
Centre for International Governance and Justice

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Some Reflections on the Longer Term role of the UN and
International Actors**

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UN AND INTERNATIONAL ACTORS**

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Peacebuilding in Zimbabwe:
Some Reflections on the Longer Term role of the UN and International Actors

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Abstract:

More debate is currently needed on the longer-term peacebuilding challenges and priorities in Zimbabwe, and on the role of external actors in the drawn-out process of national recovery. This paper reflects on the proper and probable role of the United Nations system and other external actors. What is the value-added of UN involvement in what has been largely a regionally-driven process? Using discussion on rule of law, governance and anti-corruption issues, key to ensuring steady foreign aid and private sector investment, the author considers certain balancing acts and compromises that will be required of international actors. It is possible for external bodies to chart a coherent and coordinated course between necessary involvement and counter-productive intrusiveness, between responsible planning and responsive delivery, and between governance demands and government capabilities. There is an opportunity for international actors to simultaneously strengthen the regional economic and political infrastructure.

Introduction

Considerable attention has been placed on mapping a way out of Zimbabwe's current political, economic and humanitarian dilemmas. Aside from humanitarian issues, one interim consideration since February 2009 relates to the circumstances and criteria under which donor re-engagement ought to take place and be monitored. More policy debate is needed, however, what may be involved in the longer term in terms of the likely and ideal role of external actors in ensuring peaceful, inclusive, legitimate and sustainable national recovery and consolidation in Zimbabwe.

Political progress can enable economic recovery – but economic recovery also provides the conditions for political progress to be sustained and for vibrant, confident plurality. Foreign aid, assistance and investment are vital to reducing the risk of state collapse and civil conflict, ensuring socio-economic revival, and to enabling Zimbabwe to fulfill its potential. These inputs in turn require, among other things, predictability in local policy-making; credible, effective and accountable institutions backed with the political will to accept and embed governance checkpoints; confidence in the rule of law and property protection; and freedom and security for non-state watchdogs. This paper selectively focuses on rule of law and governance issues. Not only are these significant in themselves, including in creating the socio-economic conditions for successful local peacebuilding. They are also useful issues through which to consider the proper and probable role of international policy-makers and institutions in assisting Zimbabweans, and in particular the added value of UN involvement in what has, to date, been largely a regionally-driven process.

Perhaps implicit in such international involvement is a project of transformation, rather than mere recovery and reconstruction. Whether or not articulated, there is also an element of external supervision: the international community will partly see itself as obliged to act in the interests of the wider Zimbabwean population, in trying to ensure a transformative course is followed by local power-holders. The scale and complexity of

outsiders undertaking such an endeavor against the grain of the decades during which local governance structures, relationships and cultures have solidified (and familiar issues around the propriety and utility of external involvement) mean that a number of difficult balances will need to be maintained by international actors helping to shape longer-term recovery. While every country situation is different, Zimbabwe will reveal whether lessons have been learned from recent statebuilding and peacebuilding efforts, and from current debates including those on 'ownership' and genuine local participation, donor coordination, aid effectiveness, conditionality and supervision, and the proper sequencing of priorities.

In addition to productive political momentum and an end to insecurity, violence and intimidation, the immediate priorities in Zimbabwe require no recitation.¹ Aside from wholesale macro-economic and fiscal reforms, banked up are a range of other, more medium to long term political, economic and social challenges, priorities and opportunities.² One point of this paper is that more comprehensive, coordinated efforts now to map and scale the longer-term challenges can assist in at least four practical ways: assessing the trajectory of problems (to assist in sequencing and prioritizing); ensuring short-term responses and any quick impact programs are tied now to longer-term plans and lay foundations for these; enabling considered determinations on the best roles for a variety of external actors; and in conceiving of problems as possibilities

¹ They include food, water and energy supply and security, seeds and agricultural extension for summer 2008/9, inflation control and currency stability, and core economic activities capable of securing foreign exchange.

