

## Poverty and the Politics of Poverty in Independent Zimbabwe, 1980-2017<sup>#</sup>

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### Abstract

*The causes of poverty in Zimbabwe range from political, economic and social policies to the deployment and utilization of economic resources such as labour and natural endowments in a country where corruption is rampant among the political and economic elite. The paper firstly analyses the relationship between politics and poverty in economic development. Secondly, whilst the dominant political power-configuration of the colonial era provided the social and historical setting of the current poverty structure, it argues that both rural and urban poverty after independence in 1980 has as much to do with colonial as post-independence policies. Thirdly, it posits that while poverty theories are important in understanding the causes and nature of poverty, there is nothing that bears a more eloquent testimony to the existence of poverty in Zimbabwe than the voices of poor people themselves. Fourthly, poverty in Zimbabwe occurs in various forms and dimensions such as income levels, health, education, and employment. Any effort to mitigate poverty depends on the successful resolution of the political and economic policy landscape.*

Keywords: Zimbabwe, rural-urban poverty, income inequalities, policies, economy, crisis, de-industrialisation

### I. Introduction

Zimbabwe became an independent nation in 1980; the new government inherited a relatively modern and diversified economy, especially by sub-Saharan standards. By mid-1980s, Zimbabwe was doing far better than many other sub-Saharan countries at comparable levels of economic development. However, by the end of the decade, macroeconomic performance began to stagnate. Imbalances between government expenditures and revenues compromised programmes for poverty reduction and public investment. By the beginning of the 1990s, the country was in the throes of a financial crisis, which severely affected the countryside where about 77 per cent of the population lived and major urban centres like Harare (the capital).

The government launched an economic structural adjustment programme towards the end of 1991 with the aim of promoting higher economic growth by moving the economy toward greater reliance on market forces and less reliance on government management and interventions<sup>1</sup>. However, this programme was unable to achieve its aims, partly due to the severe drought of 1991-92 and other factors such as fiscal deficit and excessive monetary growth.<sup>2</sup> The failure of the programme had severe consequences for the economy and placed hardship on a large majority of the population, particularly the poor as food prices increased manifold.

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<sup>1</sup> See, Jeffery et al. (2002).

<sup>2</sup> See Masaka (2013).

Poverty increased significantly when the economic crisis deepened from 1997/98 onwards.<sup>3</sup> The crisis culminated in hyperinflation and the demonetisation/devaluation of the Zimbabwean currency by 2008/09.<sup>4</sup> The Zimbabwean dollar had lost its value and the government had to abandon its currency, instead adopted the US dollar as its principal means of exchange in 2009. Prices of scarce necessities such as bread, maize meal, flour and paraffin rose several times each day. Hyperinflation was a reality and the prices of basic commodities increased as the value of the local currency declined at an alarming rate. Industries and banks facing liquidity and solvency problems closed down.<sup>5</sup> Unemployment reached high levels; most Zimbabweans (i.e. 84%), worked in the informal sector while only 11 per cent were engaged in formal employment.

Things seemed to improve by the advent of the Government of National Unity (GNU) in 2009. The GNU ushered in the multi-currency system in which Zimbabwe adopted the US dollar (the accepted and preferred currency), the British pound, the South African rand, and the Botswana pula as legitimate/legal tender. In spite of this basket of currencies, the crisis deepened after the termination of this government following the 2013 elections. By 2017, it had reached unmanageable proportions synonymous with 2008 with the only exception that food was available in the supermarkets but the economy no longer had enough US dollars on the market, and government and other companies were failing to pay workers on a regular monthly basis.

## II. Justification

The purpose of this paper is to give a broad perspective of the politics of poverty in post-independence Zimbabwe. It seeks to examine political aspects of poverty, theoretically as well as empirically. The primary hypothesis is that poverty in Zimbabwe, which did not seem addressable during colonial rule, was even more un-addressable after independence due to a difficult socio-political and macro-economic environment, which showed no signs of improvement. Poverty is a common marker of lack of economic growth, democracy and development in Zimbabwe. Its causes range from political, economic and social policies (policy bankruptcies) to the deployment and utilisation of economic resources such as labour and natural endowments in a country where corruption is rampant among the political elite in the Zimbabwe African National Union-Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF) ruling party.

Whilst the dominant political power-configuration of the colonial era provided the social and historical setting of the current poverty structure, the article argues that both rural and urban poverty after independence in 1980 has as much to do with colonial as independence poverty policies. It further contends that the political, economic and policy context in Zimbabwe remained prone to constant changes since then, thus, informing the nature and extent of poverty and income-inequalities in the country. While various theories have been put forward to explain poverty in Zimbabwe (see Reynolds, 1978; Burnell, 1995; Sachs & Warner, 1997; Sen, 2000; Sachs, 2005; Stark, 2009; Kinsey, 2010), there is nothing that bears more eloquent testimony to the existence of poverty in Zimbabwe than the voices of poor people themselves most of whom were black.<sup>6</sup> The country requires critical policy-adjustment and commitment to reduce poverty because the notion that 'people can depend on the government to assist the poor' no longer applies to Zimbabwe. The incidence of poverty in Zimbabwe is multi-faceted and increasingly occurs in various forms and dimensions, including inequalities in income levels, problems in accessing health, education, and employment (ZIMSTAT).

<sup>3</sup> By late 2003 the urban situation, for instance, had become dire. Seventy-two per cent of the households were deemed poor; this included 51 per cent considered very poor, meaning they could not afford to buy food and other necessities. See, Potts (2006).

<sup>4</sup> See Coomer & Gstraunthaler (2011) for a detailed historical account of the economic crisis.

<sup>5</sup> Hyperinflation made it very difficult for business to remain afloat and for the general population to make ends meet in an environment where the Zimbabwe dollar substantially had lost its value. See Masaka (2013), *op.cit.*

<sup>6</sup> In this chapter the terms 'Africans' and 'blacks' are used interchangeably to denote the indigenous black population of Zimbabwe. The term 'poor people' means people living in poverty.

Poverty data for 2017 shows that 63 per cent of Zimbabwe households were poor and 16 per cent were categorised as living in extreme poverty (ZIMSTAT & *Herald*, 2017). The wealthy comprised 21 per cent of the population. That there is widespread rural and urban poverty in Zimbabwe which differentiates people along class, gender and generational lines is not debatable, but what is contentious are its causes in a country once touted as the grain or bread basket of Africa. The article, thus, seeks to disentangle the poverty debate within a policy context focusing on its core proposition that poverty pervades contemporary Zimbabwe society, negates the UN (2015) 2030 sustainable development projections, and that no single interpretation is sufficient in itself to account for the complex nature and ever-changing dynamics of poverty in Zimbabwe.

