examining the food crisis that gripped the country of Zimbabwe after 2000, one needs to understand the underlying factors that have directly or indirectly turned a food surplus country into a country on the brink of a famine. These factors are historical and contemporary; internal and external; and political and economic.

In this chapter, I will argue that the post-2000 food crisis in Zimbabwe did not start with the events of 2000 when the government of Zimbabwe embarked on its fast track land resettlement programme. The food security situation in the country has been under threat for a long time. The 2000 land reform programme and the political chaos that followed only compounded the crisis and made it difficult to resolve. To give a background to the food crisis, this chapter will address a number of issues. First, it will

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<sup>63</sup> Godfrey Mudimu, 'Zimbabwe Food Security Issues Paper', Forum for Food Security in Southern Africa, ODI, London, 2003, p v.

provide an agro-ecological background that shapes the agricultural productivity of different communities in the country. Then the focus turns to the colonial history that shaped land ownership in those agro-ecological regions and why the postcolonial government failed to address historic colonial land imbalances. Third, the chapter will look at the postcolonial factors that contributed to undermining food security in the long term. Central to the discussion will be the role of the Economic Structural Adjustment Programme adopted in 1991 and how it seriously damaged the famine prevention system in Zimbabwe. Food riots in 1997<sup>64</sup> and land invasions between 1997 and 1999, by ordinary citizens disgruntled by increasing rural poverty, are a clear sign that the Zimbabwe food security situation was already under threat. Increasing poverty due to economic decline also led to declining access to food by many Zimbabweans, and that led massive political pressure on a government that was slowly becoming an authoritarian regime.

## 2.2 Agro-Ecological Background

Zimbabwe is located in Southern Africa and has a total land area of 39.6 million hectares. Approximately 33 million hectares is reserved for agricultural activities while the rest is reserved for national parks, forests and urban settlements<sup>65</sup>. The country has a savannah tropical climate with one rainy season that starts in November and ends in March. The terrain is mostly high plateau, with a higher central plateau often referred to as the 'high veld.' It is mountainous in the east. Zimbabwe is divided into five agro-ecological regions, also called 'natural regions'. The five natural regions have varying

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<sup>64</sup> Human Rights Forum Zimbabwe, 'A consolidated Report on the Food Riots', 19 – 23 January 1998.

<sup>65</sup> United Nations Country Facts – Zimbabwe (2002).

degrees of annual rainfall and therefore the agricultural production potential of the regions also vary. An outline of each region and its agricultural use before the land reform programme of 2000 is presented below<sup>66</sup>. As will be discussed in Chapter Three, the Land Reform Programme disrupted most of the activities carried out in Regions One, Two and, to a lesser extent, Three.

Region One receives more than 1000mm of rainfall every year which is the highest amount of rainfall received among the five regions. This region covers about 7 000 square kilometres which constitutes about 2 percent of the total area. The farming system in Region One is based on specialized and diversified farming with forestry plantation, fruit production and intensive livestock rearing as its main agricultural activities. Tea and coffee are also produced in Region One. Region Two has an annual rainfall of between 750mm and 1000mm and is suitable for intensive farming. The main agricultural activities in Region Two include livestock and crop production. Major crops produced in this region are tobacco, maize and wheat. Region Two covers 58 600 square kilometres, which constitute 15 percent of the total land area in the country. Most of the commercial farming happens in Regions One and Two. Before the Land Reform Programme, intensive irrigation schemes in commercial farms allowed winter production of wheat. Region Three is based on semi-intensive farming. Annual rainfall varies between 650 and 800mm. Livestock breeding, fodder and cash crop production are the main agricultural activities. Cotton, which has recently been diversified from previously commercial farms to small-scale subsistence farmers is the main cash crop grown in Region Three. This area has a marginal production of maize, tobacco and cotton. It

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<sup>66</sup> Ibid; Also see V. Vincent and R.G. Thomas, *An Agricultural Survey of Southern Rhodesia: Part I: Agro-Ecological Survey*, Government Printer, Salisbury, 1960

covers 72 900 square kilometres and constitutes 19 percent of the total land area in the country. Region Four is based on semi-extensive farming. Average annual rainfall ranges between 450 and 650mm. This region covers about 147 800 square kilometres that are 38 percent of the country's total land area. It is the largest of the five regions and yet has the least favourable climatic conditions for agricultural production. The main agricultural activities in this region include extensive livestock breeding and production of drought resistant crops such as millet, sorghum and rapoko. Finally, Region Five is based on extensive farming. The rainfall in this region is very low and erratic and so crop production is very difficult. The main agricultural activities include extensive cattle and game ranching, and also irrigation-aided sugar plantations. Region Five covers 104 400 km square kilometres that constitutes 27% of the total land area.

The country has a population of roughly 13 million people<sup>67</sup>. Approximately 65% of them live in densely populated communal areas<sup>68</sup>. The majority of these communal areas, 90 percent of them, are located in natural regions Three, Four and Five.<sup>69</sup> The majority of the people in the communal areas are smallholder farmers who depend solely on rain-fed subsistence agriculture for their survival. Any unfavourable climatic changes are likely to worsen food productivity in communal areas. Principal livelihood activities in communal farms are food and cash crop production, animal husbandry, and employment on commercial farms. Off-farm economic activities are very limited. Therefore, droughts are the biggest threats to communal livelihoods because they reduce rural incomes and food production potential.

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<sup>67</sup> BBC Country Profile, Zimbabwe, 2007

<sup>68</sup> United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), Human Development Report, [online], [www.undp.org/statistics/data/countries.cfm?c=zwe](http://www.undp.org/statistics/data/countries.cfm?c=zwe) (accessed on November 2, 2008).

<sup>69</sup> Zimbabwe Vulnerability Assessment Report, 'Zimbabwe Livelihoods Profiles', ZimVAC, Harare, September 2005, p 9.

### 2.3 Land Issues and the Historical Context of the Food Crisis

Zimbabwe was colonized in 1890 by the British South Africa Company (BSAC), operating under a Royal Charter granted by the British Crown after King Lobengula of the Ndebele people had been tricked into signing the Rudd Concession in 1888. Under the terms of the Charter, the company was empowered to exercise administrative authority, search for, and exploit mineral deposits but not to permanently settle on the land.<sup>70</sup> When the mineral deposits proved to be far less than what they had hoped for, the settlers turned to farming. This move by the white settlers was fiercely resisted by the Ndebele people in the 1893 Anglo-Matebele war and in the 1896-1897 Ndebele and Shona Uprisings often referred to as the first Chimurenga/Umvukela (Shona and Ndebele words respectively meaning fight, struggle or uprising). In both wars, the African spears, bows and arrows had no match for the European maxim guns. Therefore, the most fertile land was then taken by the white settlers and the indigenous people who previously owned that land were evicted and placed in reserves located in less fertile regions that are prone to drought. During the colonial era, there was a systematic way of land acquisition and dispossession realized largely through violence, war and legislative enactments by successive colonial governments and that led to a racially skewed land distribution. As Sachikonye puts it, the patterns of land distribution during the colonial era were defined by conquest.<sup>71</sup> For example, under the Land Apportionment Act of 1930, some 51 percent of land was reserved for white settlers (who numbered about 50,000), 30 percent

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<sup>70</sup> Amnesty International, 'Zimbabwe Power and Hunger – Violations of the Right to Food (Report)', AFR 46/026/2004, 15 October 2004.

<sup>71</sup> Lloyd M. Sachikonye, 'Inheriting the Earth', Agricultural Sector and Agrarian Development Strategy Paper, final draft, ICG, London, 2004.

for African reserve areas (for about 1 million blacks)<sup>72</sup>. The remainder was for commercial companies and the colonial government. Under the Land Apportionment Act, the distribution of land was as follows:

Table 1: Land Apportionment in Southern Rhodesia in 1930

Category	Acres	% of Country
European Areas	49,149, 174	51
Native Reserves	21,127,040	22
Unassigned Areas	17,793,300	18.5
Native Purchase Area	7, 464, 566	7.8
Forest Area	590,500	0.6
Undetermined Area	88,540	0.1
Total	96,213,120	100

Source: The Government of Zimbabwe Documents, 'Background to Land Reform in Zimbabwe', 2003.

The Land Apportionment Act restricted Africans to own land only in designated Native Purchase Areas. The most significant consequence of the Land Apportionment Act, and all the land laws,<sup>73</sup> which came after it, was to reduce the agricultural economy of the Shona and Ndebele people from being successful, enterprising and food surplus producing into impoverished subsistence farmers in overcrowded reserves, practicing inefficient agricultural techniques.

<sup>72</sup> Presidential Land Review Committee Report, Harare, 2003 (often known as the Utete Report).

<sup>73</sup> Other land laws include Land Husbandry Act of 1951, and the Land Tenure Act of 1969.

The racially skewed land distribution continued into independence. In 1980, some 6,000 white farmers owned 15.5 million hectares, most of which lay in high rainfall agro-ecological regions. In noted contrast, some 8,500 black farmers operating on a small scale, held about 1.4 million hectares; and approximately 4.5 million communal farmers eked out subsistence livelihoods on 16.4 million hectares<sup>74</sup>. Most of the communal land was located in the drier ecological regions where the soils were poor. That means at independence about one percent of the population, which was of European origin, controlled about 70 percent of the arable land. The African population fed themselves and their families from the remaining thirty percent. In fact, most of the African population in communal areas lived on arid and semi-arid land. Land reform might have made a significant difference to rural poverty in the 1980s. The Programmes for land redistribution adopted immediately after independence were, however, modest. In almost twenty years, only a small part of the former white owned areas had been acquired and redistributed, benefiting less than 73,000 households.<sup>75</sup> As a result, the demands for equitable land redistribution that led to the war of liberation continued to be made after independence. With the Zimbabwean population ballooning since 1980 the pressure on land in communal areas intensified. The 1982 census in Zimbabwe reported the population at 7.5 million. In 2002, the population had increased to about 12.5 million.<sup>76</sup> Unfortunately, the economy in general and food production in particular, did not grow at the same rate to cater for the growing population.

There are a number of reasons why the government of Zimbabwe failed to redistribute land in the 1980s. The British and the American governments had promised

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<sup>74</sup> Presidential Land Review Committee Report, Harare, 2003, p 8

<sup>75</sup> Mudimu, 2003, p 7

<sup>76</sup> UNDP, 2007

to fund land reform in Zimbabwe at the 1979 Lancaster House Conference that had brought about the end to the Zimbabwe liberation war.<sup>77</sup> The agreement, and the constitution that came from it, denied the government of Zimbabwe power to compulsorily take land from the former colonial settlers. Unfortunately, the Americans never fulfilled their promise and the British government claims that it gave the government of Zimbabwe 35 million pound sterling specifically for land reform.<sup>78</sup> The British High Commission in South Africa reports that a Zimbabwe Donors Conference (ZIMCORD) in March 1981 raised some \$Z 70million (£17million) for development in Zimbabwe, including land reform. Between 1980 and 1985, the United Kingdom claims that it provided £47million for land reform: £20million as a specific Land Resettlement Grant and £27million in the form of budgetary support to help meet the Zimbabwe government's own contribution to the Programme.<sup>79</sup> Timothy Stamps, who is a British national and was Minister of Health in Zimbabwe from 1986 to 2002 claims that the government of Zimbabwe received £17 million; most of the money was meant for rural development.<sup>80</sup> Therefore, during the 1980s effort of the Zimbabwe government was directed towards mobilizing funds to purchase farms from the colonial owners. One mistake made at the Lancaster House conference is that there was no provision made in the agreement for a specific fund to support land reform. It was more like a gentlemen's agreement without a gentleman involved. That of course created problems and confusion in the future. The matter became more serious in May 1997 when the new Labour government of Tony Blair communicated to the Zimbabwe government that they did not

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<sup>77</sup> Tapera Knox Chitiyo, 'Land Violence and Compensation – Reconceptualizing Zimbabwe' Land and War Veterans Debate' CCR Track Two, Vol. 9, No. 1 (May 2000)

<sup>78</sup> British High Commission, South Africa, 2007.

<sup>79</sup> (ibid)

<sup>80</sup> [Zimbabwesituation.com](http://Zimbabwesituation.com) interview with Dr. Timothy Stamps, 2000

feel obligated to fund the Zimbabwe land purchases<sup>81</sup>. That infuriated the Mugabe government and became a source of tension between the Blair government and the Mugabe government for many years. It was from then on that Mugabe vowed that the land reform was going to happen with or without donor support.<sup>82</sup> In September 1998, the government launched what it termed the Second Phase of the Land Reform and Resettlement Programme with two main broad arguments that (a) the pace of land acquisition needed to be increased for the sake of social stability, poverty alleviation, peace and justice and (b) the land redistribution will have better and higher financial and economic returns.<sup>83</sup> As Chapter Three will show, however, the plan did not go well.

Although the willing buyer-willing seller clause in the 1979 Constitution made it difficult for the new government to embark on a broad land resettlement agenda, there was also pressure to include the Land Reform Programme into a wide national development strategy. As a result, the government was reluctant in the 1980s to take fertile land from productive colonial owners and give it to the landless peasants who lacked resources to ensure food security in the country. Then there was a huge appetite by the black bourgeoisie to own land.<sup>84</sup> Most of the commercial farms purchased by the government for land redistribution ended up in the hands of cabinet ministers and high-ranking government and ruling party officials. This is also one of the reasons mentioned by the British government officials for cutting off funding towards the Zimbabwean land reform process.<sup>85</sup> The result is that many individuals who needed land reform the most

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<sup>81</sup> Letter from Clare Short to Hon. Kumbirai Kangai, MP, Minister of Agriculture and Land, 5 November 1997, reproduced in full in *New African*, February 2003.

<sup>82</sup> Amnesty International, 2004

<sup>83</sup> Godfrey Mudimu, 2003, p 8.

<sup>84</sup> Lloyd Sachikonye, 'The Land is the Economy; Revisiting the Land Question', *Africa Security Review*, Vol. 14, No. 3, 2005.

<sup>85</sup> *ibid.*

remained un-resettled. As the population in communal areas grew and their pressure on the land led to more deforestation, desertification and poor harvests, frustration was growing in rural areas. In some of these rural areas between 1996 and 1999, people sporadically invaded nearby farms before the government sanctioned land invasions of 2000. The Svosve villagers near Marondera, which is about 70km from Harare, consistently invaded farms after the 1996 presidential elections despite police evictions and warnings from the government against such action. Sensing the rural population's frustration especially after the 'no' vote in the constitutional referendum in 2000, Mugabe used what seemed like his last card for political survival. Land invasions became government policy. Chapter Three discusses in detail the direct and indirect impact of the land invasions on Zimbabwe's food security.

#### 2.4 Agricultural and Food Security Policy - 1980 to 2000

Zimbabwe's economy is mainly comprised of agriculture, mining, and manufacturing activities. However, agriculture plays a critical role in the overall development of the country. As of 1998, agriculture contributed 11-14 percent of Gross Domestic Product (GDP), provided employment for 70 percent of the population, and contributed 60 percent of industrial raw materials and 45 percent of exports<sup>86</sup>. At independence, Zimbabwe inherited a dual agricultural economy consisting of a highly productive, highly skilled and mechanized large-scale commercial farming sector mainly located in Natural Regions One, Two and Three where there is good soil and favourable rainfall patterns alongside a low skilled, low productivity, communal agriculture sector

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<sup>86</sup> Zimbabwe Human Development Report (ZHDR): Poverty, 1998, p 23.

mainly located in dry and infertile regions in Natural Regions Three, Four, and Five.<sup>87</sup> Both commercial farmers and small-scale farmers were important stakeholders in the food security of the country. However, the commercial farmers had influence on government policy and could withstand minor shocks without difficulty because of their resources and productivity. Mudimu notes that the commercial farmers produced the bulk of the export commodities like tobacco, horticulture and beef that were the mainstay of the country's economy.<sup>88</sup> They also were interested in influencing the country's economic management because the economy had direct impact on their businesses. The Commercial Farmers Union has been one of the biggest lobbying groups in Zimbabwe and has dozens of subsidiary interest groups promoting the interest of large-scale commercial farmers.