² An attempt to catalogue these might include: electoral and constitutional necessities and ending political dysfunction; consolidating civilian control of the military and reducing military spending; addressing legislation such as the *Public Order Security Act*, media and NGO registration laws; repatriation and resettlement of displaced persons; disbandment, rehabilitation and constructive redirection of youth militia; acceptable and workable strategies for justice, reconciliation and reparation for past political violence; ensuring equality and inclusive national development for Ndebele-speakers and other minorities; employment creation and stimulating small-scale farming and business; revitalizing the tourist industry; reviewing the recent corporate foreign ownership rules; crucial infrastructure needs, particularly water and electricity; deciding on a strategy for the large government parastatals; long-term food security; rationalizing land ownership and incentivizing large-scale commercial agriculture in the context of apparently 'irreversible' land redistribution; attracting foreign investment and return of skilled diaspora and their capital; basic rule of law reform and restoring confidence in the senior judiciary; energizing the parliamentary committee system; bringing local government and city councils into the constitutional structure; addressing corruption and tracing misappropriated funds; reviving the once-proud healthcare and education systems (including supplies, and stemming the flight of teachers and medical staff), and scaling up the fight against HIV/AIDS, TB and Malaria.

– what opportunities do the 2008 ‘settlement’ and whatever may be its follow-through present in terms of visions of a revitalized and reformed society in 2015 – when the MDGs will focus attention – and beyond?

The Role of the UN and other External Actors

What is the longer-term role for the UN system, beyond the consolidated humanitarian appeal coordinated by OCHA in 2008/9? What of other external bodies, including the World Bank Group, donor governments, and the private sector? With some exceptions, the UN’s overall role in Zimbabwe has been and will likely remain relatively limited. UN involvement in post-crisis peacebuilding phases is very often determined by the nature of any prior role. Here no Security Council mandate underlies political engagement, and UN Special Envoy Haile Menkerios was not the primary mediator, nor high-profile, in the September 2008 settlement and its re-examination in January 2009. Zimbabwe has by and large been handled as a regional issue, within a SADC process.³ In order to mediate donor demands and to dilute some country donors’ influence, it is not inconceivable that a future government request may be made to the UN Peacebuilding Commission (PBC) to coordinate international assistance. This would seem to fit the PBC’s intended institutional role. However, a PBC role is perhaps unlikely given the non-UN trajectory so far. In any event, the PBC Support Office is still relatively new, and there may be questions over its capacity for further engagement now (including whether it would be equipped to work intensively on the ground with a new or unity government on the detailed, complex peacebuilding and statebuilding discussions Zimbabwe will require of its external partners).

³ It has not been suggested that SADC coordinate recovery, although its governance norms (as well as those of NEPAD) ought to be seen as relevant to the framework within which recovery takes place – as argued below, this can be an opportunity to enliven these institutions. Some framework guidance can also be drawn from the OECD-DAC Principles for Good International Engagement in Fragile States and Situations (while Zimbabwe is post-crisis rather than post-conflict), and the African Union Framework Document for Post-Conflict Reconstruction and Development.

Leading bilateral donors operating in Zimbabwe throughout the last decade, increasingly in unison, will be the primary external actors in Zimbabwe's recovery, alongside international financial institutions. Indeed, the lead has already been taken by this collective group, with the World Bank coordinating an Analytical Multi-Donor Trust Fund (A-MDTF) that is gathering critical information to be fed into the eventual planning for and implementation of external support in Zimbabwe's recovery. The related Emergency Recovery Program (ERP – September 2008) under discussion by external partners is addressed to the short term (spanning an estimated 12 months after re-engagement by the donor community). This paper is concerned with some longer-term challenges and roles: the ERP is however likely to be significant in laying the basis for the development of longer term plans by the Zimbabwe government and its partners, and crucially has a strong governance element.⁴ Again, this paper does not examine issues around initial donor re-engagement and what pre-conditions and monitoring arrangements ought to be in place: that issue raises difficult balances between supporting the February 2009 arrangement for what it is, and acknowledging on the other hand that there need to be some incentives for ZANU-PF to change its ways.