Research on poverty in the developing world, especially Africa, is even more necessary as the continent has the largest number of people living in poverty with incomes of under US\$1.25 per day (World Bank, 2015; see also Iyenda, 2007). Further research is required to address the deficiency of country-specific poverty-literature in Africa, like Zimbabwe.<sup>7</sup> Zimbabwe has experienced major social, political and economic crises during Mugabe's 37-year rule. In the main, the crises were characterised by massive de-industrialisation, low growth rates, decline of agriculture and formal economic sectors, high levels of informalisation of the economy and rapid increase in poverty (*Herald*, 2017). Due to the protracted crisis, the country was not yet on a recovery path by 2017 prompting the ouster of Mugabe in November that year. Any effort to eradicate poverty therefore depended on the successful resolution of the long-drawn political and economic crisis facing Zimbabwe. Efforts also hinged on transformative change of the institutional and policy landscape as well as the fulfilment of forgotten poverty-eradication promises in order to prevent people from sliding into further poverty in a country where the chasm between the rich and the poor has become unfathomable/immeasurable ever since the end of colonialism.

### III. Contextualisation and Literature

That poverty is political is not a new concept. Old and contemporary multidisciplinary works exist on the subject. In fact, no society (past or present) can claim to be so equal that all members of the community enjoy equivalent access to all communal resources regardless of their social status and location in space (Hurst, 1998). The case of Zimbabwe during the reign of President Mugabe testifies to how poverty emerged due to a malfunctioning and weak state. Many eminent political philosophers have analysed the interaction between politics and poverty ever since Adam Smith, J. S. Mill, Karl Marx and F. A. von Hayek. Adam Smith argues that inequality and poverty have a very close relationship as they imply differentiation between rich and poor classes. Differential social and economic status in certain instances breeds corruption and the capturing of the state as exemplified by Adam Smith.<sup>8</sup>

This disposition to admire, and almost worship, the rich and the powerful, and to despise, or, at least, to neglect, persons of poor and mean conditions, though necessary both to establish and maintain the distinction of ranks and the order of society, is, at the same time, the great and most universal cause of the corruption of our moral sentiments.

Kuznets (1955), Potter, Eden, & Binns (1986), Chokor (1991), and Paulo Roberto Gitirana de Araujo Guerra (2015) agree with Adam Smith's view in that excessive inequality breeds poverty. Poverty, of any kind, is suffering and this condition exists not just in the global South, but also within the rich North. However, despite the universal nature of poverty, societal inequalities are more widespread in developing countries like Zimbabwe than they are in the advanced industrial economies (Todaro, 1996). Disparities exist in the developing world not only between the rural and urban areas but also between different regions, and genders (Lipton, 1977;

<sup>7</sup> Zimbabwe is second among 10 poorest countries in Africa after the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). For several years, Zimbabwe was renowned for its academic and scientific research. However, since the onset of the economic crisis in the 1990s, research seems to have become a low political objective in the country.

<sup>8</sup> Smith (2000).

Harrison, 1979; Folmer et al., 1982; Potter, Eden & Binns, 1986; UNDP, 1994, 2000; Todaro, 1996; World Bank, 1996, 2002). Wide discrepancies as evidence of poverty also exist between rural and urban residents, and between residents of affluent and non-affluent regions in terms of household incomes, access to employment, health care, education, transportation, electricity, sanitation and treated water (Blue, 1996; Brockerhoff & Hewett, 2000). This literature concurs with Zimbabwe's experience in that poverty as a material reality disfigures and affects the lives of women, men and children in this era of globalisation. However, some aspects such as the importance of democracy in reducing poverty and inequality have not always been included when analysing the causes of poverty. Poverty and inequality hit at the core of democracy, that is, an absence of democratisation leads to great poverty and socio-economic inequality (Burnell, 1995). Poverty and inequality became conspicuous features of Zimbabwe under Mugabe, and this prompted citizen demands for the ZANU-PF government to address the situation. The term 'poverty' embodies the material core of the ultimate, 'unacceptable hardship' Ruth Lister writes about 'the extent and depth of that hardship, and the suffering it entails' and emphasizes the need for a politics of recognition and respect, which reflects 'the language used by the people in poverty themselves' (Lister, 2004:187)

In the colonial era, blacks or Africans were dis-enfranchised. The Settler Government of Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe) had put in place an array of racial segregationist/discriminatory ordinances such as the *Land Apportionment Act (LAA)* of 1930/1931, the *Native Land Husbandry Act (NLHA)*, 1950/1951, and the *Land Tenure Act* of 1969, which impoverished and marginalised African peoples.<sup>9</sup> According to Palmer (1977), these political decrees and laws facilitated and strengthened white economic hegemony. The State merely regarded Africans as a cheap source of labour provision in the mines, industries and on white settler farms. The extensive exploitation of land, mineral, forestry, water and other natural resources of the country was highly politicised during the development and consolidation of settler agriculture and mining. This became even more apparent with the enactment of colonial land segregationist legislation. The intended consequence of these laws, which facilitated the eviction of Africans from their land, was to ensure that blacks would not economically compete on an equal footing with their white counterparts. Exploitation of national resources by the white race became one of the chief causes of poverty and income inequalities among the black population of colonial Zimbabwe. With independence it was expected that colonial-era poverty, socio-economic and political inequities would be eliminated, but the new political dispensation added another dimension to the discourse on poverty.

For the people living in poverty in independent Zimbabwe, political decisions made from 'above' rather than from 'below' and political expediency were mainly responsible for their poverty. In their view the government was largely to blame for their plight because most of the time it pursued inconsistent economic policies. It also obstructed aid from philanthropic organisations. Whilst in some developing nations, civic society, aid organisations, charitable institutions and private financiers played a role in poverty eradication; in Zimbabwe, the responsibility was placed squarely on the government, which invariably viewed such agencies with suspicion, thinking that they were agents of opposition political parties.

Structural inequalities resulting from the policy measures are reflected in the social and economic reality of the country; vast majority of people live in poverty despite, or more likely because of, the pursuit of the Marxist-Leninist philosophy of scientific socialism at independence, which was supposed to create an egalitarian society.<sup>10</sup> This paper seeks to take a broad view of

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<sup>9</sup> For detail on these racial discriminatory laws see Moyana (1984); Floyd (1972); Palmer (1977); Machingaidze (1991); *Land Tenure Act* (1969); and Nyandoro (2008, 2012).

<sup>10</sup> It was assumed that socialism, as practised in the countries of the East such as Russia and China, meant equitable distribution of income, resources and opportunities. However, this was an erroneous belief as economic, social, and political inequalities characterised these societies. See Masaka (2013), op.cit.

urban and rural poverty (defined in either relative or absolute terms)<sup>11</sup> and its linkages with the politics of poverty, which is an emerging new theme in independent Zimbabwe.