In 1980, the government of Zimbabwe came into power with an aggressive agricultural approach. A lot of attention and resources were re-directed towards improving the production capability of small-scale producers. Goran Hyden explains that in many African countries, peasants as a social class are not effectively subordinated to the corporate demands of the state.<sup>89</sup> The government of Mugabe came to power in 1980 with an agenda to include peasant farmers in the food security and national development plan. Three main sets of policies have dominated the food security agenda since independence. First was the drive to boost domestic food production, both to make food available and to support farmers' incomes. With the majority of Zimbabweans living in the communal areas on smallholder farms at independence, boosting farm output and

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<sup>87</sup> Zimbabwe Vulnerability Assessment Committee, 'Zimbabwe Livelihoods Profiles', ZimVAC, Harare, September, 2005, p 9.

<sup>88</sup> Mudimu, 2003, p 1

<sup>89</sup> Goran Hyden, *African Politics in Comparative Perspective*, Cambridge University Press, New York, 2006, p 141.

incomes in these areas was a key objective of the new government. State-owned agencies established the conditions for expanding maize productions in the communal areas by extending the support previously given to the large-scale commercial farms into the smallholder areas. The state-owned Grain Marketing Board (GMB) increased its coverage of collection depots into the communal areas, from just three in 1980 to thirty-seven in 1991, as well as setting up additional seasonal collection centers.<sup>90</sup>

The second set of policies was the overall economic and social development policies designed to promote economic growth and improve social welfare that affects people's access to the food available. The Ministry of Agriculture, through the extension service, promoted a maize production package based on high-yielding hybrid varieties, with fertilizer application to capture the yield potential. Credit to buy fertilizer and seed was provided by the Agricultural Finance Corporation (AFC). The national policy was to produce as much of the country's cereal requirements domestically as possible. The GMB was expected to keep a large reserve of grains. With the increased amounts bought in from smallholders, this goal was more than achieved. By 1986, around two metric tonnes of maize were in store, enough for a whole nine months of normal use.<sup>91</sup> In addition, retail prices of roller milled maize meal were controlled and subsidized from independence to 1993. As a result, food was easily available and affordable to almost all Zimbabweans. This changed with the introduction of the Economic Structural Adjustment Programmes (ESAP), discussed below. With ESAP, the subsidies were eliminated and prices set by the market and that became the beginning of serious food problems in the country.

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<sup>90</sup> ODI, 'Food Security Options in Zimbabwe – Multiple Threats, Multiple Opportunities?' Consultation Draft, November, 2004, p 18.

<sup>91</sup> Mudimu, p 7.

The third set of policies which dominated the food security agenda after independence were shaped by relief efforts mounted after the major climate shocks such as the droughts seen in 1982/83, 1986/87, 1991/92, 1994/95, 1997/98, and the Cyclone Eline induced drought of 1999/00. The government of Zimbabwe with the help of the international donors succeeded in feeding its people throughout these major droughts especially until 1992. Surpluses from previous harvests were very useful in the 1980s to ensure that the damages of the droughts were minimal.

These agricultural reforms and food security policies that came after independence had a very positive effect on communal farming. The Zimbabwe Grain Marketing Board (GMB) reported that overall grain supply trebled by 1990 (Zimbabwe GMB, 1991). Stoneman and Thompson state that by 1986, the communal farmers produced about 60 percent of the marketed maize and over 50 percent of the cotton; both of these up from below 10 percent before independence.<sup>92</sup> They add that the growth rate of peasant production of maize over the 1980s was 9.0 percent with the yield per hectare rising 6.7 percent, while comparable figures for cotton were 26.5 percent and 1.3 percent.<sup>93</sup> This was labelled 'the Zimbabwe miracle' or the 'Green Revolution' at the time. This model, or the Green Revolution, began to show cracks in the mid to late 1980s. De Waal argues that the excess abundance of food made the government complacent and the persistence of rural under-nutrition was neglected.<sup>94</sup> Chisvo and Jayne argue that success at national level concealed a systematic failure to address rural poverty.<sup>95</sup> The state-owned marketing boards, of which the GMB was one of the largest, were running

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<sup>92</sup> Colin Stoneman and Carol Thompson, 'Banking on Hunger: Food Security in Zimbabwe', SAR, Vol. 9, No. 3, January 1994, pp 20-30.

<sup>93</sup> *ibid*

<sup>94</sup> De Waal, 1997, p 60.

<sup>95</sup> Chisvo and Jayne, 1991 in de Waal, 1997, p 60.

up deficits equivalent to 5.8 percent of all public spending by the mid-1980s.<sup>96</sup> Pressure to cut costs mounted from the international finance corporations like the IMF and World Bank. Something needed to be done. The financial burden of the GMB and other marketing boards helped the international donors to convince the government that the country should adopt an economic structural adjustment Programme.

## 2.5 Structural Adjustment and Food Security in Zimbabwe

In response to growing public sector deficits, running at 10% or more, the government brought in the Economic Structural Adjustment Programme (ESAP) in 1991.<sup>97</sup> The programme liberalized international trade, foreign exchange dealings and financial transactions. Many domestic prices were no longer regulated. ESAP was also intended to trim government spending and to reform taxes. A major component of ESAP has been that GMB should not run at a loss.<sup>98</sup> As a result, the GMB had to export more when it had good stocks and hold smaller stocks. Maize prices were also lowered to encourage farmers to produce cash crops such as tobacco, cotton and paprika. Based on previous maize production averages, the restructuring did not cause any food security concerns because production would stay above minimum food security requirements. Unfortunately, the country was hit by the worst drought of the country's history in the growing season of 1991–1992. The harvest of 1992 was way below the normal levels. Maize production fell to just one fifth of the average for the previous five years.<sup>99</sup> To make matters worse, the GMB had, on the advice of the World Bank and IMF, just sold

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<sup>96</sup> Howard et al 2000 in ODI, 2004, pp 22 – 23.

<sup>97</sup> Colin Stoneman and Carol Thompson, pp 20 – 30.

<sup>98</sup> ODI, 2004, p 23

<sup>99</sup> De Waal, 1997, p 61.

off most of its grain stocks. The drought was to have serious consequences. The immediate fear that the lack of food would cause starvation was not realized, mainly because of the largely effective relief effort by government assisted by donors. The cost of relief to the government, however, dashed any immediate plans to bring public spending into balance.

The assumption of the World Bank and IMF experts was that structural adjustment through economic liberalization can provide small-holder farmers with the right incentives to produce more for the economy.<sup>100</sup> In Zimbabwe, this statement was partly true and largely false. Liberalization of international trade and domestic markets allowed some farmers to realize their full potential. Large-scale commercial farmers gained more from their tobacco exports and developed export horticulture. Some smallholders were also able to profit from growing cash crops such as tobacco, paprika, and above all, cotton. However, food crop farming stagnated. The producer prices of the staple maize were controlled until 1993.<sup>101</sup> Therefore, large farms shifted away from producing maize as a commercial crop. In addition, the GMB was slow to relinquish control over the crop. Other than the GMB, there were not many places where smallholder farmers could sell their crops and that forced even more farmers to switch to more profitable options. In communal areas, smallholder farmers were faced with completely new circumstances. As a way to minimize its losses, GMB had closed depots and collection points in the more remote areas meaning farmers had to bring their crops to the depot gate to sell them. That meant more transport costs for the smallholder farmers. Those farmers who could not afford the transport costs ended up selling at even

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<sup>100</sup> *ibid*

<sup>101</sup> Makamure et al, 2001, p 17

lower prices within their villages. Individuals and even well known milling companies ended up coming into villages buying the maize crop at low prices.

Burdened with significant debt levels, the Agricultural Finance Corporation moved to purely commercial terms and conditions for credit.<sup>102</sup> Consequently, the large majority of small-scale farmers were effectively denied access to formal credit. Deprived of credit and inputs, and facing more difficulty in selling crops, many small-scale farmers ceased to grow maize for sale. The Green Revolution of the 1980s came to a screeching halt. Domestic food supplies, however, were still sufficient to cover the country's needs in most basic foods other than wheat. Except in the drought years, Zimbabwe was able to export a small surplus of maize mostly to its neighbours. Only in the last years of the 1990s did food production begin to falter and fall below domestic requirements because of increasing poverty and low incomes in communal areas. With low incomes, most small-scale farmers had difficulty purchasing agricultural inputs like fertilizer and seed. Also, starting from 1997, the government of Zimbabwe's relationship with the donor community was deteriorating and therefore the government's effort was being increasingly turned towards political security

An important point to note is that since independence, food security policies were made by civil servants in the Ministry of Lands, Agriculture and Rural Resettlement. According to Mudimu, policies were made in consultation with the politicians and farmers' organizations.<sup>103</sup> Until 1990, the ministry had the organizational capacity to develop and implement food security strategies. After the adoption of the Economic Structural Adjustment Programme (ESAP) in 1991, the influence of the donor

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<sup>102</sup> Makamure et al, p 20

<sup>103</sup> Mudimu 2003, p 6.

organizations rose significantly. Donors became more involved in the implementation of the structural adjustment document. They funded the consultative meeting that led to the drafting of the Zimbabwe Agricultural Policy framework (1995–2000).<sup>104</sup>

The problem with the food policy in Zimbabwe, even before ESAP, was the lack of public debates and popular consultation. Ordinary citizens were supposedly consulted through politicians who represented them. Unfortunately, politicians looked out for themselves. Political interference in food security policy implementation has always been a problem in Zimbabwe since independence. Politicians looked forward to benefiting either politically or financially or both. De Waal argues that the lack of public debate on food policy after ESAP was also welcomed by international donors and the International Financial Institutions who feared that a public debate could mobilize an anti-reform coalition.<sup>105</sup> ESAP also reconfigured government accountability from its own people to meeting externally imposed conditions. As a result, neoliberal economics that came with ESAP and a creeping authoritarianism handed a fatal blow to the famine prevention system in Zimbabwe.<sup>106</sup>

## 2.6 HIV/ AIDS Pandemic

Zimbabwe is one of the countries in the world most affected by the HIV/AIDS pandemic. HIV/AIDS is cutting people down in the prime of their productive years, leaving a growing number of households headed by grandparents, single parents and children. As of 2004, there were approximately 980,000 AIDS orphans, and 56,000 HIV

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<sup>104</sup> *ibid*

<sup>105</sup> De Waal, 1997, p 62.

<sup>106</sup> *ibid*

positive children.<sup>107</sup> Those with fully blown AIDS and can no longer work usually go to their rural homes to be taken care of by their parents or grandparents. Individuals responsible for primary food production will now spend more time on care-giving leaving them with little time for food production. This means that most affected households often have difficulties producing enough food to feed the growing number of dependencies. Increasing poverty compounded by the HIV/AIDS pandemic makes the food security concerns at household levels even more severe. HIV/AIDS usually affects a household in three ways namely an increase in health costs, shortage of labour supply and a loss of income. Losses in income limit the amount of agricultural inputs such as seed, fertilizer and pesticide that the household can buy. This compromises household food production and diminishes its capacity to deal with other shocks such as drought or economic decline. For Zimbabwe, a country with high prevalence of HIV and AIDS, agricultural productivity of affected households declined and that affected overall production in many communities. Also, with a high number of people dying in communal areas, the productive hours of those communities decline as people attend funerals.

## 2.7 Conclusion

In the 1980s, Zimbabwe did well to improve the food security of its people especially in previously neglected communal areas. Its aggressive agricultural policy produced surplus food allowing the country to export to its neighbours. In general, food security was achieved by Zimbabwe in the 1980s. According to UNICEF, the rate of

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<sup>107</sup> UNAIDS/UNICEF/USAID, 'Children on the Brink: A Joint Report of New Orphan Estimates and a Framework for Action', July 2004: 26.

malnutrition of children in Zimbabwe in 1990 was the lowest in Sub-Saharan Africa.<sup>108</sup>

The ESAP reversed all those gains and malnutrition levels began to rise. Also, the failure to address the land question at the 1980 conference will prove to be the best opportunity wasted. The land issue was at the heart of the liberation war and addressing the issue at the time could have prevented the chaos of 2000 and the after effects of that chaos.

Without land reform in Zimbabwe, and even without the events after 2000, it is likely that Zimbabwe was going to face food shortages. The food shortages were not going to be as severe as they became in the post-2000 era. Availability of agricultural inputs, even at high prices, would have made the situation bearable. As I will discuss in the next chapters, a food crisis within an economy teetering on the brink of collapse means that the solutions are more than just agricultural. Issues of poverty and limited access to services means food security will remain a challenge. Effective, well planned and well funded land reform is important in order to ensure long term food security in Zimbabwe. That way, pressure from the overpopulated communal areas will be eased and smallholder producers will again be instrumental in food production for the state. Land reform without donor support, however, will either fail or take too long for the benefits to be realized.

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<sup>108</sup> UNICEF, 1993, in Stoneman and Thompson, 1994, pp 20 – 30.

## Chapter 3

### The Food Crisis and the Politicization of Food in Zimbabwe (2000 – 2007)

#### 3.1 Introduction

Since 2000, Zimbabwe and its Southern African neighbours have faced serious food shortages due to climatic changes that have affected the region more than other regions in Africa. In 2002, Zimbabwe and its neighbours declared food emergencies<sup>109</sup>. Production yields could no longer meet demand and food prices sky-rocketed. As a result, poor people became more vulnerable to food shortages. Zimbabwe, which used to produce food surpluses and also exported food to its neighbours, could no longer continue doing so. Instead, it suddenly faced food deficits. Although there are food security issues in Southern Africa, the Zimbabwe food crisis has lasted longer and has been more severe because of political instability and an economic decline. Despite its neighbours showing signs of recovery after 2003, Zimbabwe continued to face severe food shortages and has thus failed to recuperate from a food crisis. Since 2000, the food production continued to decline. Like most Southern African countries, Zimbabwe declared the ‘national drought disaster’ in April 2002 when it became obvious that the harvests for that year were lower than the previous year<sup>110</sup>. The following years’ grain production continued to decrease. According to the ODI report, the 2003 harvest was at 41 percent of the 1996-2000 average.<sup>111</sup>

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<sup>109</sup> ‘Report on Economic and Social Condition in Southern Africa’, ECA/SRDC/SA/ICE/2002/04, [online], <http://www.uneca.org/sros/sa/publications/Ecorepsa%202002.pdf>

<sup>110</sup> World Vision, ‘Zimbabwe: Food Shortage Declared a National Disaster’, 16 May 2002

<sup>111</sup> ODI, 2004, p 7.

With increasing food shortages, there are reports which indicate that the Zimbabwe food crisis has been used for political gain by the ruling party, by the opposition party and even by members of the international community with vested interests in the country<sup>112</sup>. A renowned expert on land issues in Zimbabwe who has done numerous researches for the United Nations and is also Executive Director of the African Institute for Agrarian Studies in Harare, Sam Moyo, admitted in 2004 that the food debate in Zimbabwe has been so politicized that it has become very difficult to understand the severity of the food situation in the country.<sup>113</sup> The internationally recognized principles of aid distribution such as neutrality, impartiality, independence and universality are no longer fully respected because food aid has become highly politicized.

It is, therefore, the purpose of this chapter to examine the causes of the Zimbabwe food crisis and the factors contributing to the continuation of the crisis. These factors include climate change-induced droughts, land reform, government policies and ‘international sanctions’. The second part of this chapter will discuss the politicization of food and food aid in Zimbabwe. The Government of Zimbabwe and the international food aid programmes have both been criticized for using food as a political weapon. The government is accused of using food to punish opponents and to reward supporters, while the international community is blamed for trying to use the food crisis to push for its regime change agenda. In the process, the ‘right to food’ has been denied to many Zimbabweans. The aim of this chapter is to bring together the various, and often

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<sup>112</sup> Amnesty International Canada, ‘Zimbabwe: Power and Hunger – Violations of the Right to Food (Report)’ 15 October 2004.