Not only will individual UN agencies' involvement likely be somewhat contingent on the nature and extent of past country involvement, importantly UN system involvement should ideally always be based on comparative advantage in the specific country context, including the perceived strengths UN agencies bring to the situation in the eyes of national partners and financing donors. The UNDP's mandate marks it out for a particularly important role in the medium to longer term on the governance issues here under discussion. One possibly significant role in earlier stages is for the UNDP's Bureau of Crisis Prevention and Recovery, which alongside the UNDG/ECHA Working Group on Transition has been working in an increasingly coordinated way with the

⁴ Plans for promoting 'governance' in the broadest sense – including human rights guarantees and democratic process standards – is the subject of a separate multi-donor initiative already afoot. It will be important in Zimbabwe when discussing 'governance' in public and with government for the UN and donors to be explicit that this is a cross-cutting issue, and relates to human rights, transparency in revenue and spending, anti-corruption measures, rule of law standards, functioning parliamentary committees. 'Governance' here does not need to be another layer of rules and procedures parallel to the state – it is more likely to be tedious reforms within existing institutions, plus the wider fostering of a culture of good governance and of the idea of legitimacy of oversight as the norm.

World Bank Group in needs assessments and post-crisis recovery planning. The UN Economic Commission for Africa may be another useful source of assistance in relation to longer-term governance reform. Individual agencies such as UNICEF can of course promote human rights, rule of law and good governance as an integral incident of their substantive thematic concern.

However, as a general matter unless a UN agency is seen in-country as a particularly effective or appropriate vehicle for donor funding, it is likely in Zimbabwe that most UN agencies will be secondary and support players in a process driven largely by bilateral donors and the international financial institutions. One issue for any UN actor will be whether to work mainly through non-government, off-budget channels, or through government departments. While some external agencies would appear to reveal a preference for the former, arguably this would be a misconceived strategy in Zimbabwe, especially for the longer term. As argued below, the state here mainly needs to be rehabilitated, not simply by-passed. A strong state can be modified – a shadow state is difficult to retrieve.

Even before relationships with government complicate matters,⁵ central to the peacebuilding challenge will be the extent to which any planning activities – and their modification and implementation over the longer term – can be coordinated between major external actors. For historical reasons, the need for inter-donor consultation and consensus is particularly acute in Zimbabwe.⁶ The A-MDTF's inclusion of non-contributing partners in discussions, along with the early signs of consensus-based division of responsibilities among donors and a remarkably unified local civil society, all provide hopeful signs in this critical issue.

⁵ The longer-term scenario, which may follow further elections, may be less complicated than the present complicated bipartisan allocation of ministerial responsibilities.

⁶ The government has previously displayed particular skill in exploiting donor proliferation and miscommunication. Post-independence 1980s Zimbabwe was, many would argue, marked by the activity of a wide range of donor agencies whose well-intentioned activities often bore little relation to each other or to a coherent national recovery agenda.

A direct challenge for international players is of building and publically representing consensus around governance conditions that are pre-requisites to or components of support, and maintaining that message in the longer-term. This includes negotiating publicly-available benchmarks, setting clear lines of communication and unambiguous signals of local leadership's responsibility, and providing real support and incentives towards the government pursuing vital reforms. Whatever the emergency planning, the longer term will not – and ought not – be a case of international actors directly setting policy, but rather strongly encouraging and assisting in certain directions. While familiar misgivings arise, this degree of oversight is not entirely inappropriate for institutions and governments that are affording to Zimbabweans money, time and expertise, and where much of the evidence to date is of mismanagement, state abuse, and neglect of large percentages of the local population.