#### IV. Politics of Poverty in Zimbabwe

The economic history of post-independence Zimbabwe reveals broad perspectives of the politics of poverty and the relationship between politics and poverty in economic development. The political, economic and policy context in Zimbabwe remained prone to constant changes since 1980. From the outset, this made Zimbabwe's guiding policy very difficult to situate as it seemed neither capitalist nor socialist. Development was informed by how economic performance was enhanced or how it addressed spiralling poverty given six major policy changes, namely, scientific socialism, structural adjustment, the Zimbabwe Programme for Economic and Social Transformation (ZIMPREST), the Look-East policy, Government of National Unity (GNU)-politics and the Zimbabwe Agenda for Sustainable Socio-Economic Transformation (ZimAsset).

In spite of these policy shifts, poverty pervades contemporary Zimbabwe society and it negates the sustainable development view of modern Marxian political economy - a development theory which views poverty from diverse political, social, environmental, economic and technical premises. Since colonial rule (1890-1979) up to independence (1980 to date), the importance of politics for economic activity and the impact of politics on poverty have motivated economic historians and political scientists to include the analysis of the relationship between politics and poverty in their research agenda. Rural and urban poverty before independence was often associated with colonial poverty policies (Batson, 1945; Palmer & Parsons, 1977; Ranger, 1993). The elimination of the vicious circle of poverty among the Africans was not a paramount consideration. Instead, the white settler governments were merely engrossed in efforts to exploit labour in order to boost agricultural production (food and industrial crops) to meet the insatiable needs of a growing urban and rural population as well as the industrial sector.

It is clear that the governments of colonial Zimbabwe were inclined towards exploiting Africans for the benefit of white mining, agricultural and industrial manufacturing enterprises. Whites always controlled these key sectors and wielded enormous political influence in the country. Very little was done to share equitably the national income deriving from these activities between white and black communities. This led to growing poverty among the latter; hence, the dominant political power-configuration of the colonial era provided the social and historical setting of the current poverty structure. However, contrary to the euphoria that independence would bring good things and assist in closing the existing colonial gaps in income distribution, the 1980s marked the beginning of economic decline and poverty in the country under Mugabe's rule. The scientific socialist policy applied between 1980 and 1990 tried to cater for the social sectors of the economy, for instance, water, education, health and transportation. Scientific socialism as the country's major economic paradigm then sought to make Zimbabwe a service-oriented and benevolent State in line with social welfare principles (focused on free education and free health policies). But by 2017 the country still had limited investment in these sectors as poverty continued to escalate. The era of free education and free health was good for the provision of social protection and social services for people living in poverty. However, the question is: who funded the services purchased at a cost, but provided free to citizens? This policy, together with the seemingly unbudgeted payment of war veterans' gratuities and the government's military intervention in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) conflict, were some of the roots of the current poverty situation besetting Zimbabwe. Military expenditure compromised growth at home.

With the exception of the DRC, Zimbabwe is now the poorest country in Africa. As of 2013, it was among 10 poorest countries in Africa, and indeed one of the poorest in the world with a

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<sup>11</sup> Nurkse describes poverty as follows: "a poor man is poor because he may not have enough to eat, being underfed, his health is weak, being physically weak, his working capacity is low, meaning that he is poor which in turn means he will not have enough to eat" (Nurkse, 1953).

Gross Domestic Product (GDP) per capita of US\$589.46 as shown in a limited African comparison in Table 1.

Table 1: Ten poorest countries in Africa by GDP per capita (US\$1.25 Per Day)

Country	GDP Per Capita (US\$)
DRC	394.25
Zimbabwe	589.46
Burundi	648.58
Liberia	716.04
Eritrea	792.13
Central African Republic	827.93
Niger	853.43
Malawi	893.84
Madagascar	972.07
Mali	1136.00

Source: World Bank (2016). <http://www.africaranking.com/top-10-poorest-countries-in-africa/>

The majority of the people in the country are poor and in many instances getting poorer, which means the government's economic policies should pay particular attention to their needs in order to eradicate poverty in post-colonial Zimbabwe.

## V. Incidence of Poverty in Independent Zimbabwe

### *Forms and Dimensions: Scientific Socialism, ESAP and Beyond*

As already noted, Zimbabwe pursued 'scientific socialism' as its economic blueprint between 1980 and 1990 which it was forced to abandon when the country faced a financial crisis as a result of the economic downturn of the early 1980s. Agriculture, the traditional mainstay of the economy, had declined in importance due to a combination of severe droughts during early-to-mid-1980s, the 1990s as well as the 2000s and also because of the lack of investment. Zimbabwe then sought International Monetary Fund (IMF)-World Bank (WB) financial disbursement as happened in 1983 when she obtained ZW\$375 million from the IMF to offset the crisis (Mlambo, 1997). To qualify for IMF-WB funds, the Government of Zimbabwe in 1990/91 unenthusiastically agreed to devaluation, restoration of internal and external balance of payments, cuts in development programmes, government subsidies and other austerity measures/conditions (Roddick, 1988; Brown & Tiffen, 1992; Bello, 1994; Mlambo, 1997; Mlambo & Pangeti, 2001). This signalled the adoption of the Economic Structural Adjustment Programme (ESAP) in an effort to revamp the country's economy and reduce rising poverty. However, the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) was abandoned in 1995 because it did not bring about the anticipated economic prosperity. Instead, it brought poverty and economic ruin through massive retrenchments and forced retirements, thereby widening the economic gap between the social strata. It had the effect of increasing poverty in the lower stratum by the high costs disadvantaged people like women, children and the resource-poor paid on food, water charges, school fees and other essentials. This made it difficult for many people to access services such as health and education (availed free under scientific socialism); water, and refuse collection. Thus, the programme killed wealth-creating opportunities for the poor. Experts in many fields either lost their jobs through retrenchments or migrated to other countries as most economic sectors in the country downsized their operations resulting in a massive brain drain whose impact continues to be felt to this day.

Droughts and economic afflictions like ESAP were the major causes of poverty. The incidence of poverty was multi-faceted. Poverty occurred in various forms and dimensions among rural-urban men, women and children. The recurrent spells of drought and hunger (lack of assured food security and dwindling donor food aid) increased rural poverty which forced some people to migrate to the urban centres where they faced a life of even greater poverty due to lack of

employment. High levels of unemployment related to the 1990/91-1995 Economic Structural Adjustment Programme work-retrenchments culminated in the emergence of many 'squatter camps' or informal settlements in towns which were a manifestation of urban and peri-urban poverty. The growing population and the incoming migrants were not all absorbed by the predominantly agro-processing industries, which, apart from drought, faced imminent collapse due to the dual impact of ESAP and the long-drawn economic crisis bedeviling Zimbabwe from 1983 to the mid-1990s. Under these circumstances, existing urban populations and the migrants who failed to secure employment were, therefore, among the poorest groups in Zimbabwe's major cities.