<sup>113</sup> Sam Moyo in ‘Stakes High in Politics of the Stomach’, Financial Gazette (Harare), 30 September 2004.

divergent, views of all the stakeholders in the food security situation in Zimbabwe as a way of trying to fully comprehend the situation on the ground.

### 3.2 The Food Crisis and Its Causes

There are a number of causes that have contributed to severe food shortages in Zimbabwe. As I noted at the outset, a persistent drought, international sanctions and the withdrawal of international non-humanitarian support to Zimbabwe have been blamed by the government of Zimbabwe and its supporters as the reasons why Zimbabwe faced the serious economic problems and food shortages that it found itself in after 2000. On the other hand, those who are opposed to Mugabe's regime argue that government mismanagement of the economy and the fast track land reform programme caused the food shortages in the country during the period under study. However, as will be discussed below, the arguments given by the Mugabe government and those given by their opponents are all valid arguments. It is only that each argument on its own tends to leave out some important factors. Although, the poor weather in the production season has been significant, the fast track land reform programme, other food policies, the failing economy and the international sanctions have all played a significant role.

Climate change has caused continuous droughts in Southern Africa since 1999. This has severely affected agriculture in the region because of the reliance on rain-fed farming. Production in communal areas which used to contribute to 70 percent of maize has been seriously affected<sup>114</sup>. By 2002, food security in the Southern African region was left at its lowest since 1992<sup>115</sup>. Six Southern African countries namely Lesotho,

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<sup>114</sup> UNDP, 'Zimbabwe: Coping with Drought and Climate Change', ALM, 2007

<sup>115</sup> WFP Emergency Operation 10200, 2002: 1

Mozambique, Swaziland, Malawi, Zambia and Zimbabwe were left with approximately 13 million people facing severe food shortages<sup>116</sup>. In Zimbabwe, Initial National Communication (INC) and records from the Meteorological Services show that drought and floods have become more frequent and severe.<sup>117</sup> According to the Meteorological Office, rainfall has declined by about five percent and rainfall events have become more intense while mid-season dry spells have increased<sup>118</sup>. Extreme weather events are becoming more intense and extend over a longer period coupled with periodic shift in onset rains that mark the beginning of the farming season. Zimbabwe has experienced six warmest years on record since 1987 and an increase in the frequency of droughts since 1990 leading to massive drop in crop yields in the country's agricultural sector<sup>119</sup>. The country is also experiencing an increase in the frequency of floods. Cyclone-induced flooding included Cyclones Bonita in 1996, Eline in 2000, Japhet in 2003 and Favio in 2007<sup>120</sup>. Future climate change projections for Zimbabwe indicate that the country is warming at the rate of 0.15 to 0.55 degrees Celsius per decade. Annual rainfall is projected to decrease across Zimbabwe. The Met Office project that by 2080, Zimbabwe will average 5-18 percent below the 1961-1990 rainfall average of 634,8mm<sup>121</sup>. Agriculture has been identified as the sector most vulnerable to these climatic changes. Crop growth is increasingly coming under stress due to high temperatures and low rainfall conditions. Crop yields have been declining as a result and the small scale farmers do not have the financial and technical capacity to respond. In an interview with

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<sup>116</sup> ibid

<sup>117</sup> UNDP, 2007

<sup>118</sup> Africa News Network, 'Small Holder Farmers in Zimbabwe Grapple with Effects of Climatic Change', March 26, 2007.

<sup>119</sup> Africa News Network, 'Small Holder Farmers in Zimbabwe Grapple with Effects of Climatic Change', March 26, 2007.

<sup>120</sup> ibid

<sup>121</sup> ibid

the Zimbabwe Herald, a 78-year-old woman from Mubobo village in Seke summarized well the impact of climate changes on Zimbabwean communal agriculture. She said,

When I was growing up, we used to receive lots of rain here in Seke. We ate plenty of wild fruits - matohwe, tsambatsi, mazhanje, matamba, tsenza and other herbal plants. The rain pattern was predictable. We had madzura chando (winter rains in June) followed by gukurahundi rains in August, bumharutsva rains in September and the kutemera gwati rains which signalled the start of the new rain season. The rainfall pattern was predictable and we knew exactly when to plant our crops. But now things have changed. It's now difficult to plan. We don't know when to plant. Timing is now a big headache for us. Our crop harvest has fallen significantly and our soils now require more fertilizers which we can't afford. Rains are erratic and I think this has more to do with climate change.<sup>122</sup>

For Zimbabwe, the drought in Southern Africa occurred at the same time as the country embarked on its land reform process. Therefore, it is very difficult to separate the effects of the drought on food production from that of the Land Reform Programme. However, one would not be very wrong to argue that food production lost to drought has been attributed to land reform by the western media and those who are against the land reform programme. Also, in opposition circles, there has been too much focus on loss of production due to land reform ignoring the economic benefits of those who received the land. Mugabe and ZANU PF cronies did not deserve or need the land, although they disproportionately benefitted from the land reform programme. However, there are a number of ordinary Zimbabweans whose economic status improved significantly due to

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<sup>122</sup> 'Take Climate Change Debates to Villagers', The Zimbabwe Herald, 21 March 2009.

unorthodox land reform. The benefits to ordinary Zimbabweans have not yet received enough attention because most of them received the land because of their affiliation to the ruling party and their benefits have not yet benefited the national economy.

Land reform has received a lot of blame for being responsible for the food crisis in Zimbabwe after 2000. It is important, however, to understand that land reform is very necessary in Zimbabwe given the unfair and racist land distribution patterns of the colonial era<sup>123</sup>. The average white farmer owned about 100 times more land than an average black farmer and the white farmer's land was far more suitable for agriculture.<sup>124</sup> Chambati et al adds that farms belonging to the Oppenheimer family alone total an area exceeding the size of Belgium<sup>125</sup>. That kind of gross injustice could not last forever and land reform was inevitable. With an economy in decline and increasing poverty in Zimbabwe in the late 1990s, the demand for land was also increasing. Between 1997 and 1999, there was a rash of spontaneous farm invasions, mostly by people from overcrowded communal areas, but also by people from resettlement areas and towns. Ironically, most of the farm invasions between 1997 and 1999 were not directed by the politicians but by angry citizens who were not happy about the slow pace of land reform and by some farm workers who just disliked individual farmers.<sup>126</sup> The fast-track land reform programme was officially launched in July 2000, when some 3,000 farms were designated for compulsory acquisition. The acquired land was resettled under two broad models namely small-scale farms (known as A1 farms) which were aimed at resettling people from the over-crowded communal areas, and while new commercial farms

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<sup>123</sup> Also refer to Chapter 2, 'Background to the Food Crisis in Zimbabwe'

<sup>124</sup> Walter Chambati et al, "Land Redistribution in Namibia and Zimbabwe", Basis Briefs, August 2002.

<sup>125</sup> Chambati et al ibid

<sup>126</sup> Amnesty International, 2004

(known as A2 farms) were reserved for those with resources to invest in commercial agricultural production.<sup>127</sup> With about 11 million hectares of land being transferred from about 4000 white commercial farmers to about 72 000 black commercial farmers and about 127 000 black small scale farmers<sup>128</sup> in a three year period, the fast track land resettlement programme in Zimbabwe became one of Southern Africa's biggest property transfer in the post-colonial era.<sup>129</sup>

However, the fast-track land reform programme was faced by legal and administrative difficulties almost immediately. Multiple court challenges by commercial farmers, an inadequate budget, political interference, and unclear procedures for the allocation of land, contributed to chaos on the ground.<sup>130</sup> In many areas of the country, harassment of and violent assaults on commercial farmers and farm workers accompanied the implementation of the land reform programme. Also, as Sam Moyo argues, land reform alone is not enough to ensure agrarian reform and national development.<sup>131</sup> In fact, land reform should be the first step towards agriculture that goes beyond food production to include employment creation and rural development. Land reform should lead to net increase in employment. That has not been the case in Zimbabwe. Land reform severely disrupted food production on commercial farms. Bird and Busse argues that the evictions and job losses experienced by former farm workers created new vulnerable groups that lack access to essential services and are chronically

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<sup>127</sup> Sachikonye, 2005

<sup>128</sup> Government of Zimbabwe, 'Land Review Committee Report' 2003 (often referred to as the Utete Report)

<sup>129</sup> Sachikonye, 2005

<sup>130</sup> Amnesty International, 2004

<sup>131</sup> Sam Moyo, 'The Land and the Agrarian Question', Addis Ababa, 17 – 18 December 2004 [online] [www.sarpn.org.za/documents/d0001097/p121-Moyo\\_Dec2004.pdf](http://www.sarpn.org.za/documents/d0001097/p121-Moyo_Dec2004.pdf),

food insecure.<sup>132</sup> The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) stated that since the start of the Zimbabwe's fast track land reform programme, approximately 240,000 farm workers have lost their jobs and 500,000 have been forced to leave their homes.<sup>133</sup> Also, the acute foreign exchange shortage caused by a sharp decline in agricultural exports and foreign investment had a significant impact on the national economy and that led to many companies shutting down causing an increase in unemployment. Hyperinflation also became a national problem as the government resorted to printing money to make up for the huge budget deficit, to repay its debts and to import food. High inflation levels also had a lot to do with inability to access basic goods and services that led to increases in the average price of basic commodities such as bread, meat, cereals, fruits and vegetables. The living standards of people therefore fell drastically from 2001 to 2003<sup>134</sup>. The black market proliferated and some basic commodities could be found there. The black market prices however escalated beyond the reach of the average Zimbabwean in urban, but especially, in the communal areas. A combination of hyperinflation and unemployment pushed many Zimbabweans into poverty. Life savings became worthless and food security at household level came under severe threat.

The problem in Zimbabwe is that the land issue has been treated more as a political issue than an economic one. Instead of land being used as a tool to improve the country's economic standing, it has been turned into a political battle-ground. It became a political tool used to buy votes, to justify violence against the opposition and to justify

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<sup>132</sup> Kate Bird and S. Busse, 'Re-thinking aid policy in response to Zimbabwe's protracted crisis: A Discussion Paper', ODI, May 2007.

<sup>133</sup> UNHCR, 'Country of Origin Information Report: Zimbabwe', 14 September 2007, [online], <http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/pdfid/46ef94342.pdf>

<sup>134</sup> Central Statistics Office (CSO), [online], <http://www.herald.co.zw:15.09.2005>.

dictatorship. As Rotberg notes, land was used as patronage spoils.<sup>135</sup> As a result, the best land was given to people who lack passion for farming, or lacked the financial resources, equipment and expertise to run large farms and that contributed to perennial decline in agricultural production. Estimations of crop production in 2002 indicated that cereal production declined by 57 percent of an already poor harvest of 2001.<sup>136</sup> The Central Statistics Office (2002, 2004) also reported that maize production declined from an average annual output of about 1.7 million tonnes in the mid-1990s to between 0.9 million and one million tonnes in 2000-2004. The following diagram shows that production on resettled farms fell short of what the white commercial farmers produced before their farms were seized.

Table 2: Productivity per hectare on resettled farms and large-scale commercial farms

Product	Small Resettled Farms in 2003 (kg. per ha.)	Large Commercial Farms in 2001 (kg. per ha.)
Maize	696	4809
Wheat	1032	5741
Flue-cured Tobacco	888	2811
Cotton	507	2232
Soya Beans	421	2505

Source: Central Statistics Office, 2002, 2004.

The table clearly shows that resettled farms produced a much lower yield per cultivated hectare than before resettlement.

However, it would be unfair to conclude that the fast track Land Reform Programme has not achieved its full potential only because it was mishandled. Although

<sup>135</sup> R.I Rotberg, 'Winning the African Prize of Repression: Zimbabwe' in Rotberg (ed.), *Worst of the Worst: Dealing with Repressive and Rogue Nations*, World Peace Foundation, Cambridge (Massachusetts), 2007.

<sup>136</sup> Sachikonye, 2005

it was poorly planned and hurriedly implemented, severe fuel shortages that occurred at the same time the programme was implemented added to the problem. Without enough foreign currency to import enough fuel, agricultural production suffered a major blow. Fertilizer companies operated at below capacity due to lack of foreign currency.<sup>137</sup> It is very likely that the government transferred money that was meant to support the land reform programme toward importing fuel and food. With its tense relationship with western donor community and the withdrawal of western funds to Zimbabwe, the country could not fund the support structure necessary for the success of the land reform. As a result, the newly resettled farmers have received little government help. They lack fertilizers, seeds, marketing support and credit<sup>138</sup> and so most of the seized farms have become idle or underutilized. One can also argue that the timing of these ‘international sanctions’ only meant to hurt the national efforts to improve agricultural output. Land reform is also a long-term process whose results may take long to come to fruition. Maybe when Zimbabwe’s economy finally stabilizes, the resettled farmers will have the opportunity to achieve full potential. In the short term, however, the fast track land resettlement programme significantly contributed to the food crisis in the country.

The food crisis also continued to persist because of the unwillingness of the government to acknowledge the full extent of the food crisis and to accept that the land reform programme has not brought about the results they had anticipated. For example, on May 11, 2004, Mugabe told donors that Zimbabwe would not require food aid for the 2004-2005 seasons because it anticipated a bumper harvest<sup>139</sup>. However, FAO and WFP survey reports of July 2004 suggested otherwise. The reports indicated that Zimbabwe

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<sup>137</sup> Renson Gassella, 2006

<sup>138</sup> Kate Bird and S. Busse, May 2007.

<sup>139</sup> ‘President Mugabe: Zimbabwe Will Not Require Food Aid’, The Herald (Harare), May 12, 2004

had a deficit of about 325 000 tonnes<sup>140</sup>. The Zimbabwe Vulnerability Assessment Committee (ZimVAC) reported that more than 2.3 million people in rural areas would require food aid in 2004-2005.<sup>141</sup> The bipartisan Portfolio Committee on Lands and Agriculture set up by parliament in August 2004 to verify government crop yield estimates gave conflicting figures about 2004-2005 harvests. Although, the 2004 harvests were better than in 2003, observers noted that the numbers were below the minimum national requirement. It was on June 1, 2005 when Mugabe finally accepted food aid, at a meeting with James Morris, a UN envoy on humanitarian aid<sup>142</sup>. However, the aid that was allowed into the country could not meet demand and was highly politicized. The government claimed that about 2.8 million would require food aid while UN officials put the number at about 5 million people<sup>143</sup>. The food that was allowed into the country could only feed about 3 to 4 million people<sup>144</sup>. As a result, food aid did not reach all the intended beneficiaries and vulnerability to food insecurity persisted for many households.

There have been droughts in Zimbabwe before, and the country has been able to feed its people. There was an even more serious drought in 1992 in Zimbabwe, for example. However, the 1991-2 drought, although severe, was short (only one season), preceded, and succeeded by fairly good seasons. Between 2000 and 2007, poor seasons succeeded each other. Tony P. Hall, the United States Ambassador to the United Nations Food and Agriculture Agencies, in his speech in Harare, 2002, argued that the current food crisis in Zimbabwe has not been caused by the drought. He argued that the drought

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<sup>140</sup> FAO, 'Special Report – Zimbabwe', Rome, 5 July 2004 Found at <http://www.fao.org/docrep/007/J2650e/J2650e00.htm>

<sup>141</sup> Peter Kagwanja, 'Zimbabwe's March 2005 Elections: Dangers and Opportunities' presented at a Conference on "Zimbabwe: Imagining the Futures, Johannesburg, February 2005.

<sup>142</sup> 'Zimbabwe Accepts Food Aid', the Herald (Harare), June 2, 2005.

<sup>143</sup> 'Conflicted Zimbabwe Accepts Food Aid, Then Backtracks', Environmental News Services (ENS), Harare, June 2, 2005.