Anti-corruption and transparency measures must be given priority by international actors, from the earliest opportunity. One danger is that a flood of external support can counter-productively strengthen the already formidable patterns of patronage and nepotism, diverting resources and undermining political health in the country, further distorting weak accountability lines, and orienting government towards external approval and unsustainable support. Apart from self-regulation by donors and private corporations, efforts must be made to secure public revenue and expenditure tracking systems and avenues for multi-stakeholder observation and audit (for example of tendering processes). However, these technical interventions stand little prospect of success without efforts to obtain political buy-in for better governance, and broad popular demand for transparency. UN and other field agencies now have considerable awareness of the power of emphasizing demand, not simply supply, of these public goods: one challenge will be to assist to create a popular narrative identifying officials as public *servants*, in place of the sense of self-entitlement that has marked much of the public sector in Zimbabwe.

These intangible qualities depend on political dynamics and do not follow automatically from advice and technical manipulation of governance structures by external actors. Alongside technical support, international actors can only try to find ways to support necessary local political initiatives: a new anti-corruption institution that citizens know about and use, empowering local governments, an enhanced role for civil society and for the parliamentary committee system, national public education programs creating an internal (not donor/external) demand for better governance, and supporting building the generic strength of the media and other non-state watchdogs. The circuit-breaker of political change is a rare opportunity to support a popular swelling up in favor of good, open, responsive government.

Finally, the recent pattern in Zimbabwe of ‘the regional’ mediating the international and the local is likely to give way to more direct international involvement as the focus moves from political to economic solutions. One particularly useful role for World Bank, UN and other actors helping to ‘imagine’ Zimbabwe’s longer-term revival is to consider to how to retain a regional dimension: there will be a rare opportunity to enhance regional linkages, infrastructure and institutions, both economic⁷ and political.⁸

Other international actors: enabling foreign private sector investment

Foreign public and private investment into Zimbabwe’s agriculture, industries, tourism and essential infrastructure is a significant peacebuilding challenge. What, in the

⁷ International actors ought to privilege project proposals that dovetail with initiatives in neighboring countries, and strengthen regional integration, infrastructure development and trade links. For example, more effective road and rail links will greatly benefit the agricultural and minerals sectors in the region. SADC began as a development community and this core role can be greatly enhanced by international actors working through SADC where feasible.

⁸ The United Nations and other international actors should as far as possible aim to direct future political energies through the SADC mechanism. Long-term conflict prevention in Zimbabwe is surely tied to the capacity of SADC to act as an African-constituted diplomatic space. The African Union was hardly exhausted as a forum on Zimbabwe, and its profile can be enhanced alongside SADC. Provided a proliferation of norms does not enable game-playing, there is also an opportunity to reinforce NEPAD vocabulary in framing reform benchmarks. The Commonwealth, of which all SADC members are members, can play a useful role in developing convergence on priorities and maintaining momentum and a sense of values-based benchmarks.

interests of longer-term peacebuilding, is the role of international institutions in attracting the right sort of economic actors who can help to fuel economic recovery in a non-exploitative, equitable, and empowering way?

Elections, truth commissions, and other such political initiatives are only part of the strategy for crisis recovery: with clear evidence of the limits of such political design (and of the limited impact of outsiders on deep political patterns), policy-makers today ought to be under no illusions of the significant peacebuilding potential of the local and foreign private sectors. If international actors are serious about Zimbabwe's longer-term stability and prosperity, they will give as much attention to ensuring investment, economic policy predictability and institutional credibility on the part of the Zimbabwe government, governance and anti-corruption measures, and the rule of law, as they give to the more familiar political institutions that often preoccupy international statebuilding.

Aid-funded investment, mainly in public infrastructure, is not the only option.⁹ However, whether private sector investment (including from the diaspora community) is forthcoming very much depends on these actors' perception of risk. In principle, Zimbabwe's wider legal system (its tax, corporate, property and contract laws) is the basis for a viable and quick recovery, despite the currency crisis, if linked effectively to its educated (if displaced) workforce, natural resources, agricultural and tourist infrastructure, relative industrialization, and the persistence and ingenuity of small-scale merchants and farmers. However, very clear signals on good governance will be needed to reassure serious investment.¹⁰ This is a considerable challenge, given the legacy of erratic economic policy-making and the recent history of heavy government and power-player interference in private property, including outright seizures of land, wider land redistribution measures, the passage of laws restricting foreign ownership, and the general propagation of a climate of nationalization and executive appropriation.