Between 1990 and 1995, ESAP was the cause of poverty and income inequalities in independent Zimbabwe. ESAP ushered in an era of poverty and disproportionate benefits among Zimbabwean citizens. The impoverishment of people created by ESAP and other challenges resulted in citizens' failure to sustain production and, subsequently, this led to many school dropouts due to parents' inability to pay school fees for their children. Whether in rural villages or in urban centres, many students withdrew from schools both at the primary, secondary and tertiary levels – a trend which persisted because of worsening economic problems even after ESAP. Although the WB thinks that ESAP reform policies were associated with considerable economic recovery, ESAP-induced poverty actually increased between the 1980s and 1990s. General macro-economic instability and poor institutional arrangements in Zimbabwe influenced substantial increases in poverty.

In Zimbabwe, like many other regions of the world, structural adjustment had a negative impact on economic growth. It had a devastating impact on Zimbabwean economy and incomes.<sup>12</sup> The programme, which started with a drought and ended with another drought in 1994/95 (Mlambo, 1997), actually marked the beginning of the de-industrialisation process. The country had experienced a cotton and agricultural boom in the 1980s (Masst, 1996) which had a positive effect on incomes, but ESAP and poor policies eroded all that. So, the success in cotton did not last for long. Major textile manufacturing companies like Martin, Kadoma Spinners, Gweru David Whitehead Textiles Ltd, Bulawayo Textile Industry and the Chitungwiza Cone Textiles Company all scaled down operations or closed down. Important mining industries such as ZISCO Steel, Cam and Motor Gold Mine/Eiffel Flats, Chakari gold mine, ZIMASCO chrome mine, Mhangura copper mine, Kamativi tin mine, Hwange colliery, and the Sandawana emerald mines, to name a few, were similarly affected. ESAP marked some of the worst laying off, retrenchment and job losses ever witnessed in the country. Many former workers became redundant and either stayed in the cities/towns or, were forced to migrate back to their rural homes. The socio-economic effects of the programme were fundamental to understanding burgeoning rural (and urban) poverty, which occurred at the height of the rhetoric of globalisation and economic prosperity for developing nations. Despite the damaging impact of ESAP, the economic improvement brought by the expansion of the informal sector (which needs formalisation strategies) is vital, but rarely discussed. Some scholars think that Africa is much richer simply because we underestimate the size of the informal sector - a sector attributed to the survival of Zimbabwean households at the height of the country's economic crisis. However, it is difficult to measure growth and decline in that sector generally and in terms of income in particular.

ZIMPREST, launched in 1997, succeeded ESAP. It aimed at correcting the deficiencies of ESAP, but it continued the same thrust of macroeconomic policies as ESAP with more focus on economic and social issues. However, the new programme was never truly implemented (Government of Zimbabwe, 1996). This meant that the political decision of 1990/1991 to adopt ESAP and the social and economic dilemmas of the ESAP era persisted. Further economic and social problems, combined with the souring of relations with countries of the West, in particular the United Kingdom (UK) and the United States of America (USA), led to the adoption of a 'Look East Policy' from 1995 and beyond. In spite of this policy, the economic crisis still reached its peak in 2008. The country faced ruin as the political and economic catastrophe was marked by

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<sup>12</sup> Chattopadhyay (2000). See also Dashwood (2002).

hyperinflation, shortage of forex, no or weak foreign currency reserves, bank closures, empty supermarket shelves, shortages of basic commodities such as food, water, gas, petroleum, and electricity with the poor being hardest hit (Makochekanwa, Tinotenda, 2019; see also Potts & Mutambirwa, 1998). Water cuts, power outages and load shedding were a common feature. Vehicle spare parts were not available or people were simply not able to buy them sometimes resulting in fatal road accidents. Most families could hardly afford the usual three meals per day; on average, they ate one meal per day. This confirms that Zimbabwe has experienced a precipitous collapse of its economy over the past several years. Its recent economic crisis was so deep that it set the country back more than half a century. For instance, the purchasing power of the average Zimbabwean in 2005 had fallen back to the same level as in 1953 and for people in extreme poverty a collapse like this translated directly into sickness and death (Clemens & Todd, 2005). The country experienced a cholera outbreak of major proportions in 2008/09, which exposed public health implications of a malfunctioning economic and governmental order (Nyandoro, 2011a). The deep-seated financial crisis, which rocked the country during this period was exacerbated by the lack of a financial rescue plan. The central bank, the Reserve Bank of Zimbabwe (RBZ), could not buy/secure bonds as financial markets were depressed due to high interest rates. In the face of the controversial fast-track land reforms of 2000 (which affected food production because of the new farmers' lack of resources), foreign donors folded their arms as they adopted a 'let Zimbabwe solve its own problems' stance. Such a posture made the situation of poverty in the country up to 2017 not only to deteriorate, but also to become untenable due to lack of viable political or economic solutions. The beginning of the 'Look East Policy' (1995-2008) was followed by the policy vacuum/bankruptcy under the Government of National Unity, 2009-2013. The GNU was characterised by a lukewarm 'reversion' to capitalism, which brought a return to normalcy, yet a perpetuation of the 'Look East Policy'

The 'Look East Policy' witnessed the advent of socialist China as Zimbabwe's so-called 'all-weather' economic friend or partner.<sup>13</sup> However, it did not address the fundamental aspects of poverty as the Chinese involvement in agro-processing industries, textiles and mining was tantamount to constant smuggling and repatriation of profits to the Asian country given weak and unclear policymaking and implementation of the Zimbabwe-China projects. Traditionally, foreign aid was dominated by multilateral agencies, such as the World Bank and the United Nations Development Programme, as the leading aid donors. Their share of multilateral giving rose from 23 per cent in the 1970s to 30 per cent in the early 1990s. Much of the official flow of aid was on a concessional basis, with grants constituting more than 90 per cent of total official assistance by 1996 - up from 60 per cent twenty years earlier. Nevertheless, there was the onset of donor fatigue in the latter part of the decade. With the geopolitical rationale for giving aid gone, the amount of aid to Africa dwindled dramatically. In the early 1990s, official donor aid (excluding emergency aid and debt relief) to Africa averaged US\$15 billion a year, compared to around US\$5 billion a year in the 1970s.

Sceptics of aid have argued that Western aid efforts have harmed Africa by enforcing a relationship with the West based on dependency and subordination. For example, in the past fifty years, the West has given more than US\$1 trillion in development-related aid to Africa. Has this assistance improved the lives of Africans and reduced poverty? Aid sceptics say no, because across the continent the recipients of this aid (seen as dead aid) are not better off but worse. They emphasize the need to find new ways (entrepreneurial alternatives) to finance development of the world's poorest countries like Zimbabwe as a method to guarantee economic growth and a significant decline in poverty, without reliance on Western foreign aid or aid-related assistance.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Youde (2007).