<sup>144</sup> *ibid*

only compounded the problem. He claimed that WFP and NGO food aid were rotting at the Zimbabwean border due to red tape. He made it clear to the Zimbabwe government that the US government was willing to help Zimbabweans with food despite the political differences with the Zimbabwe government.<sup>145</sup> Unfortunately, the Zimbabwe government was still in a state of denial at the time. Kevin Iles argues that Mugabe was still trying to prove to the world that his 'violent land seizure' from white commercial farmers has actually produced food surplus and not shortages<sup>146</sup>. As a result, from 2001, the government of Zimbabwe has been misrepresenting its food production yields for political reasons.

The other factor that has worsened the food crisis in Zimbabwe, and has nothing to do with the drought, is the government policy of price controls on basic goods and maize sales at all stages from the farm-gate, into mills, and for retail sale. Facing serious food shortages, in 2001, the government granted the Grain Marketing Board (GMB) a monopoly in trading in maize and wheat, whether in the form of grains, meal or flour<sup>147</sup>. The government of Zimbabwe further compounded food shortages and consolidated its control over food distribution by halting private merchants, the MDC and all but a handful of NGOs from importing grain.<sup>148</sup> Unfortunately, the GMB has not been able to import enough maize. There have been reports that there was not enough maize at these

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<sup>145</sup> United States of America Department of State, 'Zimbabwe Headed For Disaster – Famine Looms on the Horizon Without Drastic Action,' US Embassy (Harare) Press Release, Harare, Zimbabwe, 11 October 2002.

<sup>146</sup> Kevin Iles, 'The Food Crisis in Zimbabwe', Sabinet, Issue No. 2, Vol. 5, South Africa, 2004.

<sup>147</sup> 'Price Controls Devastating Rural Economy', IRIN News, Harare, 24 July 2007

<sup>148</sup> Zimbabwe Peace Project, Zimbabwe Peace Project, 'Politicization of Aid – Monitoring Report – The Manicaland Experience', August 2006.

controlled prices<sup>149</sup>. Price controls make it difficult for farmers to cultivate crops at a profit due to the escalating prices of seed and fertilizer, and for retail traders to operate at a profit. As a result, both commercial and small scale farmers either abandoned or significantly scaled down the cultivation of maize and wheat in favour of ‘less political’ crops, such as tobacco, that are not price controlled. Corruption in GMB operations<sup>150</sup> and reports that the imported food never reaches intended beneficiaries are common. This has resulted in the maize parallel market leading to very high prices with people’s wages falling behind. Officials responsible for food distribution often divert the food and sell it at the black market for very high prices. Some of the grain ended up being sold in neighbouring countries where prices are even more favourable.<sup>151</sup>

Furthermore, the government policy of ‘command agriculture’ to counter food shortages through controlling production and distribution of food worsened the food crisis. In 2005, the government launched ‘Operation Taguta’ (Eat Well) where army units were deployed on arable, purportedly underutilized land around the country to try to increase maize production. Farmers without enough inputs would get them from the GMB but had to sell their produce to the GMB below international market prices.<sup>152</sup> The army reportedly forced households to sell most of the produce to the GMB and only allowed them to retain limited volumes for own consumption.<sup>153</sup> This was often not enough and households ended up buying back grain from the GMB where they had to undergo political screening. As discussed in the second part of this chapter, suspected

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<sup>149</sup> Zimbabwe Peace Project, ‘Politicization of Aid – Monitoring Report – The Manicaland Experience’, August 2006.

<sup>150</sup> GMB Corruption was even brought to Parliament Debates by an Opposition Senate. See: Zimbabwe Parliamentary Debates – The Senate, Vol. 15, No. 21, Wednesday 31<sup>st</sup> May, 2006.

<sup>151</sup> Zimbabwe Peace Project, *ibid*

<sup>152</sup> Solidarity Peace Trust, ‘Command Agriculture in Zimbabwe: Its Impact on Rural Communities in Matabeleland’, 2006.

<sup>153</sup> (*ibid*)

opposition supporters were not allowed to buy from the GMB. Operation Taguta was a command agriculture model that intended to place 1 500 000 hectares under maize production in the 2005/6 season and to produce 2.25 million tonnes of maize, 90 000 tonnes of tobacco, 49 500 tonnes of maize seed, 210 000 tonnes of cotton, and 750 000 tonnes of horticultural crops<sup>154</sup>. However, this was only a good idea on paper because the government failed to raise the US\$151 million needed to support the model<sup>155</sup>. This Stalinist approach only achieved to turn utilized land into under utilized especially in rural irrigation schemes.<sup>156</sup> Solidarity Peace Project reported on their website that soldiers were taking food and farm equipment from villagers in Masvingo, Matabeleland and Midlands provinces under the guise of Operation Taguta.<sup>157</sup> The army accused villagers of underutilizing the equipment and so they took it away without prior warning. The impact of the command agriculture approach was that it gave power to the army to rob people of their food in the name of national interest and it left many households more food insecure.

In addition, in July 2007, the government of Zimbabwe ordered all commodity prices to be cut in half as a way of ‘fighting inflation’ and businesses that were using ‘British tactics’ to compound the economic hardships.<sup>158</sup> To enforce the price cuts, the police, army and ZANU (PF) youth militia went into shops threatening arrests, or even worse, if the prices were not rolled back. The results of such actions were catastrophic as shelves in shops were emptied and retailers reported huge losses. Most retailers,

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<sup>154</sup> The Zimbabwe Independent, ‘Zimbabwe Launches Operation Taguta’, November 18 – 25, 2005.

<sup>155</sup> ‘Zimbabwe: Military taking control of Food Production, Claims NGO’, IRIN News, 5 April 2006.

<sup>156</sup> Also see Solidarity Peace Project, ‘Operation Taguta/Sisuthi: Command Agriculture in Zimbabwe’, 2006

<sup>157</sup> Solidarity Peace Project, 2006

<sup>158</sup> ‘Shops Emptied as Panic Grips Zimbabwe’, The Guardian (SA), 5 July 2007.

wholesalers and manufacturers went out of business since they could no longer operate at a profit<sup>159</sup>. Those individuals with money went on panic buying and hoarding fearing an uncertain future. The end result of this government policy was that it only managed to worsen an already precarious food situation and further damage the economy.

### 3.3 The Two Food Regimes and the Politicization of Food in Zimbabwe

Since Zimbabwe declared the ‘natural drought disaster’ in April 2002, and allowed food aid to come into the country, there have been two official food regimes responsible for food distribution in the country. One is controlled by the Government of Zimbabwe and the other by local and mostly international donors and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). In this chapter, the government controlled food project will be referred to as the ‘government food regime’ and the other controlled by international donors and NGOs will be referred to as the ‘international food regime’. The government food regime is run by the Grain Marketing Board (GMB) while the international food regime is run by the World Food Programme (WFP) and a United States-funded Consortium of Southern Africa Food Emergency (C-SAFE) who supply local NGOs with imported maize and they will then distribute the food to the needy<sup>160</sup>. The GMB also oversees a ‘food for work’ programme where families without enough income to purchase food can perform public labour like road repairs, in return for food. The two regimes, however, do not meet the demand in Zimbabwe. Zimbabwe Vulnerability Assessment Committee (ZimVAC) reports that the two official food programmes in

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<sup>159</sup> John Robertson, “August 2007 Forecast Paper,” Robertson Economic Information Services for Zimbabwean Statistics, found at <http://www.economic.co.zw>.

<sup>160</sup> OCHA, ‘Consolidated Inter-Agency Appeal in Response to the Humanitarian Crisis in Southern Africa Zimbabwe: July 2002 - June 2003’, July 18, 2002.

Zimbabwe only provide food to about half the people who need the food<sup>161</sup>. To fill the void, the black market comes in and as more people turn to the black market for food, the food became more expensive. With an inadequate supply, food became an influential tool used to manipulate the vulnerable.

Local and international food aid groups in Zimbabwe have indicated that food has become an important political tool in Zimbabwe used to influence voters. It is used by the government of Zimbabwe and is also available in the international relief programme. Insiders of the international food agencies have admitted that there is a reluctance or unwillingness by international donors to give food aid to those involved in the land reform programme.<sup>162</sup> Need is no longer the sole determinant of food aid whether it is government aid or international aid. The food crisis in Zimbabwe has deprived the majority of Zimbabweans of their fundamental human right of access to food. The Zimbabwe constitution does not mention anything about the right to food and therefore, 'the right to food' is not locally enforceable. However, Zimbabwe is a signatory to international and regional agreements that relates to this right. Article 25 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), to which Zimbabwe acceded in 1991, guarantees the right to food. It also binds Zimbabwe to cooperate with the international community to end hunger within the country.<sup>163</sup> It stipulates that all states should ensure that 'every man, woman and child, alone or in community with others, has physical and economic access

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<sup>161</sup> ZIMVAC and SADC FANR Vulnerability Assessment Committee, 'Zimbabwe Emergency Food Security Assessment Report', December 20, 2002, pp. 13-14.

<sup>162</sup> Zimbabwe Peace Project, 2006

<sup>163</sup> Human Rights Watch, 'Not Eligible: The Politicization of Food in Zimbabwe', 2003,[online], [www.hrw.org/reports/2003/zimbabwe1003](http://www.hrw.org/reports/2003/zimbabwe1003).

at all times to adequate food or means for its procurement'.<sup>164</sup> Discrimination in access to food based on religion, political or other opinion constitutes violation of the covenant. The covenant also binds the country and the international community not to politicize food aid. The Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights has also emphasized that 'food is never used as an instrument of political and economic pressure'.<sup>165</sup> So anyone denying sectors of the population access to food for political or economic reasons will be in breach of international law. Food is more than just a resource for consumption. It is the essence of morality and purity. Therefore denying people food due to their political affiliation, or for whatever reason, is violating human rights and deprives those people of their personal dignity.

There have been efforts by the government to create an environment where it controls the scarce resource, food, and to determine who distributes it in the country. The Public Voluntary Organization (PVO) Act requires all organizations that provide welfare services and treatment to register with the government. The PVO Act was enacted in 1967 by the Smith regime as a way to restrict external support to the freedom movement<sup>166</sup>. Although it was re-enacted by the Mugabe government in 1996, it was used more often after 2000 to deny registration to NGOs who are deemed not supportive of the government and the ruling party. In 2004, the NGO Bill was introduced to replace the PVO Act. It intended to monitor and regulate NGOs operations and criminalize

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<sup>164</sup> UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, General Comment No. 12, 'The Right to Adequate Food', E/C.12/1999/5, paragraph 6.

<sup>165</sup> The Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, (ICESR, article 11, May 12, 1999).

<sup>166</sup> International Bar Association, 'An Analysis of the Zimbabwean Non-Governmental Organizations Bill 2004', 24 August 2004.

activities of human rights and governance NGOs.<sup>167</sup> Although, the bill was not put into act due to political pressure, its effects were felt by those in the NGO sector.<sup>168</sup> ZANU PF feared that NGOs could be used to channel external funding into MDC coffers or that NGO food could be used in the campaign of the MDC especially in rural areas.

### 3.4 The Government Food Regime and the Politicization of Food

The government food regime has been heavily criticized for political bias, lack of transparency, massive corruption, gross mismanagement and violence associated with food distribution. The Mugabe government has been blamed for making food an instrument of power used to reward allies, punish opponents and attract new supporters.<sup>169</sup> It is alleged that at ZANU PF rallies, supporters usually receive free sugar, maize seed and maize meal<sup>170</sup>. Violence and intimidation has been reported as war veterans and ZANU youths organize food distributions<sup>171</sup>. Between 2001 and 2007, Amnesty International documented the political manipulation of food aid where food aid was often withheld from those who did not hold a ZANU-PF membership card, and was used in attempts to influence election results<sup>172</sup>. Similar reports are found in the international media, on websites of independent NGOs and other human rights groups on the ground in Zimbabwe. Specifically, Human Rights Watch has done extensive research on the use of food for political gain in Zimbabwe and has reported in many of its reports

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<sup>167</sup> E. Bornstein, 'The Spirit of Development – Protestant NGOs, Morality and Economics in Zimbabwe' in Reynolds, F. and Sullivan, W.F. (Eds.), *Religion in History, Society and Culture – Outstanding Dissertations*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 2003.

<sup>168</sup> HRW, 2003.

<sup>169</sup> Michael Grunwald, 'In Hungry Zimbabwe, Food Used as a Political Weapon', Global Health Council, 01 January 2003.

<sup>170</sup> 'Food for Vote', Zimdaily.com, August 2007 (accessed on 08 September, 2007)

<sup>171</sup> Financial Gazette, 'Violence accompany Government Food Distribution', 15 August, 2006

<sup>172</sup> Amnesty International 'Between a Rock and a Hard Place: Women Human Rights Defenders at Risk', 25 July 2007', [online], [www.amnesty.org](http://www.amnesty.org)

that the politicization of food is very common in the country. The government has just brushed aside these allegations as ‘British tactics’ meant to discredit its Land Reform Programme. However, looking at the approach taken by the government in addressing severe food shortages in the country since 2000, it is evident that food is important in the political survival of the Mugabe regime.

In 1991, the government formed the National Drought Management Committee to deal with the drought of 1991-92. It comprised of officials and technocrats at all government levels from the village to the Vice President’s office. It has remained in place ever since to address drought issues. However, after 2001, it was replaced by the Task Force on Maize Distribution mostly known as the Food Committee. The Minister of State Security chairs the committee and he reports to the ‘war cabinet’<sup>173</sup>. The committee is based at the GMB head office and consists of intelligence personnel, police, defence forces members and individuals from various ministries.<sup>174</sup> Retired and senior military officers run and operate the functions of the GMB. The food committee is run by people whom I can call ‘securocrats’, those whose mission it is to protect the interests and security of the ruling ZANU PF party and its leader President Mugabe. It is not a coincidence that these ‘securocrats’ have a lot to lose with a change of government. Most of them will most likely face prosecution for human rights crimes committed during the Mugabe era. Food has become an integral part to ensure that security. Therefore, the committee has branches at all levels of government from cabinet to village level. The primary responsibility of the food committee is to import food, especially maize, and then

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<sup>173</sup> ‘War cabinet’ was appointed in August 2002 to ‘fight the economic problems... and the British and its allies’, the Herald, August 26, 2002

<sup>174</sup> Human Rights Watch, ‘The Politics of Food Assistance in Zimbabwe’, A Human Rights Watch Briefing Paper, 12 August 2004

sell it domestically at subsidized prices. It also provides grain to selected millers who will supply the maize meal to shops and outlets to sell at low prices.<sup>175</sup> Provincial and district food committees evaluate the extent of need in their respective areas and determine the amount of grain to sell to individuals. These local committees are responsible for maize distribution to depots and other selling points.<sup>176</sup> From looking at the composition and operation of the food committee, one can tell that the Zimbabwe food policy after 2000 was more about politics and security than it was humanitarian. The food committee has the structures of a political campaign team and has been effective in targeting and alienating suspected opposition supporters.

An important point to note is that some of the activities of the food committee members are motivated by personal profit and not political gain. However, as Rotberg argues, it is often difficult to draw the distinction between personal profit and political gain<sup>177</sup>. United Nations staff and observers at border posts have stated that there are indications that some of the food imports intended for Zimbabwe never actually reach the country<sup>178</sup>. Possible destinations of that food included the Democratic Republic of Congo, Malawi and Zambia. Other reports from the Zimbabwe Vulnerability Assessment Committee and other interest groups such as the SADC Assessment Committee all note that total GMB imports and local deliveries often do not add up. The Zimbabwe Financial Gazette reported in 2003 that about 200 000 tonnes imported into the country could not be accounted for.<sup>179</sup> National numbers often show surplus while at village level there are serious shortages. The ability to divert such large volumes of maize requires developed

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<sup>175</sup> HRW, 2003, 2004

<sup>176</sup> (ibid)

<sup>177</sup> R.I.Rotberg, 2007

<sup>178</sup> 'GMB Loses US\$20m in Grain Deal', The Zimbabwe Independent, March 14, 2003.