⁹ A number of studies show that private (as opposed to aid-funded) investment in infrastructure sectors only comes in 5-7 years after the end of a conflict. In principle there is no reason to cling to the assumption that this will take time. Despite the economic crisis, there has not been a military conflict here.

¹⁰ One issue is not simply what ought to be the content of signals, but whether the activity of public signaling itself has any credibility in Zimbabwe now. This is where external actors can lend credibility.

This is not to underestimate the considerable technical and political challenge of identifying, tracing and repatriating state and private assets that have been wrongfully obtained, and of sorting through the many layers of claims upon land and other assets that has resulted from the combination of state-sponsored disorder and speculative investment during the last five years.

In the Zimbabwe scenario one useful role for the international donor and policy community is, in consultation perhaps with the Zimbabwe Chamber of Commerce, trade unions and other actors, to ensure the government internalizes the need to entrench conditions favorable to the serious commercial investment (and activity not solely driven by aid) needed to shore up and unleash Zimbabwe's potential. This means a consistent, predictable and principled policy, governance and legal environment capable of reassuring foreign investors, including banks, that it is possible and worthwhile to plan for a long-term engagement in Zimbabwe. Here there is a role for the World Bank and donor governments to consider political risk insurance for investors of various scales, from the Multilateral Investment Guarantee Agency (MIGA) and national export credit agencies. Meanwhile agencies prepared to underwrite guarantees for trade (for example for the import of agricultural machinery) will be significant actors on the Zimbabwe peacebuilding map.

Various state-owned and other entities have been actively exploring the Zimbabwean situation despite (or perhaps because of) the crisis. Creating conditions acceptable to *reputable* international companies can have a multiplier effect, attracting and reassuring other investors. From a governance perspective, such corporations can potentially represent another influential constituency in keeping the bureaucracy honest and on its toes, as well as helping its capacity. However, in their initiatives on this issue international actors ought, where possible, to support policies that aim as much at regionally-based SMEs as at large multinational corporations. A considerable source of economic regeneration in Zimbabwe might come from regional investors who are more confident about the conditions. The same is true of unlocking the potential of women

entrepreneurs and women's cooperatives in Zimbabwe, in a range of sectors. Smaller companies, small-scale farmers and the now large informal sector can act as drivers of growth and show tangible results relatively quickly: this is vital to ensuring medium-term satisfaction with the political process. Small businesses and trade associations can be active governance and anti-corruption watchdogs, adding to a plural scene. The Donor Enterprise Committee is one coordinating actor that can ensure that attention is given to rural livelihoods, SMEs and regionally-based smaller enterprises.

A particularly charged debate will be the extent to which privatization of some sort is needed for the large government parastatals that have been significant features of Zimbabwe's economy – plundered, patronized and mismanaged but nevertheless vital starting points in the delivery of essential services and market coordination.¹¹ In governance terms, any restructuring and selling-off is also one area of high corruption risk. Moreover, any international stimulus on parastatals needs to be done in a way that manifests public-private partnerships, and does not lead to political objections that the new era has led to Zimbabwe being sold out to foreign ownership – this would only strengthen hardliner elements and prevent longer-term recovery. The World Bank Group is in familiar territory, but the particular significance, influence and public image that these parastatals have in Zimbabwe, and the connection here to longer-term stability, goodwill and cooperation, cannot be underestimated.