<sup>14</sup> See, for example, Marcus (2013).



China then became the new donor on the bloc.<sup>15</sup> Currently one of the fastest growing economies in the world, it has some of the biggest agricultural, mining, construction, water and energy investments in Africa. By 2005, Chinese investments in Zimbabwe were mainly in the mining of platinum, gold, diamond, iron ore and coal. In 2009 China paid US\$3 billion for exclusive access to Zimbabwe's extensive platinum rights, a contract estimated to be worth US\$40 billion. It has also made significant investments in agriculture especially the farm mechanisation programme, which it supported soon after the 2000 fast-track land reform programme. In the energy industry, large Chinese State-owned enterprises (corporations) have entered into joint ventures with Zimbabwean companies in extracting coal to generate power for the country. Chinese owned companies were also involved in ethanol production and investments in tourism, trade and infrastructure development. China's involvement in the construction industry includes the building of roads, schools and hospitals, and this has been a visible part of Chinese investments. Chinese Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) targeted firms in all continents, but with a distinct focus on South-East Asia and, to a lesser extent, Africa. In sum, however, China's outward FDI remains small relative to the economy's size.

However, the rapid expansion of Chinese investments has sparked both hope and uncertainty about the true intentions of China in Africa and the implications of its projects on the development of African economies like Zimbabwe. The overall financial volume of Chinese projects in Africa is hard to establish. Without sufficient official data available in most African countries, it is difficult to determine with certainty the actual positive or negative contribution of Chinese investments to the Zimbabwean economy, let alone to poverty alleviation. Chinese investments in Africa have been a source of concern in the West.<sup>16</sup> Views and sentiments often expressed by Western governments and international organisations are that China's policies of unconditional aid and relations with pariah states undermine current efforts by international and bilateral donors. In Zimbabwe, China has been accused of digging for gold, diamonds and other extractive minerals in a way that is damaging for the environment. It is also responsible for importing cheap Chinese textile products to the detriment of local enterprise.

Similarly, according to the former (now late) Zambian president, Michael Sata, who after becoming the president of Zambia softened his stance towards China, China has done more harm than good to local industries, especially small companies in the manufacturing and construction sectors in Africa.<sup>17</sup> He accused China of not complying with competition laws and that its trade patterns (for example, the supply of low-cost consumer goods, which offer unfair competition for African manufacturers) were against World Trade Organisation (WTO) rules to which it is a signatory. It has also been claimed that China's real intentions, that is, to elbow out all foreign companies and gain access to Africa's resources at cheap prices are well known, thus, further raising the question: Will Zimbabwe ever grow out of poverty given its natural resource dependence and the challenges of allowing China to be involved in the extractive sector? In spite of reservations expressed by many Zimbabweans about Chinese involvement in the country, bilateral ties/relations with China persisted throughout the GNU era and after. The GNU period ultimately ended with the adoption of the Zimbabwe Agenda for Sustainable Socio-Economic Transformation, which marked the consolidation of the 'Look East' approach, but Zimbabwe's success in alleviating poverty is yet to be assessed.

By 2017, many people were exposed to a life of abject poverty illustrated by abysmally low real wages in Zimbabwe or low salaries (ranging from approximately US\$100.00 to US\$500.00 in 2016). Low wages, according to Frankema and Van Waijenburg (2012), represented structural impediments to growth in Africa. Poverty was also reflected in the low standard of living, malnourishment, low life expectancy, high infant/child mortality rate, lack of food and of health

<sup>15</sup> Zafar (2007); Kragelund & van Dijk (2009); and Kragelund (2013).

<sup>16</sup> Jakobson & Wood (2012). See also Hanauer & Morris. (2014)

<sup>17</sup> Kragelund (2012). See also Edoho (2011).

services, which made people vulnerable to diseases. Diseases were major social indicators or symptoms of poverty. Most of the poor found employment in the informal sector; a sector dominated by the flea market business.<sup>18</sup>

Most of these activities were happening in undesignated places. A large majority of the poor people lived below the poverty line of US\$1.25 per day (World Bank, 2016). The chasm between rich and poor was widening against the backdrop of immense income inequalities. Persistent poverty was the result of a failure of politics, and lack of empathy with the poor. Corruption and state capture were endemic. Politicians had utterly failed to implement policies to alleviate the plight of Zimbabweans living in poverty.

## VI. People's Voices Against Poverty, 2000-2017

For many people and analysts, poverty in Zimbabwe is a social and political creation. There is nothing that bears more eloquent testimony to the existence of poverty in Zimbabwe than the voices of the poor. People have grown disenchanted with an ailing economy and political system characterised by massive job losses, unemployment, forced retirements, non-payment, and failure to pay workers on time. For example, for most of 2016 and 2017 government and private sector workers went for months without pay. As a result, they have registered their displeasure against poverty through strikes, demonstrations and vigorous whispering campaigns transmitted by means of social media such as WhatsApp, Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. The public and independent media have also covered sad stories about poverty.

For example, Zimbabwe came to a standstill in a peaceful protest-cum strike against corruption dubbed #Zimshutdown2016, which was also seen as activists' (human rights defenders) public stand against corruption, injustice and poverty among other things (*Zimbabwe Guardian Africa Network*, 2016). What started as local demonstrations launched by unpaid government workers (civil servants) escalated into a rallying point for national outcry against poverty, regime corruption, mismanagement, nepotism or favouritism, lack of electoral reform, rights abuses, lack of freedom of expression and media, and the worsening financial crisis. Demonstrations against the deteriorating economic situation turned into strikes and calls for regime change (particularly against Mugabe), which were ruthlessly suppressed by the police and army. (Human Rights Watch, 2017) Addressing a press conference following the strikes Promise Mkwanzani, the leader of the #Tajamuka (we have risen) movement, said; 'We are not afraid any more. We are ready to bring the dictator [Mugabe] down' (*Zimbabwe Guardian Africa Network*, 2016). The strikes were the latest in a continuum of public acts of defiance that first began in 2014, launched by activist and journalist Itai Dzamara, who staged an 'occupy protest' in Harare's Central Unity Square.

The reaction of the State to the strikes prompted Australia, Canada, the United States and Julius Malema of the Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF) opposition political party in South Africa to issue statements of concern over use of violence, the succession crisis within ZANU-PF, the deteriorating human rights situation and other human rights violations. Zimbabwe could hardly secure credit lines from external sources. The World Bank said any extensive bailout package or direct funding to Zimbabwe would only resume after the country cleared its arrears with the bank and had corrected its tainted human rights record (Human Rights Watch, 2017). The drying up of credit lines for the country deepened the economic conundrum and poverty as US dollar cash shortages/deficiencies and/or its unavailability led to failure to disburse any US dollars to the banking public. The demand for cash by banking clients sometimes forced banks to issue the South African rand instead of the US dollar. Cash shortages had resulted in the government's introduction of, initially bond coins, and later \$2 and \$5 bond notes (so-called export incentives) and the stipulation by banks of maximum withdrawals per day of \$10-20 bond notes. Supermarkets such as

<sup>18</sup> Flea market activities involved the sale of: new and second hand clothes (*mabhero*), fruits, vegetables, meat, belts, shoes, perfumes, detergents, carrier bags (*changani* bags), cell phones, mobile phone recharge cards, electrical appliances, pirated musical compact discs (CDs), firewood/charcoal, and such.