<sup>179</sup> '200 000t Maize Vanishes', The Financial Gazette (Zimbabwe), February 6-12, 2003

transportation, financial, managerial and organizational capacity. In Zimbabwe, that is something that could not be done without high-ranking government connections, given the government's close attention to food imports and to the movement of food within the country. Also, the black market has kept flourishing because of necessity and there are unproven rumours that it is dominated by high-ranking politicians. It is a likelihood that some of the maize diverted from the GMB channels end up being sold on the black market.

GMB food is allegedly in abundance during election time be they local or national elections. As coincidental as it may sound, the food often disappears soon after the elections and everyone will go back to the usual day to day scavenging for food. In election years, 2002 and 2005, food shortages were not very severe.<sup>180</sup> In its 2002 parliamentary elections report, the International Crisis Group (ICG) stated that the government released supplies of maize meal on the day of the election in certain MDC strongholds with the intention that most people will spent their day in the queue for food and that would reduce the number of people able to vote.<sup>181</sup> 2003 and 2006, the post election years, were the two years where hunger and malnutrition reports coming out of Zimbabwe were most numerous. Africa News reports that 2003 was the worst year in the country's ongoing food crisis because food was very scarce.<sup>182</sup> The consumer price index for the month of September 2003 reported inflation rates of 419 percent on food items, 275 percent for medical care and 265 percent for education costs<sup>183</sup>. Although inflation

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<sup>180</sup> Rachel Munyanyi, *The Political Economy of Food Aid: A case of Zimbabwe*, Western Cape University, November 2005.

<sup>181</sup> International Crisis Group (ICG), 'Zimbabwe: What Next?', Africa Report No. 47 14 June 2002.

<sup>182</sup> 'Food Security in Zimbabwe', Africa News, Thursday, 22 November, 2007, AfricaNews.com.

<sup>183</sup> Central Statistics Office, 10 October 2003

rates went over the roof in the following years, observers say food unavailability never reached the severity of 2003.<sup>184</sup> In 2004, the City of Bulawayo reported starvation related deaths in the city and surrounding areas. In a surprising move, the local government minister, Ignatius Chombo, investigated the MDC run city council and not the causes of deaths.<sup>185</sup> In 2004, the International Crisis Group also noted that most of the starvation related deaths were in urban MDC strongholds.<sup>186</sup>

Transparency, which is an important principle of food aid distribution, lacks in the government food aid regime. In 2003, Nathan Shamuyarira, the Secretary of Information for ZANU PF referred to food data as a state secret<sup>187</sup>. As a result, there is no hard information about GMB imports and distribution available to the public and other providers of food aid in Zimbabwe. Villagers are often in the dark about the selection process that determines those who should receive food aid. Without transparency and accountability in the way the GMB operates, it becomes easier for the politicization of food and for corruption in the government food regime to thrive. It also becomes very difficult to measure the effectiveness of the government food regime. As Amnesty International notes, accurate data on food availability and accessibility, appropriately disaggregated to show possible variation by gender, vulnerable groups and region is vital to addressing the problem of food insecurity.<sup>188</sup> Transparency and coordination is crucial to ensure that the food crisis in Zimbabwe is resolved.

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<sup>184</sup> Ibid.

<sup>185</sup> Gassella, 2006

<sup>186</sup> Collins: Contemporary Security Studies, 'Zimbabwe Beyond 2000 - The Politicization of Land and the Crisis of Government Zimbabwe's Human insecurity Issues', Oxford University Press, 2007

<sup>187</sup> 'Food Data is Government Business – Shamuyarira', The Zimbabwe Herald, 9 February 2003.

<sup>188</sup> Amnesty International, 2005.

One trade union leader stated that ‘ZANU PF likes droughts. They thrive on droughts because people are eating from their hands’<sup>189</sup>. The ever-increasing reliance on food handouts only ensured that food will be used as a political weapon. Despite increasing economic hardships in the country, Mugabe managed to maintain a certain level of popularity in rural areas by creating this culture of political dependency. Collins states that on the day of the 2005 General Election, NGO observers witnessed some ZANU PF party members distributing food near some polling stations.<sup>190</sup> In that environment, a ZANU PF membership card became a security and survival instrument.<sup>191</sup> Being MDC has been seen as taboo by those who support the government. ZANU PF youths and war veterans allegedly took away food from suspected opposition members. In the run to the 2005 elections, the land issue was also used as an electoral tool by using the promise of land allocations like a carrot in front of MDC leaders to try to induce defections.<sup>192</sup> In September 2004, Harare Executive Mayor, Sekesayi Makwavarara, dumped the MDC for ZANU PF after acquiring a farm near Mugabe’s home town of Zvimba and the promise of many other benefits.<sup>193</sup> Also, a Human Rights Watch report states that high-ranking politicians were reportedly accused of bringing names of individuals to access the GMB food.<sup>194</sup> Most of these individuals did not even pass the vulnerability test. However, GMB officials could not verify this or they risk losing their jobs.

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<sup>189</sup> HRW, 2003

<sup>190</sup> Collins 2007

<sup>191</sup> ‘ZANU PF Card Passport to Maize Meal in Highfield’, The Daily News, June 12, 2002.

<sup>192</sup> Kagwanja, 2005

<sup>193</sup> ‘Makwavarara Row Sucks in Politburo’, Zimbabwe Independent, Thursday, 24 March 2005.

<sup>194</sup> HRW, 2003

The politicization of food in Zimbabwe has a lot to do with the nature of political control, the desire to stay in power and retain the right to rule. It has become one of the many tactics used by the political players in Zimbabwe as they wrestle for political power. Despite Mugabe's promise in 2002 that the government will feed everyone including the 'stooges and puppets', independent sources on the ground are reporting a completely different story.<sup>195</sup> Chiefs and traditional leaders now play an important role in deciding who gets food aid. They are responsible for giving letters to prove one's vulnerability. Even for those who want to be neutral, there is a lot of pressure on them to deny these letters to those who are suspected of being critical of the ruling party. Those community leaders who resist these discriminatory government policies have their privileges revoked. ZimOnline.com reported on 26 July 2007 that, three chiefs and several headmen in the southern province of Masvingo had their government allowances withdrawn from them for backing the MDC.<sup>196</sup> For them to retain their influence in rural areas and the benefits that come with it, they have to play to ZANU PF's tune even if it means blocking food aid coming to help the hungry people in their villages.

Research by the Zimbabwe Peace Project (ZPP), a faith based rights organization, concluded that suspected opposition supporters are denied not only food but also access to anti-retroviral drugs and inclusion in the Basic Education Assistance Module (BEAM).<sup>197</sup> BEAM is a national plan to help orphans get health care and schooling. ZPP alleges that children whose guardians are suspected MDC supporters are arbitrarily

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<sup>195</sup> 'Vote for Opposition and You Won't get food, villages told', Meera Selva (The Independent), Bulawayo, 27 March 2005; Also see Human Rights Watch, 2003, and Zimbabwe Peace Project, 2006.

<sup>196</sup> UNHCR, 14 September 2007

<sup>197</sup> 'Zimbabwe: Politics not need determines govt aid - rights NGO' IRIN News, 26 September, 2006.

withdrawn from the BEAM programme.<sup>198</sup> School headmasters, who are often in charge of such a programme in their communities, are usually known ZANU PF activists.

Sokwanele (Enough), a human rights group in Zimbabwe, reports that some communities have made efforts to buy food on their own. In Zaka East, the community organized to go to the GMB to purchase maize for their families. Some even sold their cattle to go and buy the maize. However, the police confiscated the maize alleging that it was being sent to MDC supporters. They paid back the money used to buy the maize but refused to pay for the important transport costs.<sup>199</sup>

It is difficult to understand why the government failed to address food shortages for nearly a decade. The continued food shortages in Zimbabwe can only mean two things. Either it demonstrates a lack of capacity by the government to end the food crisis or a stunted human rights consciousness in government<sup>200</sup>. The evidence shows that the government lacks both the capacity and the willingness to end the food crisis. Renson Gassella, Shadow Secretary of Agriculture for the smaller faction of the MDC, former MDC MP for Gweru rural and a former GMB official, thinks that it is in ZANU PF's best interest to keep Zimbabwe in a semi-permanent food deficit situation because it can control the rural vote.<sup>201</sup>

The March 29, 2008 elections in Zimbabwe proved that ZANU PF has lost some grip on the rural vote. The two MDC factions ended up with a total of 110 seats (100 for MDC Tsvangirai and 10 for MDC M) and ZANU PF won 99<sup>202</sup>. The two MDCs picked

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<sup>198</sup> *ibid*

<sup>199</sup> Sokwanele-Enough is Enough, 'Reward or Retribution: The Politicization of Zimbabwe's Food Supply', July 26<sup>th</sup>, 2005.

<sup>200</sup> Rotberg, 2007

<sup>201</sup> Renson Gassella, 2006.

<sup>202</sup> Zimbabwe Electoral Commission (The Herald), April 2, 2008.

up many rural seats. It was the first time in 28 years that ZANU PF lost the majority in parliament. However, between 2000 and 2007, the use of food as a political tool has been very effective. Despite the allegations of rigging and use of violence, ZANU PF won three major elections namely the 2000 General Election, 2002 Presidential Election and the 2005 General Election, and numerous by-elections. In 2002, a high-ranking MDC official admitted that the plan was really working. MDC supporters were surrendering their MDC cards to be able to get food aid<sup>203</sup>. The government's aim was to starve the opposition into submission forcing them to support the ruling party. From official results, more people in rural areas voted for the MDC in 2000 than in 2002 and 2005. However, in 2008, the MDC seems to have made some in-roads in rural areas. It is also because the government has become bankrupt and has failed to fulfill most of its promises.

### 3.5 International Regime and the Politicization of Food

International emergency relief workers arrived in Zimbabwe in 2002 after the Zimbabwe government had finally admitted that they could no longer feed its people. There were going to be presidential elections in June 2002 and the two main parties were fighting for political control of the country. Robert Mugabe was facing a fierce opponent in Morgan Tsvangirai of the MDC. This was the first presidential contest between the two foes and this is an election that could have gone either way. Therefore, the international emergency workers arrived into a very tense political situation. They reported in many independent media outlets that some politicians tried to use

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<sup>203</sup> Claire Soares, 'Vote Mugabe or Starve – the Latest Ploy From a Regime Clinging to Power', The Independent, 7 June 2008.

international food aid to benefit government's political standing.<sup>204</sup> WFP even suspended some of its operations in Matabeleland North province at one point because its food was being diverted by politicians<sup>205</sup>. Politicians, both ZANU PF and MDC, often claimed that they were responsible for food aid in their constituencies. In return, they expected the beneficiaries to support them in elections. The international principles of aid distribution such as neutrality, impartiality, independence and universality are very difficult to uphold in a highly charged political environment.

Although the GMB has been widely blamed for being corrupt and for politicizing food, international food was also used for political gain. The WFP, for example, lacks resources (especially human) to monitor registration and distribution at village level. So, it often does not know about the politicization of its food unless it is a high profile case. The WFP, however, argues that it has been working hard to reduce the politicization of international food through sharing information with other players in the international food regime as a way to avoid making the same mistakes made by other groups. Relief agencies also claim that they have mechanisms to closely monitor and verify the selection of beneficiaries before and after the distribution. They claim they have a proven confidential system where individuals can report about manipulation of their food aid. Human Rights Watch, in interviews with international relief staff, gathered that the international aid system in Zimbabwe was so tight that less food was diverted for political gain compared to other countries.<sup>206</sup> The problem is that the WFP usually uses community leaders to compile the registers because it believes in community involvement in its operations. In Zimbabwe, the community leaders are the people who

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<sup>204</sup> HRW, 2003

<sup>205</sup> 'WFP Resumes Food Distribution', The Zimbabwe Independent, 28 March 2003.

<sup>206</sup> HRW, 2003

benefit from being extensions of ZANU PF rule in rural areas. Unfortunately, the over-reliance on community leaders and local authorities in their relief efforts means that their food aid can easily be used for political gain. On the other hand, the government of Zimbabwe claims that the international food aid is used to benefit the opposition.

The government of Zimbabwe, Human Rights Watch and other NGOs have all criticized international donors for their reluctance to provide food aid and agricultural inputs in the newly resettled farms. International donors did not want to appear as if they are supporting the Land Reform Programme of the government. However, as one relief worker admitted, it was very difficult for some time to differentiate between the new settlers and the ex-farm workers who were still on the farms.<sup>207</sup> These workers were in dire need of food aid and need should be the sole determinant for receiving food aid, according to international law. The government food regime does not cater for these individuals for two main reasons. First, they resisted the invaders on most farms when the invasions started. On certain farms, they fought running battles with the new occupiers in a bid to protect their employers and their only source of livelihood – their employment. Therefore, they are viewed as opponents of the Mugabe government. Second, it was not in the government's best interest to provide food aid in resettled areas because if people are hungry on resettled farms, then the Land Reform Programme will appear to be a failure.

Maize meal is the staple food of Zimbabwe. Other than the GMB, few other licenses were given to NGOs to import maize into the country. The WFP heads these NGOs and it works with local organizations in the distribution of its food. However, these local NGOs have to register with the Zimbabwean government and that is the

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<sup>207</sup> 'Southern Africa: Interview with WFP regional director Judith Lewis,' IRIN News, July 3, 2002.

source of the politicization of international food aid. NGO officials have in many instances turned a blind eye to partisan food distribution because they fear confrontation with the government.<sup>208</sup> Direct confrontation means that they risk having their licenses revoked and their organizations being banned in the country. For many local organizations, they are better off ignoring government use of international food aid for political purpose. Eddie Cross, MDC Economic Affairs spokesperson, notes that although the WFP and other aid groups do not act in a political manner, they are letting themselves be manipulated.<sup>209</sup>

There is less evidence to prove that international food agency directly used food for political gain, but there are other factors that need to be understood here. Mugabe's fear of the NGOs is not entirely baseless. There are a number of NGOs who have been trying to use the food crisis and other human rights issues to push a 'regime change agenda'. Examples of such NGOs include the Westminster Foundation for Democracy, Open Society Initiative for Southern Africa and the Crisis in Zimbabwe Coalition, just to name a few. Western food aid in Zimbabwe in 2002, when food aid started coming in, was distributed by NGOs who were not mostly favoured by the government. By giving food, these NGOs would appear to be responsible for feeding the hungry Zimbabweans – an exercise the government could not do.<sup>210</sup> This can explain why the government introduced laws to make sure that NGOs responsible for distribution of food register with

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<sup>208</sup> Nicole Itano,, 'Zimbabwe's Political Tool: Food', The Christian Science Monitor, CS Monitor.com, August 19, 2002

<sup>209</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>210</sup> Gregory Elich,, "Zimbabwe Under Siege", August 26, 2002 found at [www.swans.com/library/art8/elich004.html](http://www.swans.com/library/art8/elich004.html)

the government. Elich adds that food aid from the West was motivated by its utility as a weapon to overthrow Mugabe than it was by a concern for human suffering.<sup>211</sup> In May 2002, United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) coordinator met US and EU representatives in New York to ask for a US\$80 million aid package to help the Zimbabwe food situation. He was told that the food crisis in Zimbabwe was two-thirds a result of wrong economic policies.<sup>212</sup> He was also told that without Zimbabwe meeting certain conditions which included devaluating the Zimbabwe dollar, abandonment of current land reform, and protection of property rights, to name a few, no significant food aid will be given to Zimbabwe.<sup>213</sup> The EU and United States representatives were trying to use the food crisis to achieve political and economic ends. With the ever-increasing dire food situation in Zimbabwe, the Western countries thought that Mugabe could play ball. They were very wrong. One important factor to note is that, throughout the food crisis in Zimbabwe, the US has maintained its neoliberal agenda. It has constantly pushed for privatization and an economic environment favourable to western investors.

Many opponents of the government criticized the GMB monopoly in importing and selling grain in Zimbabwe as a political ploy by the Mugabe regime to control the movement of a precious commodity – maize. The fact that the food is subsidized can also be seen as a way to keep prices low to protect the poor people. However, this argument could only hold water if the GMB food was available to all Zimbabweans including those who criticize the government. On the other hand, many commercial and even small-scale farmers deliberately refused to sell to the GMB, but were selling to private buyers or

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<sup>211</sup> Gregory Elich, 2002

<sup>212</sup> “Change Policies, EU Tell Mugabe, Financial Gazette (Zimbabwe), May 2, 2002.