Refitting a Ship that is already at Sea

As things now stand, the international community will not be dealing with a failed state scenario in Zimbabwe, nor is this (despite the stark economic and humanitarian indicators) a post-conflict situation. Thus at once the role of external actors is modified

¹¹ These include the Dairy, Cotton, and Grain Marketing Boards (DMB, CMB, GMB), the Cold Storage Commission, National Railways of Zimbabwe, the National Oil Company of Zimbabwe (NOCZIM), the Zimbabwe Electricity Supply Authority (ZESA), the Zimbabwe Iron and Steel Cooperative (ZISCO), the national water authority (ZINWA), the national telecommunications authority, and so on. In the longer term, major infrastructure projects revolving around energy security will make hot topics of the various hydroelectric and coal-based platforms including Kariba (shared with Zambia), Cabora Basa / Cahora Basa (Mozambique), Hwange, Munyati and Harare. This issue is one where thinking on a regional basis is vital.

and all external actors (including the UN agencies) ought to explicitly acknowledge this. Moreover, the idea of the rule of law and of Zimbabwe as a state, a coherent entity, is very much intact in the population. However discredited in recent times, there is arguably residual fidelity to these concepts and their crucible effect in enabling recovery. These rather abstract ideas are in fact vitally important: one invaluable intangible peacebuilding resource is a shared idea of the future and the nation-based parameters within which recovery and transformation takes place. No amount of external programs and interventions can build these common identities if they are otherwise lacking. In this sense, Zimbabwe has a head start over other fragile states in its longer term. Damage to institutions, and to the national reservoir of social trust and confidence in government, ought not to be overestimated in Zimbabwe. Levels of popular political awareness are higher than it sometimes appears. In some respects, the common hardships of ordinary people in Zimbabwe may have brought them together in an unintended way. Discussions, often by indirect means, of political issues in bread and petrol queues may have done more than any formal donor programme could dream of in terms of creating a politically-informed population and demand for good governance. This bottom-up resource requires supporting structures and spaces to have impact and expression.

Nevertheless, there is a role for international actors in encouraging and reminding Zimbabweans to develop a coherent plan and inclusive national narrative for 2015 and beyond, what World Bank practitioners refer to as a coherent ‘storyline’ for peacebuilding. This needs to be something do-able but challenging, and something public – to motivate, concentrate, and hold account against. However it will also be vital, including as the state apparatus becomes more confident, that as between themselves external actors reach consensus, insofar as is possible, on a common storyline.¹² This is subject to an obvious caveat: that it ought not – and will not – be the international community that ultimately writes the script for Zimbabwe. Outsiders merely help the cast

¹² Related to this point, and in the light of patterns of ‘career-making’ in other post-crisis countries, is consideration of whether in any re-engagement with Zimbabwe, the staff of donor and other agencies show a degree of humility and restraint in pushing ahead with initiatives best done in partnership, or not at all, or left to others with a comparative advantage.

agree on roles and prompt the players on their lines. If one takes the metaphor further, while governance conditions are vital, players on that stage who feel the pull of strings might react against and frustrate any perceived puppeteer.

The MDGs are important to this storyline – and their goalposts coincide with the medium term outlook now for Zimbabwe – but they are at a level of abstraction. The longer-term expectations, responsibilities and visions for peacebuilding in Zimbabwe need to be tied in, conceptually and practically, to current arrangements and debates. There is now rich experience that identifying and acting on early opportunities to entrench these standards is crucial. In relation to governance and transparency issues, for example, circuit-breaking moments are few and brief, and reform is generally much harder when done against the interests of bureaucracies that have entrenched themselves and which can seriously undermine reform even where executive-level political will exists.

Use of the language of ‘building’ (the state, or peace) can suggest a very intensive role for foreign actors. However, part of the point of this paper is that external policy-makers, guarantors and pressure-givers are likely to have – or should only seek – a supportive and advisory role: it is Zimbabweans who must (and wish to) rebuild their society. This does not mean that there are no opportunities for very precise, intrusive measures by international actors, in particular in ensuring compliance with governance indicators. It is perhaps entirely legitimate (and necessitated for capacity reasons) that in some respects Zimbabwe be placed on a form of probation. External actors must assist Zimbabwe to build on its strengths, remind Zimbabweans that they have achieved real results once before after an intensive civil conflict, and draw on officials’ memories and traditions of working within what was a relatively functioning state. Outsiders have a duty at the same time to build public confidence that the foreign support honeymoon will not simply pass, leaving the lethargic but predatory one-party state to one day rise again.