OK, TM, Pick n Pay, Spar, and Bon Marché used to give cash backs, but with the cash shortages supermarket cash backs were tightly regulated which was tantamount to stopping them. Mobile service provider Econet's EcoCash facility, which had virtually become the people's alternative to formal banks also became controlled and by 2017 it was down or was as good as eliminated/abolished. Cash, readily available at EcoCash outlets earlier, was no longer available. The critical cash crunch meant people were slipping further and further into poverty.

Poverty levels in Zimbabwe reached alarming proportions. A recent authoritative survey revealed that in some areas of the country as many as 96 per cent of villagers lived on less than a dollar a day (*Daily News*, 2015). According to the *Zimbabwe Poverty Atlas* for 2015 – a research carried out by ZIMSTAT, the World Bank and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) – areas such as Nkayi in Matabeleland North Province had a shocking poverty prevalence of 96 per cent (*Atlas*, 2015). In Nkayi, out of an estimated population of 107,613, with an average of five people making up a household, 21,112 households did not have income sufficient to provide for basic necessities (*Daily News*, 2015). Analysts said the main factors behind Zimbabwe's dire state of affairs were the misrule of former President Robert Mugabe's ZANU-PF administration and the recurrent droughts, which left most parts of the country relying on humanitarian aid or drought food relief (*Daily News*, 2015).

According to the paper's survey, other districts which were experiencing high levels of poverty were Lupane (the capital of Matabeleland North) with 93 per cent poverty prevalence, Gokwe South (Midlands Province) 91 per cent, and Mudzi (Mashonaland East) 90 per cent (*Daily News*, 2015). The report said 'Poverty was found to be most prevalent in Matabeleland North, while it was least prevalent in [the Harare and Bulawayo Metropolitan Provinces] at 36.4 per cent and 37.2 per cent [respectively]'. Further, 'The rest of the provinces had poverty prevalence rates ranging between 65 and 76 per cent ... districts with lower poverty prevalence rates were Marondera [the capital of Mashonaland East] 43.4 per cent and Gweru [the capital of Midlands] 45.5 per cent (*Daily News*, 2015).

UNICEF Zimbabwe Country Representative, Reza Hossaini, said it was high time the government and other stakeholders 'put their hands on deck to eradicate poverty' as children continued to be the hardest hit by the scourge (UNICEF Representative cited in *Daily News*, 2015). He said, 'Seventy-eight percent of children in Zimbabwe live in monetary poverty. Progress towards reducing poverty has been uneven during the Millennium Development Goals [MDGs] and we need to act on this'. Enhancing these points, Permanent Secretary for Economic Planning and Investment Promotion, Desire Sibanda, said the economy was 'key in turning around the fortunes of the country's poor' (*Daily News*, 2015).

Critics have argued that instead of focusing on reviving the country's 'comatose economy', the ruling ZANU-PF party under Mugabe was 'consumed by its unending factional and succession wars, at the expense of bread and butter issues'. The much publicised interface rallies, which ended in 'deposing' Robert Mugabe in November 2017, were held at the expense of the economy. Many people felt that 'the government's much-hyped [new] economic blueprint, ZimAsset, [had] so far proved to be [a] mirage, incapable of providing the stimulus needed to revive the country's bleeding economy'. Clearly, from the time ZANU-PF won the disputed 2013 harmonised elections, 'the country's economic growth rates have plummeted, with ever more companies collapsing and hundreds of thousands of jobs being lost' (*Daily News*, 2015). Concomitantly, the general standard and quality of living deteriorated sharply leading to abject poverty and inescapable moral decay.

## VII. Poverty and Moral Decay: The Evidence

Poverty in Zimbabwe has manifested itself in various ways. In most rural and urban areas, many people were living in extreme poverty as seen through how they struggled to eke out a living. In Harare, for example, there were growing communities living as squatters along the Mukuvisi River and other streams. These communities, described as 'the poorest of the poor' lived in plastic

shacks (makeshift shelter); they scrounged for food, and the City Council was urged to do something about it (*ZBC News*, 2017). Others lived in squalid conditions especially in the city high density hostels like the Magaba, Matapi, and Shawasha flats in Harare. Unemployment, poverty, destitution and economic hardship led to social and moral decadence as reflected in the emergence of, yet growing child prostitution, street children (kids), begging and crime problems in the country.

### *The Plight of Children: 'Street Children'*

Clearly, the socio-economic situation in Zimbabwe whilst it also affected adults had a severe negative impact on children. When Zimbabwe's economic crisis started to bite in the 1990s - against the backdrop of ESAP and a horrendous drought in 1992 (Nyandoro, 2017) - some young children drifted from the countryside to the cities looking for social protection and a share of whatever would be scavenged, stolen, begged or solicited for from pedestrians, passers-by or motorists. Others were unleashed onto the streets since the infamous *Operation Murambatsvina*<sup>19</sup> or slum clearances begun in 2005. Homeless street children<sup>20</sup> who inhabited the streets and backstreets scavenged for rotting food scraps from dirty places, bins including waste dumps and slept in Zimbabwe's major towns and cities (e.g. Harare, Bulawayo, Kwekwe, Gweru, and Mutare) water drains especially during the dry seasons in search of warmth. The children who lived and worked on the streets bear tragic witness to how little has changed in a society that has been devastated by economic crisis for several years. In extreme and bad economic times they live in abject or extreme poverty, and in good times they experience an illusion of prosperity. Their plight, in the absence of clear government policies to cater for such underprivileged children, seems permanent and is evidence of the trampling of children's human rights. For example, they not only lacked food but also proper clothing and blankets hence they usually wrapped/draped themselves in torn cardboard boxes and lit a thin fire at night (especially in the cold winter) to ward-off the effects of drops in temperature (*The Guardian*, 2010). They often fell prey to child trafficking, sodomy, unwanted pregnancies, alcohol, drug abuse (the commonest ones being the inhaling of glue, smoking of cannabis/*mbanje*, and the taking of smuggled BronClear cough syrup, known locally as *Bronco*) and police raids or round ups.