<sup>213</sup> A. Mutsakani, “Donors tell Mugabe: No Devaluation, No Food Aid”, Financial Gazette (Zimbabwe), May 14, 2002.

were illegally selling in neighbouring countries<sup>214</sup>. Selling outside of the official distribution channels could have been influenced by profit. It could also be because they were trying to create artificial shortages in Zimbabwe to put political pressure on the government. Unfortunately, the impact of this move is hard to assess in a political environment dogged by violence and electoral fraud.

### 3.6 Summary and conclusion

There are a many factors that have contributed to the food crisis in Zimbabwe. The drought that affected the Southern African region played a huge role in setting off the crisis. However with its neighbours showing signs of recovery from the drought, Zimbabwe's political instability, lack of government responsiveness and its sour relationship with the donor world only worsened the food crisis. National effort and resources have been directed towards ensuring the survival of a political regime instead of addressing the food and economic crises. Because its neighbours are enjoying relative political stability, they can focus their resources towards development and ensuring food security. The politicization of food compounded by political violence and repression only makes the situation even more complex in Zimbabwe. Information is not easily available and this means public participation in solving the crisis is very limited. Without openness on GMB operations, it is very difficult for donors to plan appropriately and ensure that enough quantities of food are available. Strengthening food security requires a policy agenda that goes across all relevant departments in government and donor community. Although there is overwhelming reports which accuse the government of politicizing its food aid, it should also be worrying that international food aid is denied to certain

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<sup>214</sup> IRIN News, 'Roadblocks Set-up to Search for Maize', Harare, 16 September

individuals because of political considerations. The case of Zimbabwe has proved that using food shortages to induce regime change does not always work. Instead, it is the ordinary people who suffer the most.

## Chapter 4

### 'Tofira Mutrial' and the Politics of Survival within Zimbabwe's

#### Food Crisis (2000- 2007)

##### 4.1 Introduction

The crisis of the Zimbabwean economy continues to intensify, with prices of basic commodities sky-rocketing due to record inflation, and unemployment levels well above 80 percent.<sup>215</sup> In addition, there appears to be no end in sight for the political crisis gripping the country, the ability of Zimbabweans to achieve economic well being has been severely threatened. Even for many of those who are still employed, inflation has rendered their income worthless. This has been widely reported in international media<sup>216</sup>. Once seen as a country of national prosperity, pride and certainty, the international media now reports, on a daily basis, of a country marred by severe political and economic crises<sup>217</sup>. What has not been widely reported is how the Zimbabweans who are living in and experiencing these ever-changing circumstances have managed to survive. For ordinary Zimbabweans, the political and socio-economic crises have boiled down to basic needs such as how to put food on the table on a daily basis. The struggle to feed their families has become a major preoccupation of many Zimbabweans. However, this experience, though tragic, has revealed a nation of resilient people with a very strong culture of resourcefulness and self-reliance.

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<sup>215</sup> 'Zimbabwe: Critique of the 2008 National Budget', Financial Gazette (Zimbabwe), 20 December 2007.

<sup>216</sup> 'As Inflation Soars, Zimbabwe Economy Plunges', New York Times, February 7, 2007.

<sup>217</sup> 'Zimbabwe's Economic Crisis Drives it Back into Steam Age', The Guardian (UK), 29 September, 2005.

It is important to note that as the ordinary people develop the art of survival, the government of Zimbabwe became a major obstacle as it criminalized most of the activities that the people of Zimbabwe have engaged in for them to survive. Each creative move or strategy, such as informal trading by ordinary people, is sure to meet state interference. The government's argument is that informal trade is threatening the very existence of the formal economy. Thus, the government works to control every economic activity to its advantage. As a result, reports of police harassment and arrests of illegal traders have been pervasive in the media and on the websites of human rights organizations operating in Zimbabwe<sup>218</sup>. Also, first hand reports of those who claim to have been harassed are numerous. All that created a country on high alert.

This chapter aims to answer the question on how the people of Zimbabwe survive a food crisis that has been very severe and has extended over a longer period of time, and without much help from their government. From the cliché that 'Africans don't starve, they cope', the chapter explores the coping strategies developed by Zimbabweans as they face the most severe economic and food crises since independence. The chapter is divided into four main sections: first, it reflects on the language that has been developed by Zimbabweans as a mirror to their internal suffering and how far they are willing to go in their fight for survival. A common language of suffering shows that the crisis is widely spread across the country and it affects people from different social backgrounds. The next three sections first provide a distinction between coping and survival strategies that the people of Zimbabwe have developed. Then they discuss the actual coping and survival strategies that people adopted. Each strategy often reflects on the level of

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<sup>218</sup> 'Police in Zimbabwe Arrest 9000 Traders,' The Guardian, UK., 24 May 2005; and Zimbabwe Chamber of Informal Economy Associations (ZCIEA) Report, 13 May 2005, [online], [www.streetnet.org.za/english/zim06.htm](http://www.streetnet.org.za/english/zim06.htm)

desperation that the people involved are in. There are probably thousands of strategies adopted by Zimbabweans as individuals or households, but this chapter will only manage to discuss the most commonly used. The chapter also intends to highlight on how the HIV/AIDS pandemic in Zimbabwe compromises the ability of affected families to cope with the food crisis, and on the environmental impact of some of these strategies.

#### 4.2 The Language of Suffering

As survival has become increasingly elusive over the years, Zimbabweans are refusing to give up. ‘We will die trying’ or *Tofira mutrial*, in the Shona language, and *kukorokoza* (hustling) have become common phrases in Zimbabwe. What has been the most impressive is the ability of Zimbabweans to make fun of their circumstances. ‘Happy New Year’ is now often referred to as ‘Happy Queue Year’. Ever-creative Zimbabweans continue to come up with new language of suffering that is not only humorous but also reflective of their day-to-day struggles. Magaisa observed that language remains the only free medium through which Zimbabweans carry and express collectively what would otherwise be individual burdens.<sup>219</sup> In his description about how the African peasant farmer struggles for subsistence in the era of globalization, Fantu Cheru captures well the reality of the Zimbabwean ordinary citizens with the following words: ‘...I am humbled by capacity of the poor to laugh at their own misery and, more

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<sup>219</sup> Alex Magaisa “The game of politics is for the well fed, an old timer in Mbare told me,” Opinion, New Zimbabwe.com, 24 May, 2008, found at <http://www.newzimbabwe.com/pages/magaisa50.16975.html>

importantly, the tenacity that appears to propel even the poorest of the poor to make a living out of thin air, to fight for their dignity'.<sup>220</sup>

In Zimbabwe, shopping for basics has become a task so monumental, frustrating and sometimes hazardous. Basic goods such as meat, milk, sugar, salt, and cooking oil are not ordinarily available on the formal market. Most manufacturers of basic commodities have either ceased or scaled down operations in the wake of commodity price controls. So waiting in the long, meandering queues does not guarantee success. Although the atmosphere can be tense, it is in those queues where the best jokes are told. In buses coming from South Africa or Botswana, singing has become a common feature as people try to encourage each other on the long journeys ahead. Local musicians are also singing the songs of turmoil, hope and faith. Most of these songs are banned in Zimbabwe but are played on the internet radios<sup>221</sup> that have mushroomed since government tightened its control of the media.

More often than not, in informal discussions, the people of Zimbabwe have been labelled politically docile<sup>222</sup> or cowards. The argument given is that how can they allow one man to destroy their lives and livelihoods. To their defence, Zimbabweans know what that the rest of the world does not. They know what they are up against. The government of Robert of Mugabe has inherited a well-oiled machine of state repression from the colonial government of Ian Smith and they perfected it. The ZANU PF government has managed to monopolize all forms of violence in Zimbabwe. After 2000,

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<sup>220</sup> Fantu Cheru, in L. Amoo (ed.), 'The Silent Revolution and the Weapons of the Weak: Transformation and innovation from below' in Amoo, L. (ed.), *The Global Resistance Reader*, Routledge, New York, 2005, p.76

<sup>221</sup> Zimnetradio.com, thazonet.com, Voice of America Studio 7 (found at [www.voanews.com/zimbabwe](http://www.voanews.com/zimbabwe))

<sup>222</sup> Fred Khumalo, 'We Laugh at Docile Zimbabwe at Our Peril', *The Sunday Times (SA)*, March 30, 2008; Ngoni Chanakira, 'Zimbabweans Too Docile – Nyemba', *The Zimbabwe Independent*, 05 March 2004.

the government of Zimbabwe continuously enacted punitive policies to induce fear and uncertainty among ordinary citizens. ‘Operation *Murambatsvina*’ ( Operation Clean Out Filth) of May 2005 is one such policy that intended to weaken the opposition’s support base and also increase government control of the economy by killing off the illegal foreign exchange market. The government claimed Operation *Murambatsvina* was an urban renewal exercise meant to reduce crime in urban areas and also bring cleanliness back to the cities and towns. What the operation achieved, instead, was an indiscriminate destruction of property belonging to the urban poor rendering them destitute. Although the government claimed that about 120 000 people were affected, a UN report claims that more than 700 000 people lost either their jobs or their homes or both.<sup>223</sup> Weakening the opposition support base through political violence also became an integral part of ZANU PF’s quest for political survival. Mugabe has lasted this long as President of Zimbabwe due to electoral fraud accompanied by intensive violence towards those suspected of supporting the opposition political party, the Movement for Democratic Change.

The assessment of those who have only heard by word of mouth or rely on the media to understand the situation in Zimbabwe can, at times, be unfairly harsh towards the approach taken by Zimbabweans in the face of their circumstances. It is difficult for some of us living in countries where food, water and other basics are easily available to understand the immediate challenges facing the people in Zimbabwe. The general person in Zimbabwe is hungry, sick and just tired. Politics and demonstrations are the last thing on most people’s minds. The challenges of feeding the family have consumed all their energy and time. The notion that a hungry man is an angry man who can be dangerous

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<sup>223</sup> Anna Kajumulo Tibaijuka, ‘Report on the Fact-Finding Mission to Zimbabwe to Assess the Scope and Impact of Operation *Murambatsvina* by the UN Special Envoy on Human Settlement Issues in Zimbabwe’, 18 July 2005, [online], [http://www.un.org/News/dh/infocus/zimbabwe/zimbabwe\\_rpt.pdf](http://www.un.org/News/dh/infocus/zimbabwe/zimbabwe_rpt.pdf)

has been proved wrong in Zimbabwe. Zimbabweans are probably angry but honestly they are too hungry and tired to be dangerous.

#### 4.3 Coping Strategies versus Survival Strategies

Since 2000, as the impact of the food crisis became more intense with each day, the strategies adopted by those facing the food crisis also changed and evidence of increasing desperation became obvious with each new strategy. Stephen Devereux in a study of famines in Africa notes that there is a three-step sequence of adoption of strategies that the people go through as they face food shortages.<sup>224</sup> These steps are: (a) Insurance mechanisms where people can draw down savings and call on remittances. These are strategies with little long run costs and are basically the coping strategies. (b) Disposal of productive assets where people began to sell important assets of the household in order to buy food; these strategies are adopted later because they have higher long run costs and are more difficult to reverse. The living conditions have become more desperate. (c) Destitution behaviour, which is completely a survival strategy and is adopted as the food crisis continues and people have exhausted all the coping strategies. Such survival strategies include migrating to other areas within or outside the country. De Waal refers to this as distress migration which reflects economic destitution and a failure to cope.<sup>225</sup> The art of fleeing, to neighbouring countries and overseas, is one of the effective strategies that the people of Zimbabwe have mastered. As discussed below, this strategy has saved many lives because those who flee the country

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<sup>224</sup> Stephen Devereux, 'Famine in Africa' in Devereux, S. and Maxwell, S. (ed.), *Food Security in Sub-Saharan Africa*, ITDG Publishing, London 2001.

<sup>225</sup> De Waal 1997

send back remittances to relatives left behind therefore taking them from situations of destitution to less desperate situations.

The fundamental difference between coping strategies and survival strategies is the idea of cost and reversibility of each action. De Waal refers to coping strategies as ‘non-erosive’ behaviour because they do not undermine future livelihoods, while those strategies that deplete the household asset base and undermine its future viability are seen as ‘erosive’.<sup>226</sup> Although, it is difficult to say that the food crisis in Zimbabwe constitute a famine, because of the absence of excess mortality linked to food shortages<sup>227</sup>, the sequences that Devereux discusses are true about Zimbabwe.<sup>228</sup> Zimbabwe has been teetering on the brink of a full-blown famine for some six to seven years. Food Security Network (FOSENET), a coalition of about 17 national NGOs formed to share views, resources and experiences on responding to food security issues in Zimbabwe, uses the Household Vulnerability Index (HVI) to rank households vulnerability to the food crisis in the country. According to the HVI, there are three levels of household vulnerability namely: (1) Coping level: these are households in a vulnerable situation but able to cope. About 70 percent of these households are headed by male adults and 30 percent adult female-headed households; (2) acute level households: these badly need assistance. With some rapid response type of assistance, the family may be resuscitated. These households are female headed, child headed and elderly headed; (3) Emergency level households: these could be resuscitated only with the best possible expertise.<sup>229</sup> The main problem

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<sup>226</sup> De Waal(1997

<sup>227</sup> Refer to Chapter 1, ‘Introduction’.

<sup>228</sup> Devereux ibid

<sup>229</sup> Food Security Network (FOSENET), ‘Assessment of the Food Situation in Zimbabwe’, August 2008, found at [http://www.kubatana.net/docs/foodse/fosenet\\_food\\_situation\\_0808.pdf](http://www.kubatana.net/docs/foodse/fosenet_food_situation_0808.pdf)

with the Zimbabwe food crisis is that it has extended over a long period of time. So, some of the individuals who could cope in 2003 had exhausted their coping abilities and were fighting for survival in 2007.

#### 4.4 Coping Strategies

The coping strategies that the people of Zimbabwe adopted since 2000 with increasing food shortages vary from household to household and from one livelihood zone to another. A livelihood zone is an area within which people share broadly the same patterns of access to food such as growing the same crops, keeping the same types of livestock (i.e. the means of production) and generally having the same access to markets<sup>230</sup>. These livelihood zones do not always follow administrative zones. For example, one livelihood zone can cover many villages or even districts. Also, there can be many livelihood zones in one administrative zone. Local factors such as soils, climate, access to markets etc. in some instances, allows different households to pursue similar strategies

Historically, social networks have been a source of support for many communities in Zimbabwe. Throughout the 1980s, 1990s until about 2001, ‘informal safety nets’, were very strong and effective. Foster defines safety nets as formal or informal mechanisms that mitigate the effects of poverty and other risks on vulnerable households during times of severe stress.<sup>231</sup> In Zimbabwe, like in many African countries, the extended family, assisted by the community at large, has been by far the most effective response for people

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<sup>230</sup> Zimbabwe Vulnerability Assessment Committee (ZimVAC), ‘Zimbabwe Livelihood Profiles’, September 2005 found at [http://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf\\_docs/PNADG540.pdf](http://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/PNADG540.pdf)

<sup>231</sup> Foster, G. ‘Under the Radar: Community Safety Nets for Children Affected by HIV/AIDS in Poor Households in Sub-Saharan Africa’, United Nations Research Institute for Social Development (UNRISD), Executive Summary, January 2005.

facing household crises. State-administered support was severely reduced when the country adopted the Economic Structural Adjustment Programme in 1991. For most people, it became almost non-existent after 2001 when the economic crisis started. Whatever was left of government support was now directed to known supporters of the ruling party and denied to suspected opposition supporters<sup>232</sup>. Social insurance for most people was then provided through kinship ties that enable household members to access economic, social, psychological and emotional support from their relatives in times of need. This can be seen as a form of collective coping. Davies refers to this as the ‘moral economy’ where friends and neighbours loan money or food to those in need and they will pay back when they can.<sup>233</sup> Equally poor households could give food to those without, of course with the expectation that help given now will be reciprocated when required in the future.