International Actors: a Balancing Act

At the heart of forecasting international actors' involvement in the medium to longer-term peacebuilding processes in Zimbabwe are certain balancing acts that will need to be maintained. My suggestion is that these may be generic to many international assistance scenarios, taking on particular characteristics in the Zimbabwe context.

First, already adverted to, will be the balance between necessary involvement and counter-productive intrusiveness. This is so for at least three reasons (even though an overall heavy foreign involvement has been absent and is unlikely):

- (a) The now familiar 'crowding out' problem for externally-assisted transitional arrangements and statebuilding: externally-sponsored and driven processes and institutions can easily become substitutes – not complements or precursors for – national capacity and responsibility. Foreign-backed initiatives and expertise can 'crowd out' existing or potential state or societal institutions. The paradox, then, is that while external assistance and attention is required, including in shoring up governance structures, exit points for those paying external attention to Zimbabwe's ills are more likely where Zimbabweans themselves manage to effectively control these processes. This balancing act will be crucial in the medium term.

- (b) In particular in relation to governance issues, more nuanced leverage sources and strategies will need to be developed in the Zimbabwe case. Donor conditionality has had limited effectiveness in bringing about policy reform, including because of the natural resistance one finds to an external agenda. International actors will need to enroll members of parliament, independent media and civil society in governance strategies that have a conditioning effect but which avoid an externally-facing Zimbabwe government unresponsive to local needs and priorities.

(c) One related policy 'red flag' is that the UN and international actors take care to lend enough profile to the process to ensure monitoring, confidence and signaling, but do not become so directly involved that they provide the Zimbabwe government with a convenient scapegoat for any delays and failures: national 'ownership' of the recovery process must very clearly mean national responsibility. There will be a challenge for international actors of settling upon a 'list' of medium to long term priorities, without merely prescribing these to the government. This is a trite comment in 21st Century international development circles, but carries particular weight in Zimbabwe: relative to other fragile or transitional states, much of the staple local political rhetoric from Harare since at least 1990 has revolved around neo-imperialist agenda-setting, unreasonable external demands and undermining of sovereignty.

One of the areas in which this issue will be particularly significant is governance and supervisory mechanisms. The role of international actors in enabling foreign commercial activity is also a matter where allegations of 'empire-building' are possible from various sections of Zimbabwe politics.¹³ External policy-makers need to consider carefully the public relations / educational aspects of their interventions in Zimbabwe, so as to ensure opportunities for a national consensus on priorities, and that responsibility is primarily with the Zimbabwean political authorities.¹⁴ Governance expectations and standards need to be of international quality but arrived at in consultation with the government, and as part of a national conversation on

¹³ In its vulnerable state it is of course true that there is a high risk of exploitative foreign commercial conduct.

¹⁴ It goes almost without saying that external actors have their own responsibilities here: one cannot intervene without in some sense interfering. Nevertheless, the main responsibility must be – and be clearly signaled to be – with Zimbabwe's leadership.

needs and priorities.¹⁵ This will increase ownership, accountability, compliance – and enable external actors to avoid being cast as scapegoats.

There is, I suggest, a clear Zimbabwe precedent here. In the 1990s, the Mugabe government was able to portray the IMF-sponsored Economic Structural Adjustment Program ('ESAP') as a complete externality, something with its own mysterious, immutable force. It became routine for government spokespersons – and taking the cue, for ordinary Zimbabweans – to simply blame 'ESAP' as the source of all manner of problems. 'ESAP' became a term of common or street parlance, and in many cases was taken as a complete answer, deflecting government responsibility.¹⁶ The risk in 2008-2015 is that the more international profile there is to peacebuilding efforts, the easier and more tempting – and perhaps more legitimate – it will be for any non-performing government to externalize the blame and avoid addressing issues. Zimbabweans are understandably somewhat wary of the litany of publicized multi-year plans that ZANU-PF was fond of announcing. However, there is a need for external players to ensure a credible, publicly-explicable program that can unite and encourage ordinary people, without raising expectations unreasonably, without being a mere catch-cry without any substance, and without enabling a 'Cry ESAP!' rhetorical escape channel to the government of Zimbabwe.