Street children are some of the most vulnerable groups in the world. Both boys and girls live on the streets but major concern is on girls. In many ways, the girl child is more vulnerable compared to her male counterpart. Both boys and girls face similar forms of abuse but the girl child always ends up with more disadvantages than her opposite sex. For instance, both boys and girls suffer from the sexual abuse but the girl has an extra risk of falling pregnant. The Department of Social Welfare estimates that there are 15,000 children living in street situations in most major cities in Zimbabwe (*The Herald*, 2017). The daily lives of these children were far removed from the childhood envisioned in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. Besides, dire poverty led to and was responsible for increased early child-marriages in Zimbabwe (*CGTN Africa*, 2014) as well as prostitution.

### *Prostitution*

Prostitution, especially child prostitution, has become a pervasive social problem in Zimbabwe. Prostitution including child prostitution was rife in urban high population density areas. The causal factors include poverty, Western values, rural-urban migration, and divorce, school dropout in circumstances of poverty, unemployment and underemployment. Social welfare workers

<sup>19</sup> *Operation Murambatsvina* left hundreds of people homeless. It was a government-coined term to denote an operation that destroyed illegally constructed houses in towns and growth points. The operation increased the shortage of accommodation and exacerbated poverty.

<sup>20</sup> Whilst the term 'street children' is problematic as it can be employed as a stigmatisation label against children who have been shunned by mainstream society, it is nevertheless used in this chapter to underscore the impact of child poverty.

could hardly cope with the increasing numbers of abandoned babies, often by raped young mothers. At the Makumbi children's home, half an hour's drive from the capital city, a nursing Sister (or Church nun) was upset to report in 2010 that she had to turn away three abandoned babies brought in by social workers in a move that was symptomatic of an abdication of young mothers' social responsibility. The nun conceded that 'More and more children [are] abandoned and being left in the bush, [and] some are eaten by ants'. She categorically concluded that 'poverty, and poverty leading to girls being abused, is the cause'. An official in the Ministry of Health concurred by saying this was one of the signs that due to poverty 'Zimbabwean society [was] splintering, breaking, [as] the family [was] not working the way it used to', adding that 'The gap [was] increasing between the rich and the poor'. 'The situation meant that the poor ended up on the streets.'<sup>21</sup>

### VIII. Drought Exacerbates Poverty

Whilst poverty, reflected through moral decay, emerged against the backdrop of poor and inconsistent economic policies, natural calamities like drought compounded the situation. Such catastrophes were some of the causes of poverty and hunger/famine in Zimbabwe. In the post-independence era occurrences of severe droughts were recorded between 1982 and 1985; in 1987, 1992, 1994, 1995, and between 1997/98 and the 2000s (Nyandoro 2017). In 2011/2012, many districts in the country faced acute food shortages following poor rains and up to approximately 1.6 million poor people required food aid during the lean period (*AFP News Agency*, 2012). In a related development, *Al Jazeera* reported that in 2012/2013 Zimbabwe faced 'its worst food crisis in years because of drought and poor harvests' and the United Nations (UN) estimated that over two million people were affected as the crisis exacerbated poverty (*Al Jazeera*, 2013).

Although people were poor and in dire need of food, the distribution of government and occasional donor-funded supplies did not work well as food handouts did not reach many parts of the country. The distribution mechanism of food relief created artificial shortages thereby confirming Amartya Sen's studies on the developing world which show that hunger and starvation were not caused by the lack of food, but by the failure in distribution of food to those in need.<sup>22</sup>

Notwithstanding government efforts to allay food shortages through redistributive measures, the country's citizens still lived in poverty. A 2014 International Monetary Fund report aptly revealed that the majority of Zimbabweans continued to live in poverty and that the country showed no signs of recovery in spite of the vast economic potential it possesses (*IMF Report*, 2014). Despite the country's abundant natural resource endowment, by 2017, the country was still failing to convert its resources such as land, water, mineral, forestry and wildlife resources to its advantage. Poverty and inequalities proliferated due, *inter alia*, to corruption, wanton levels of state capture, mismanagement and political-economic policies which were incompatible with addressing spiralling poverty.

### IX. Corruption and other Economic Challenges

For Konadu-Agyemang and Shabaya (2005), whilst the existing disparities may be rooted in history, their persistence and worsening in the post-independence era can only be understood with reference to the corruption, nepotism and the mismanagement that have characterised Zimbabwe since independence. Corruption, which has made a few people in Zimbabwe wealthy at the expense of the nation, is widely perceived to be a feature of most African governments.

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<sup>21</sup> Destitution and poverty also became feeding grounds for the proliferation of criminal activities such as stealing/theft, house burglaries, larceny, assaults, murder, mugging, shoplifting, armed robberies, armed carjacking and other survival vices. These crimes had a tendency to increase in times of drought and economic challenges that continually beset the country.

<sup>22</sup> Sen (1993). See also Baro & Deubel (2006).

There was, thus, need to revamp the Zimbabwean economy, eliminate corruption, put an end to the worrisome capturing of the State, and the poaching of wildlife resources, and to transform the political landscape. Corruption became pervasive as almost every citizen (from top to bottom) was engaged in corrupt transactions in one form or the other. Members of the presidium, cabinet ministers, private sector/company and banking executives, Chief Executive Officers (CEOs), sport and recreation officials, lower-level civil servants and other ordinary people were engaged in corruption and illegal money laundering. So, corruption does not only involve economically and politically powerful people, but it also infects/affects and concerns the lower social segments of both rural and urban society.

Clearly, poverty was endemic, yet curable through optimum exploitation (and value addition) of the country's abundant natural resources and the comparative-advantages that existed to raise incomes in the agricultural, mining, manufacturing and public sectors like water, housing, electricity, education, sanitation, health and transportation.<sup>23</sup> Basic income-fulfilment was an indispensable prerequisite for socio-economic development and eradication of poverty as it had implications on the satiation of people's basic wants.

Because of the lack of a transformative agenda and innovative policies, economic growth in Zimbabwe has been unsatisfactory. With all the droughts, diseases, HIV, and economic crises to which members of poor households were most vulnerable, Zimbabwe by 2017 was at its lowest ever economic position since independence. Since the prevalence of HIV/AIDS is higher in Zimbabwe than in other southern African states, it can be observed that there is a direct connection between HIV/AIDS and poverty in the country. AIDS has caused severe damage to the working age population and many children have become orphans. While there is a direct connection between HIV/AIDS and poverty in Zimbabwe, there may not be any direct connection between politics and HIV/AIDS. However, the malfunctioning health care system aggravated the epidemic. Hence, poverty has impacted the health care system and likewise, a poor health system exacerbated poverty in that the adult population engaged in agriculture (the backbone of the economy) was also infected and/or affected. Agricultural production was deficient and was hardly able to feed its population. Malnutrition, death rates, and infant mortality and other symptoms of poverty also increased. In 2016, 33,000 children were reported to be suffering and in urgent need of treatment for severe/acute malnutrition (UNICEF Zimbabwe, 2016). There was great concern about poverty, malnourishment, child mortality, and low life expectancy. Under-five mortality rose from 55 deaths per 1,000 live births in the early 1990s to a high of 94 deaths per 1,000 live births in 2009 (ZIMSTAT, 2014). Life expectancy was estimated to be just 59 years in 2015. Poverty was worsening, and there was need to change the country's current economic trajectory where corruption and the magnitude of State capture during the Mugabe regime was a major reason for spiralling poverty (Nyamunda, Mukwambo & Nyandoro, 2012).