However, after 2000 as the food situation in Zimbabwe began to deteriorate, the ‘moral economy’ as Davies describes it, also encountered a crisis.<sup>234</sup> Wherever it still existed, it was no longer moral. It became an instrument of exploitation because food could now be used to buy cheap labour or political clout. With increasing food shortages, the limitations of the informal safety nets became very clear. They became least effective at a time when they are needed the most. Those with a little food surplus could no longer risk giving away their food because they are not sure of the future. The Zimbabwe example shows very well that social networks or collective coping only work with minor shocks and when the situation is not severe. For those households without strong connections to wealthy relatives or relatives in the Diaspora, drawing on social networks

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<sup>232</sup> Refer to Chapter 3, ‘The Food Crisis and the Politicization of Food (2000 – 2007)’.

<sup>233</sup> Davies, 1996 in Devereux, 2001

<sup>234</sup> *ibid*

offered limited relief and was rapidly exhausted. As a result, coping strategies have become individual or household based.

When the food crisis began in 2000, the first strategy that most people adopted was to reduce the number of meals and/or portions of the meals and also to adopt cheaper diets as a relatively costless way of making limited resources take them a little further. A family that used to eat three meals a day will cut to two meals or even to one meal a day. One technique that the people of Zimbabwe quickly adopted when the crisis began was to improvise and compromise on quality and quantity. The Food Security Network (FOSENET) reported that after 2000, most families had foregone most basics and having one meal a day had become a normal practice for most households.<sup>235</sup> At national level, undernourishment and malnutrition increased as a result. The United Nations' Human Development Report of 2007/2008 highlights an increase in the population undernourished to 47 percent between 2000 and 2004 from about 38 percent reported between 1995 and 1998.<sup>236</sup>

Alternative sources of food were also explored as a response to the crisis. In 2002, Refugees International (RI) did a survey in some drought-affected areas of rural and peri-urban Zimbabwe asking villagers about how they were preventing starvation. Villagers reported that they were foraging for wild fruits and roots. Hungry people were finding and roasting red ants, capturing and cooking mice, and catching fish.<sup>237</sup> However, the rodent population depends on the availability of maize in fields. With the drought, the

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<sup>235</sup> Food Security Network (FOSENET), 'Assessment of the Food Situation in Zimbabwe', December 2008, found at [http://www.kubatana.net/docs/foodse/fosenet\\_food\\_monitor\\_090212.pdf](http://www.kubatana.net/docs/foodse/fosenet_food_monitor_090212.pdf)

<sup>236</sup> Human Development Report 2007/2008, 'Zimbabwe: The Human Development Index – Going Beyond Income', UNDP, found at [http://hdrstats.undp.org/countries/country\\_fact\\_sheets/cty\\_fs\\_ZWE.html](http://hdrstats.undp.org/countries/country_fact_sheets/cty_fs_ZWE.html)

<sup>237</sup> Refugees International, "Zimbabwe: Survival Strategies in the Face of Starvation", Refugees International, Articles, Zimbabwe, 09/04/2002, [Online] [www.refugeesinternational.org/content/article/detail/1192/](http://www.refugeesinternational.org/content/article/detail/1192/)

maize yield was very low and so the mice population was also low. Fish was also in short supply due to dry rivers for most part of the year because of the drought. Unfortunately, these alternative sources of food were not sustainable because many people were relying on them and the supplies are very limited. Like most coping strategies, the eating of mice, red ants or wild fruits is basically the intensification of existing activities rather than a completely new or unusual behaviour. Even during the 1980s or 1990s when food was relatively abundant, mice or red ants, or wild fruits were part of the diet in rural Zimbabwe. The only difference between then and now is that for most people it was a choice to eat them then and probably the only alternative now. Like many coping strategies, catching fish or mice, and gathering and preparing wild fruits require skill and experience. Therefore, these are not strategies which can be adopted by everyone. Also, mice, red ants, wild fruits and even fish are mostly available in rural or agricultural areas. For people living in cities or towns, such alternatives are not always available to them.

Clement Njoroge argues that the definition of poverty in Zimbabwe has taken a new meaning.<sup>238</sup> Poverty is now more rampant in urban cities than in rural areas. In rural areas, households can eat whatever they can grow and they have a better access to alternative foods such as wild foods, fish and mice, etc. In urban areas, the story is different with high unemployment, empty stores and expensive food on the black market. The term 'black market' is often used to refer to illegal activities. In Zimbabwe, for those who can afford to buy food at inflated prices, the 'black market' is a lifeline. Njoroge adds that even when the government offers cash incentives to whistle blowers in an attempt to cripple the black market, there are no takers because food has become more

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<sup>238</sup> Clement Njoroge, "The Politics of Exclusion and National Survival", AllAfricafiles.org, 8 October, 2007. [online] [www.newsfromafrica.org/newsfromafrica/articles/art\\_1085.html](http://www.newsfromafrica.org/newsfromafrica/articles/art_1085.html)).

than just a politicized commodity.<sup>239</sup> It is also very scarce. With food supplies in short supply on the official market and price, yet available on the black market at ten times the price, the people of Zimbabwe have become used to waiting in endless queues with little to no guarantee of getting the food once they reach the end of the line. Magaisa observed that by 2006,<sup>240</sup> Zimbabweans could join any queue even if they did not know what was at the end of the line. However, by joining that queue, they know very well that whatever they are going to get, if they get it, will be of use sooner or later. In many cases, they are sure they can buy something that they can re-sell at an exorbitant profit. Days are spent in queues. Sometimes they return empty-handed but that does not deter them from joining queues again the following day. Unfortunately, some people have lost lives in those queues. For example, the Zimbabwe Independent reported that a man was killed in Harare during a stampede to buy sugar<sup>241</sup>. The crowd ran over him just to buy a pack of sugar.

One person I interviewed stated that his company has since resorted to paying them every week instead of every month<sup>242</sup>. They are paid half the wages in groceries such as flour, salt, beans, sugar or whatever the manager can find. The cost is deducted from their wages. Sometimes the manager is compassionate and he does not deduct anything. This is one of the few companies still in business. Most of the businesses have closed claiming that the political and economic environment makes Zimbabwe a difficult place to do business<sup>243</sup>. For most people however, gadgets such as a cell phone became important because they could help provide dinner for the family. Instant texting and

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<sup>239</sup> Clement Njoroge (ibid)

<sup>240</sup> Alex Magaisa (2007)

<sup>241</sup> 'Man dies in sugar stampede in Zimbabwe', The Zimbabwe Independent, August 16, 2007.

<sup>242</sup> Nhamo Manzara (not his real name), Informal personal interview, December 2007.

<sup>243</sup> 'Zimbabwe Among the Worst for Business', The Zimbabwe Times, January 2007

phoning became an important way of informing the nation of what is available where. In cities especially, people would not leave home without backpacks, plastic bags or containers and, of course, lots of cash. In June 2007, when the government ordered a 50 percent reduction on all goods and services<sup>244</sup>, telecommunications systems were jammed as constant text messaging and phoning were used to locate the shops still carrying the goods and commodities.

After 2000, cross border activities along the borders of South Africa, Mozambique, Zambia and Botswana increased as households try to find ways to make ends meet. Some individuals went as far as Dubai and China. Due to its informal nature, statistics are hard to come by. However, most people believe that cross border trade - legal and illegal – has contributed significantly to the country's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and could have helped in averting a total collapse of the Zimbabwean economy. Mate describes Beitbridge, a town located at the border with South Africa, as the 'barometer' of Zimbabwe's socio-economic crisis, in general, and the food crisis, in particular.<sup>245</sup> The South African economy is considered much stronger than the Zimbabwean economy. Therefore, traffic volumes at the border post speak volumes of the impact of the food crisis and the pressures in Zimbabwe's economy. In Zimbabwe where severe food shortages and increasing poverty has become the order of the day, cross border trading has become an important livelihood strategy. In 2003, Food for the Hungry International reported that Beitbridge border post has become Africa's busiest in

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<sup>244</sup> 'Government Launches Operation Reduce Prices', The Zimbabwe Herald, 27 June 2007.

<sup>245</sup> Mate, R, Making Ends Meet at the Margins? Grappling with Economic Crisis and Belonging in Beitbridge Town, Zimbabwe, CODESRIA Monograph Series, Dakar (Senegal), 2005.

terms of volume and value of goods, and human and vehicles passing through it.<sup>246</sup> The border post is open for 24 hours all year round.

Thousands of Zimbabweans are going to neighbouring countries to buy food. Individuals cross into neighbouring countries selling crafts, home-made mats, hoes, clothes, etc. They sell those goods and then buy food and other necessities to bring back to their families. Although Mozambique and Zambia are also destinations for Zimbabweans, South Africa and Botswana are more popular. Thousands of Zimbabweans go to neighbouring countries to buy necessities such as soap, cooking oil, toiletries, and flour, to name a few. In Botswana<sup>247</sup> or South African<sup>248</sup> wholesale shops, Zimbabweans are easy to identify because they buy everything in bulk. They buy giant boxes of soap, cooking oil, milk, flour, salts, sugar and even candles because back home electricity is now a rare commodity. The irony is that in Botswana or in Malawi, one can buy products made in Zimbabwe such as Mazoe orange juice or powdered milk, but these products have been in short supply for a long time in Zimbabwe. Price controls in Zimbabwe forced producers to sell their products out of the country for a profit.

Zimbabweans are no longer welcome in neighbouring countries because they are causing prices of food to increase due to the increase in demand. Even increases in food prices caused by the global increases in food prices are now blamed on Zimbabweans by some locals in neighbouring countries. Africa Business (Botswana)<sup>249</sup> reports in May 2003 that a once friendly relationship between the Tswanas and the Zimbabweans was deteriorating fast as the Zimbabweans were flocking to Botswana to look for work and to

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<sup>246</sup> FHI in Mate, 2005

<sup>247</sup> E.g. Jumbo wholesale Cash and Carry Outlet, located in Industrial areas in Francistown

<sup>248</sup> E.g. The Messina Factory Shop in the Border Town of Musina

<sup>249</sup> 'Botswana: Citizens Turn on Zimbabwean Migrants', Africa Business, Thursday May 1, 2003.

buy groceries. The report adds that the Zimbabweans were being blamed for everything from increases in food prices, vagrancy, stealing, prostitution, spreading HIV/AIDS, to the foot and mouth livestock disease that broke out in January 2003 killing livestock throughout Southern Africa<sup>250</sup>. In South Africa, the tension between poor unemployed South Africans and immigrant groups mostly Zimbabweans, and to a lesser extent, Somalis and Mozambicans reached its boiling point in May 2008 when South Africans youths went on rampage beating, raping and killing foreigners. The local youths were blaming foreigners for ‘stealing’ their jobs and increasing crime rates in South Africa.<sup>251</sup> Zimbabweans newspapers claim that more than 20 Zimbabweans died in those xenophobic attacks.<sup>252</sup>

#### 4.5 Survival Strategies

Although some people were still coping in 2007, signs of desperation were evident in as early as 2002 for some households. Households with few material, financial, natural or social assets were hit hard early when the crisis began. Bird and Prowse argue that without assets to form the basis of effective coping strategies and resilience, people can experience catastrophic declines into persistent poverty and face increased morbidity and reduced life expectancy.<sup>253</sup> In Zimbabwe when the crisis began, most poor households quickly exhausted their asset reserves and then adopted adverse coping that only support short term survival while undermining their long term well being. People

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<sup>250</sup> Ibid

<sup>251</sup> ‘South Africa Wracked by Brutal Township Killing Spree’ The Times, May 20, 2008

<sup>252</sup> ‘West Should Stop Blocking Zimbabwe's Way Forward’, Zimbabwe Herald, May 23, 2008.

<sup>253</sup> Bird, K. and Prowse, M. ‘Vulnerability, Poverty and Coping in Zimbabwe’, World Institute for Development Economics Research, Research Paper No. 2008/41, United Nations University, April 2008, p 6.

with livestock resorted to selling their cattle, goats or sheep often at low prices to raise cash to buy food. Surplus grain could also be used to brew beer which will then be sold to raise money. Some people even see beer as a nutrition source rather than a luxury. Some individuals told the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs' Integrated Regional Information Network (IRIN) News researchers that getting drunk takes away their hunger pangs<sup>254</sup>. Some communities managed to pull their resources together and then they would buy the staple maize together whenever it was available. However, with very high transport costs, communities pay more for limited supplies and receive less for the goods they try to sell to other areas. Also, for those who sold their livestock, it is going to take them long to recover even if the situation in the country recovers. In rural Zimbabwe, the cattle are used for ploughing the land. They are the working animals. Without them, farming is going to be difficult and more expensive. Their yields will most likely be lower than what they could have produced with their livestock available to them. Therefore, survival strategies such as the sale of livestock can ensure survival in the short term, but seriously jeopardize future production and survival.

Food shortages in households often lead to income being switched from other necessities such as school fees and health care. For many children in Zimbabwe, education has traditionally been the only way to escape the poverty trap. With money meant to pay for their school fees now being used to buy food, their chances of ever making it out of poverty are significantly reduced. Children as young as fifteen are learning to do manual jobs such as thatching huts so that they can help their families with cash for food and most of them no longer attend school. Some poor families are

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<sup>254</sup> 'Zimbabwe: Survival Tactics During Food Crisis', IRIN News, 12 June 2003 [online], <http://allafrica.com/stories/200306120505.html> .

reportedly resorting to such desperate measures as marrying off their underage daughters to older men in exchange for food security and other economic support<sup>255</sup>. This is a pre-colonial tradition that had died more than a hundred years ago in the Shona culture and is being revived now as families are desperate for survival in face of an unprecedented food and economic crisis. That means even when the food crisis finally gets resolved it will continue to have a negative social and economic impact. The sad part is that life could not have been as tough if food was available at the GMB at government-controlled prices or if the international community has been allowed to bring food aid into the country without too many restrictions.

In June 2003, the Integrated Regional Information Networks began reporting that people were now eating floor sweepings bought from maize millers and that in rural areas some people were falling sick or even dying from eating poisonous wild foods.<sup>256</sup> With shrinking food choices, wild foods played a huge role to help a diet already limited in diversity. Families, including children as young as three, spend a lot of time picking and preparing these wild fruits.<sup>257</sup> The knowledge of the elderly family members who survived previous droughts became invaluable as they teach the younger family members on which trees had edible roots and how best to prepare them. Unfortunately, the number of elderly people with such knowledge has declined significantly because during the previous serious drought of 1991-1992 the government was able to source enough food to minimize the impact of the drought. As a result, the need for desperate measures was significantly reduced and most people never needed to rely on wild fruits. Also after independence, changing lifestyles and attitudes, and social stigmas where people

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<sup>255</sup> 'Hunger Forces Zim Girls into Forced Marriages', Mail and Guardian Online, 17 May 2006.

<sup>256</sup> 'Zimbabwe: Feature on Survival Tactics During Food Crisis', IRIN News, June 12, 2003.

<sup>257</sup> Ibid

consuming wild foods are perceived as 'poor', caused a decline in the use and knowledge of wild foods. On the bright side, there are efforts from the University of Zimbabwe's department of Biochemistry to document the medical and nutritional properties of wild foods, their identification and their preservation<sup>258</sup>. The Kellogg Foundation funded project aims to create more awareness on the value of indigenous wild plant foods and promote their effective utilization. The results of the project will provide a future reference on the use of wild foods.

As the food crisis continues and with increasing need for food, some people engage in illegal activities to feed their families. They illegally collect and sell firewood from commercial farms or national parks or other restricted areas. Firewood has become invaluable in Zimbabwe because electricity has become a rare commodity. Many households in cities now cook their meals on fire. In urban centres, the environmental damage has been enormous as people cut down trees all over cities for firewood. Some people buy grain from the GMB and sell it at much higher prices. Some engage in illegal gold panning where they have to be on the move all the time to follow the sources. This means they will be away from their families for extended periods of time. For some people, these illegal activities do not bring them any fortune. Some even got arrested and they had to look for even more money to pay for the hefty fines imposed by the government. The harsh economic, social and political environment has compelled almost everyone into criminal activity. The ordinary men and woman on the street or in villages are doing what they can, illegal or not, to feed their families. The rapid increase in the number of people engaging in informal, and often illegal, trading activities is proof that the people of Zimbabwe are willing to do whatever is necessary to earn a living in an

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<sup>258</sup> Sifelani Tsiho, 'Wild Food Plants of Africa Project', Gibbs Magazine, Harare, 22 January 2007.

environment of high unemployment and high inflation. For most individuals, crime is the only tool left in their survival kit. However, the harassment, intimidation and arrest of informal traders by the police narrow the options for livelihoods strategies available especially to women because women are more involved in the vending business.

With increasing economic difficulties, migrating to other countries has become the only alternative for many Zimbabweans. In fact, fleeing the country has become an art of survival for many people in the hunger stricken country. Maphosa notes that the remittances sent by those who flee the country have become the most important source of income for most households.<sup>259</sup> These remittances are usually cash or other financial transfers, but they also include goods such as foodstuffs and medicine. Although for Zimbabweans, migrating to other countries is nothing new, after 2001, the number of people leaving the country to seek greener pastures has increased sharply. Refugees International estimates that between two and three million people have fled the country after 2001<sup>260</sup>. Common destinations are South Africa, the United Kingdom, the United States, Canada, Australia, Botswana and recently China. However, it is in South Africa where most of the emigrants are now living. In a research done by Dr. Maphosa, from the University of Zimbabwe, in Ward 7 of Mangwe District in Matabeleland Province of Zimbabwe, from the sample of 150 households, 103 (68.7 percent) households had at least one member who had migrated to South Africa.<sup>261</sup> From the sample, only 2 percent cited political persecution as the reason for migration. Most of these people cited

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<sup>259</sup> Frances Maphosa, 'Remittances and Development: The Impact of Migration to South Africa on Rural Livelihoods in Southern Zimbabwe', Routledge, Development South Africa Vol. 24, No. 1, 2007.

<sup>260</sup> Refugees International, 'Release: RI Calls on African Nations to Protect Zimbabweans Fleeing Violence', Press Release, 25 June 2008.

<sup>261</sup> Frances Maphosa, 2007

economic reasons such as unemployment and shortage of food.<sup>262</sup> With an economic meltdown in Zimbabwe, distress migration is the only survival strategy available to most people. Women cross the crocodile-infested Limpopo River with babies on their backs because they cannot afford to pay the bribe at the border post. They feel like they have nothing to lose. If they stay in Zimbabwe, they starve. It is better to die trying.

Migration trends from Zimbabwe to South Africa have mainly been that people cross into South Africa, purchase food and send it back home, or find work on farms and return home a few months or even years later. Research done by Professor Daniel Makina from the University of South Africa in collaboration with the Mass Public Opinion Institute and the Zimbabwe Diaspora Civil Society Organizations concluded that the number of Zimbabweans migrating into South Africa legally or illegally has been increasing sharply since 2001.<sup>263</sup> As the situation in Zimbabwe worsens, the number of people crossing into South Africa increased. The research concluded that the number of people migrating into South Africa increased tenfold between 2001 and 2007 and most of the respondents cited economic crisis and employment as the reasons why they have migrated. One of the interviewees said he was in South Africa to find work so that he can send money to his younger siblings and grandmother so that they 'eat and go to school'.<sup>264</sup> For most of these Zimbabweans in South Africa, life has not been an easy transition for them. Refugees International reports that many Zimbabweans work for more than six months on farms without pay. Despite verbal agreements that they will be paid on the last day, the farm owners often call the police because these immigrants are in

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<sup>262</sup> *ibid*

<sup>263</sup> Daniel Makina, "Survey of Profile of Immigrant Zimbabweans in South Africa: A Pilot Study", University of South Africa, September, 2007.

<sup>264</sup> *ibid*

the country illegally. The immigrants will be arrested and deported before they are paid their wages.<sup>265</sup>

Although it is very difficult to get food for a vast majority in Zimbabwe, there is a gender dimension to the country's economic and food crises. Shereen Essof, a Zimbabwean feminist living in Cape Town suggests women are on the frontline of this struggle for survival because like in many other developing countries, women in Zimbabwe are responsible for productive and care work of the household<sup>266</sup>. In a country like Zimbabwe, where everyone is on a survival mode, the day is spent searching for food and other basics. Thoko Matshe, a feminist women's rights activist adds that clichés that exist in development language about women such as 'the poorest of the poor' or 'women suffer the most' etc best describes the reality of women in Zimbabwe<sup>267</sup>. In Zimbabwe, women have become teachers or nurses by day and sex workers by night to add to their paltry salaries. IRIN News reported that at the Zimbabwe-South Africa border, Zimbabwean sex workers (who are women) could provide their services for a few bars of soap and goods like salt and sugar.<sup>268</sup> Refugees International reported in as early as 2002 that in rural areas, women and girls were engaging in transactional sex for food or cash from those with money particularly the gold-panners. If food were easily available, most of these women would not participate in such activities. Cecilia M, a 40-year-old woman living with AIDS acknowledged in an interview with Human Rights Watch that the food crisis has made life miserable for Zimbabwean women especially those who are single and sick. With tears running down her cheeks, she acknowledges her failure to cope, 'I

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<sup>265</sup> Refugees International, 2002

<sup>266</sup> R. Jones., 'The Crisis in Zimbabwe: A Gender Perspective', AWID, May 9, 2008.

<sup>267</sup> *ibid*

<sup>268</sup> AllAfrica.com, 'Zimbabwe: Sex for Soap, Salt and Sugar,' 29 July 2008. (Accessed on 30 July 2008).

am so stressed. I nearly committed suicide because things are tough. There is no bright future because when you don't know what you are going to eat tomorrow, there is no future'.<sup>269</sup> The food crisis in Zimbabwe since 2000 has threatened and violated women's rights and bodily integrity and it will take long before that integrity can be restored. Although women are the most vulnerable, the initiatives put in place to address food shortages tend to be gender blind or even biased towards men. Even international food aid has failed to address the gender imbalance in food distribution resulting in women often being at the end of the line. The situation is often tough for single older women who do not have male companions to fight for them in queues.

Poor households coping with the effects of HIV/AIDS pandemic have been the most affected by the food crisis in Zimbabwe. HIV/AIDS reduces the ability of affected and infected individuals to pursue labour intensive coping and survival strategies such as labouring for money and even gathering wild foods. Whiteside and de Waal argue that HIV/AIDS increases dependency on family members and therefore increases a family vulnerability in a food crisis.<sup>270</sup> The burden of caring for the orphans and the sick adults consumes the much needed income and labour necessary for acquiring or producing food. Also, individuals with the disease tend to have higher nutritional needs than normal<sup>271</sup>. Therefore, reduced consumption, as a coping strategy, will not be a good alternative. Without adequate food, the infected person's health will deteriorate rapidly.

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<sup>269</sup> HRW, 2006

<sup>270</sup> Alan Whiteside, and Alexander de Waal, "New Variant Famine: AIDS and Food Crisis in Southern Africa", *Lancet*, 362: Durban, 2003. pp 1234 -37.

<sup>271</sup> L. Haddad and S. Gillespie, 'Effective Food and Nutrition Policy Responses to HIV/AIDS: What We Know and What We Need to Know,' Washington DC, International Food Policy Research Institute, Food Consumption and Nutrition Division, Discussion Paper No. 112, 2001.

#### 4.6 Conclusion

As discussed above, different households adopted different strategies to put food on the table. Most of the strategies depends more on the household's assets, income, access to the markets and location of residence among other many factors. The most common coping and survival mechanisms among households include reduced consumption, sale of assets, increased utilization of wild foods, dependence on remittances, vending, cross border activities, poaching, illegal gold panning, theft, selling firewood, child labour and many others. Some of these strategies were very creative and constructive. They helped the households cope with a severe and long food crisis. However, some of the strategies were very destructive because they either cause serious environmental damage or severely compromise the ability of individuals or households to escape poverty in the future.

The people of Zimbabwe have been on high alert since 2000. The severe economic hardships and food shortages has forced almost everyone into activities. Zimbabweans adjusted to doing this or that to make it to the next day. However, the current food crisis has only confirmed one thing about Zimbabweans. They are survivors and creative improvisers who can create opportunities to meet the day-to-day demands of life. They are resourceful and have a deep resolve to survive. They have the ability to make the abnormal become normal. With an unstable political and economic environment, the only way for ordinary citizens to survive the daily challenges is to be as creative as they possibly can. However, getting food and commodity markets working fairly is the best way to help Zimbabweans rebuild their own lives. Long-term strategies must include political stability, policy changes and economic development. If conditions

in the broader society improve, people's strategies are likely to shift and reshape to accommodate the change and this will most likely benefit the vulnerable groups within the country.

## Chapter 5

### Conclusions and Recommendations

#### 5.1 Thesis Summary and Conclusions

The overall conclusion of this thesis is that the food security concerns in Zimbabwe did not start with the events of 2000 when the government funded war veterans and youth militia invaded white owned commercial farms. There are many factors that have caused and prolonged the post 2000 food crisis that has caused so much pain and suffering to millions of ordinary Zimbabweans. The failure to redress a racially skewed land distribution pattern at the Lancaster House Conference in 1979 proved to be a big mistake because it allowed colonial grievances to persist into the post-colonial era. Effective land reform in the 1980s could have gone a long way to reduce rural poverty and that could have helped to avoid the land invasions of 2000 and the chaos that followed. With increasing population in rural areas, pressure on the already infertile land was increasing and food production potential of rural communities was in decline already even before 2000.

The Economic Structural Adjustment Programme, which advocated reduced government involvement through the liberalization of the economy, inflicted a major blow on the famine prevention system in Zimbabwe. Although ESAP helped some, mostly commercial, farmers to realize larger profits from producing cash crops such as cotton, paprika and tobacco, food production significantly declined. Communal farmers who benefited from the 1980s agricultural policies were the most affected by the economic restructuring. Agricultural inputs, such as seed and fertilizer, which were

subsidized in the 1980s, were no longer subsidized after ESAP was adopted in 1991 and that severely damaged food production in communal areas. Most rural farmers could no longer afford the inputs and their yield fell drastically.

The HIV/ AIDS pandemic also contributed to the food crisis although the impact of the pandemic was felt more at household level than at national level. The disease kills people in their prime and most of these people are the breadwinners in their families. Able-bodied people are taken away from their families leaving very young orphans in care of elderly grandparents. As statistics have shown, households affected by the disease are more vulnerable to the slightest shocks such as drought and economic decline. As one of the most affected by the pandemic, Zimbabwe's household food security has been severely threatened by the persistence of the disease.

The drought caused by changes in climate was instrumental in pushing the food security concerns towards more severe food shortages in Zimbabwe. However, it was the land invasions and the fast track land resettlement programme which started in 2000 that turned Zimbabwe's serious food security concerns into a full-blown food crisis. The food crisis in Zimbabwe became multifaceted and very complex in the sense that it no longer operate in accordance to the economic logic of food demand exceeding food supply. Therefore the overall conclusion of this paper is that the post-2000 food crisis has more to do with the lack of political accountability by both the government of Zimbabwe and by the international community. The 'political contract' between the citizens and the government that imposes enforceable obligations on government to provide for food and the right to freedom from famine has collapsed in Zimbabwe. Facing a serious political challenge from the MDC, the government turned against its citizenry and became focused

on its political security. Food became an important political tool used to ensure that security. With the politicization of food, political leaders chose to allocate food and other resources to those people who are loyal to them and likely to serve their need. On the other, political opponents of the government, who are both local and international, also saw food shortages as a window of opportunity that could be used to advance the regime change agenda. The tug of war between Mugabe and his opponents did not fatally damage any of the two parties involved. It was the ordinary citizens who suffered the most as food became very scarce and expensive when available. The traditional Shona saying that 'When two elephants fight, it is the grass which suffers the most' became very relevant. With the political and economic decline, putting food on the table became a major preoccupation for many Zimbabweans. They embarked on coping and survival strategies, which were either creative and productive or very destructive. However, most people practiced adverse coping that threatens future livelihoods.

The rise of reactionary and repressive nationalism and its diverse implications in Zimbabwe has caused some serious theoretical challenges. Information and media censorship makes it difficult to assess the Zimbabwe political picture and the real food situation on the ground. However, after 2000, it became increasingly evident that policy making has been influenced by two main issues: first, Mugabe and his cronies' determination to hang on to power no matter what the consequences and the perceptions of the people would be and, second, efforts by the political elite to accumulate as much wealth as they can before the inevitable winds of change blow them away. Land reform is one such policy used to justify dictatorship and also accumulate wealth for the ruling elites. In an economy with controls, there are always a few who can become very rich by

circumventing these controls. The war on the opposition and the independent press allows the government's corrupt and unfair practices to receive less publicity and therefore less challenges. The lack of transparency and public debate has also contributed in prolonging the food crisis. Without transparency and openness, there is very limited public debate that could contribute to resolving the food crisis. Also, it becomes difficult to assess the extent of the need for food aid that could give a clear picture on the amount of food aid needed in each region. The lack of openness makes it difficult for aid agencies to plan appropriately and allow enough quantities into the country. Second, it allows the politicization of food to persist with minimum exposure.

## 5.2 Recommendations to Policy Makers and Relief Agencies

Better policies and stronger and better-governed institutions have a major role to play in strengthening access to food. Strengthening food security is likely to be achieved only through a combination of production, market, and consumption-based interventions; a long-term commitment to social protection for those who are unable to feed themselves; and more productive agriculture for subsistence, and more efficiently functioning markets. There is need to ensure through the constitution that the right to food becomes a human right. The international community also needs to realize that their so-called 'smart sanctions' to Zimbabwe have not produced any positive outcome. Their hope that hungry Zimbabweans will revolt against Mugabe has failed to produce any significant results. Instead, it is the Zimbabwean people, especially children, who are suffering the most. They should take Ronald Reagan's words of wisdom that 'a child knows no politics'. The NGOs and other humanitarian agencies working to address food security concerns should

work towards maintaining a position of political neutrality as a way to ensure access to food for all the people in need. They should respect international principles of food aid that include neutrality and impartiality.

### 5.3 Areas of Further Research

Every human being has a right to adequate, safe and nutritious food. The 'right to food' is recognized as a universal human right by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the Convention on the Rights of the Child and several other international instruments. The states and governments that are parties to these instruments have obligations and commitments to assure the realization of the right. Although, the international community has frequently reaffirmed the importance of full respect for the right to adequate food, a disturbing gap still exists between the standards set in these international instruments and the situation prevailing in many parts of the world including Zimbabwe. My research has focused mainly on the political obstacles to the full realization of the right to food in Zimbabwe. However, there are many other factors that have contributed to the lack of access to adequate food for many households and individuals. Some of these factors existed well before 2000, still exist and will continue to exist even when the Zimbabwean food crisis is finally resolved. These factors are wide ranging from social, cultural economic, political, administrative and even legal. Therefore, there is need for much further research on what these factors are, how they affect the full realization of the right to food and what can be done to eliminate all the obstacles to full realization of the right to food in Zimbabwe.

#### 5.4 Concluding Remarks

Food security is critical for national development because it affects the overall health, well being and general productivity of the population. A population facing chronic food insecurity often exerts all effort towards accessing and fulfilling the primary food needs and cannot significantly contribute to its social and economic development. Without food security, the economy of the country will continue to suffer from the problems of poor socio-economic development. Zimbabwe has the resources to produce more than enough staple food to feed the population from its own land at low cost. However, it is paramount that the political situation in the country becomes stable and the country returns to a democratic system where there are free and fair elections, free media and freedom of political associations.

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