Lack of good governance (e.g. widespread corruption and unfavourable government policies) and low-quality institutional structures have resulted in the failure of natural resources to provide foreign exchange necessary for sustainable growth and equitable development. Unbridled corruption caused a large share of the national wealth being appropriated by the political and economic elites, thus resulting in widening inequality and poor growth patterns. Prudent public policies were therefore urgent and essential for economic development in Zimbabwe. At the same time, institutional amendments and developments were necessary in order to eliminate rent-seeking opportunities and to create an environment conducive for business.

It appears development experts have overplayed the role of the country's resources as the basis of economic transformation. They have emphasised that natural resources constitute the core

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<sup>23</sup> An interesting feature of modern economic growth is the curse of natural resources or the natural-resources-curse. That is, countries rich (abundant) in natural resources tend to grow slower (perform badly) than economies without substantial natural resources (natural-resource-scarce economies). This has been proven empirically and analysed in various recent studies (Van der Ploeg, 2011; Nyandoro & Dube, 2018).

of development because Zimbabwe is rich not only in precious mineral deposits, but also in fertile land, water supply, good pastures, flora and fauna, forests/timber and rubber. Abundant natural resources, which include plentiful sunlight for the generation of solar energy (as a substitute for non-renewable energy form), are important to the country's growth. However, pragmatic and comprehensive policies are yet to be implemented to harness this critical resource for energy production.

In order to benefit from mining and other critical sectors of the economy, Zimbabwe avoid being just a mineral exporting country or a source of raw materials with no experts in contract negotiation. The country should move away from the colonial legacy that perceived markets to be overseas markets. Mining which lacks clarity and consistency regarding indigenous policies should be geared towards production, profit-orientation and, of course, control. Zimbabwe should leverage its natural resources for sustainable development.

Thus, the natural resources-theory alone is not sufficient to guide Zimbabwe out of widespread poverty. The theory is weak because it fails to account for the country's poverty despite its abundance of raw materials. There can be no stronger proof of the great natural resource fallacy than the fact that, even in the face of the much-discussed resources, Zimbabwe has not risen to economic prominence. The fact that most Zimbabweans are poor in spite of the country's plentiful resources indicates that 'relative resource-abundance did not [necessarily] mean that the region was generally 'resource-rich'. This just confirms that Zimbabwe is land-abundant, yet low-income. Zimbabwe has to shift from the notion of the availability of natural resources to efficient utilisation of these resources and other development dynamics, because resources until fully utilised are as good as bad. This, thus, partly explains why the country is comparatively rich in natural resources, yet remains poor.

## **X. Portfolios of the Poor**

Clearly, the term poverty carries with it the implication and the moral imperative that something should be done about it. Whilst comprehensive and inclusive Government poverty eradication policies are virtually non-existent, the people living in poverty had to adopt survival strategies, described by Daryl et al (2010) as portfolios of the poor. In the circumstances, Zimbabweans responded to their plight in various ways. To raise their well-being (standard of living) and fight against or at least minimise poverty, malnutrition (which reduced life expectancy), infant mortality rate (below the age of five), lack of food, and lack of health services (which made people vulnerable to diseases) most poor Zimbabweans sought to help themselves. How they did that brings out novel ways to survive. Zimbabweans exhibited agency to counter poverty and achieve economic and social improvement. They adopted local anti-poverty strategies which included labour migration to neighbouring countries (e.g. South Africa, Botswana, and Namibia) and cash (also groceries) remittances to home village (Bracking & Sachikonye 2008; Nyandoro 2011b). In addition to these, they also organised themselves in various self-help associations, embarked on 'vending' or informal trading activities to mitigate risks of falling into poverty in the absence of major Government policies against the scourge.

However, in the absence of strict government control of informal activities big metropolis like Harare by 2017 epitomised 'a vendor city' as desperate and poor people invaded every urban and peripheral spaces to engage in aggressive vending and flea market businesses. They were also widespread along highways to and from South Africa. The activities have become an eyesore and a major blot on urban centres, clearly illustrating the extent of poverty, as well as how ordinary people tried to ameliorate their plight.

## **XI. Concluding Remarks**

The paper has provided a broad perspective of the politics of poverty in post-independence Zimbabwe. It finds that there is extreme poverty in the country, and that the various dimensions of

poverty and their linkages to an unpredictable policy environment, State capture, and major economic, social and political challenges exacerbated poverty. Poverty, which is multi-faceted and occurs in various dimensions such as income levels, health, education, and employment, is a common marker of lack of economic growth and development. Inability or indifference of the Government under Mugabe to deal with the country's unprecedented economic challenges meant that the war against poverty was invariably lost. The people whose plight and voices bear eloquent testimony to the existence of poverty in the country, therefore, feel the nation requires critical policy-adjustments and commitment to reduce poverty as the notion that 'people can depend on the government to assist the poor' no longer applies to Zimbabwe. Alarming poverty became the order of the day by 2017. Unprecedented poverty pervaded all social strata except the political and other elites. The growing extent of poverty in Zimbabwe over a period stretching 37 years actually contradicted Mugabe's statements that 'there was no crisis in Zimbabwe' and also contradicted government pronouncements that the country was rich because it possessed abundant natural wealth in land, minerals, and forests. Sadly, the opposite was true.

This paper has concluded that poverty was caused not only by lack of relevant Government policies but it was also a consequence of prevailing economic, political and social factors; unwillingness to address corruption, State capture, and income inequalities among other factors. Thus, hopes of poverty reduction cannot be too high for the near future for one of Africa's top poor countries especially given the policy bankruptcy and measures that are not conducive to providing urgent solutions to economic stagnation, corruption, broad inequalities and poverty. Serious efforts to mitigate poverty and other challenges depend on the successful resolution of the political and economic crisis facing the country including transformative-change to the institutional and policy landscape. Perhaps the historic resignation of President Mugabe, on 21 November 2017 amid impeachment debate in Parliament may be a positive influence on future policies addressing poverty eradication and other problems in Zimbabwe. Following Mugabe's removal, one newspaper's headline 'The end of an era' could easily have been entitled 'The end of an error' i.e. a 37-year-old error (*News Day*, 2017), summing up the poor performance of the economy, characterised by extreme poverty, under the former President.

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