A second significant issue for donors and major lending partners will be balancing responsibility with responsiveness in addressing and sequencing priorities and service delivery. Zimbabwe's health service, education and agricultural extension systems are desperately in need of assistance. Like many structural undertakings, peacebuilding must balance responsive attributes such as speed, flexibility, and tangible delivery (on

¹⁵ A rights-based approach by external actors is one strategy, since the standards then invoked are those to which Zimbabwe has already committed itself to by ratifying various universal instruments: this changes matters from 'these are our demands' to 'these are the state's own commitments'.

¹⁶ The fact that the IMF's structural adjustment policies around the globe in the 1990s have been heavily criticised from a range of perspectives does not weaken the point being made here.

the one hand), with responsible attributes such as expense, sustainability, deep and enduring institutionalization of reform, inclusivity, and so on. Prompt improvement in service delivery in Zimbabwe will be vital to reassuring the population that peacebuilding is working, and to preventing popular abandonment of the state altogether. There will be a need for some early tangible high profile, high visibility, confidence-building projects and investments. While ensuring some 'quick wins' is vital, including for the credibility of external involvement, some effort ought to be made to tie these to longer-term plans. While building trust in external actors is important, quick impact initiatives can sometimes be motivated by agencies' quests for publicity, inter-agency rivalry or other reason, rather than forming part of a genuine plan for a local site.¹⁷

An overly enthusiastic foreign response can also create irresistible corruption and embezzlement opportunities, discrediting the new start. It is also now abundantly clear that there are limits to the absorbability of aid inflows, and it may even be that aid (at least in the financial assistance sense) can retard overall economic growth and recovery, and undermine state capacity. Striking the right balance between early results and less glamorous but essential reform and groundwork, then, is one that international actors can greatly influence in Zimbabwe in the next 3-7 years.

Third, a difficult issue in post-crisis statebuilding and external assistance is deciding how much energy to put into watching government rather than into helping government do its actual job. Given distrust of the Zimbabwe state, it is understandable that external actors might concentrate on the former. However, in doing so they ought to enroll and build the capacity of local state watchdogs, while not neglecting the other side of this balance.

A fourth balancing act, related to the second, will be the extent to which the coordinated international storyline focuses on enhancing national/central state capacity to deliver

¹⁷ New visitors to Zimbabwe will be struck by the (often cheerful) scepticism its people harbour even for very successful 'high visibility' donor projects. It ought not to be forgotten that one-off, ribbon-cutting managed events around public service delivery have been a key government publicity strategy in the past in Zimbabwe.

and to govern, or is instead spread across supporting the capacity of civil society, elected local rural and town council governments, independent media and non-state processes and institutions. One can support both levels, of course, but choices will need to be made. In the Zimbabwe context the considerations are that the state has historically been too strong, rather than too weak – this has not been a ‘shadow’ state – yet in recent years has not been willing or able to provide services or be responsive to citizens. An exclusively ‘output delivery’ oriented approach by outsider agencies, one depending on ‘direct execution’ through parallel systems, will arguably miss critical opportunities to create and embed careful transparency through any ‘new start’. Thus longer-term peacebuilding in Zimbabwe requires simultaneously pushing to narrow the scope of the state’s involvement in society, and bolstering its role in key service-delivery areas.¹⁸ External support is needed towards improving horizontality in government: one function of the political impasse has been a ‘verticalisation’ of all issues in Zimbabwe, even those which are entirely capable of resolution at a local city or rural council level. Instead, matters are referred or deferred upwards. Partly this has been a consequence of opposition strength at local government level, resulting in centralization (and inaction) on local issues such as water and sanitation maintenance and delivery.

Sub-state and civil society actors require support, and inclusivity and effectiveness are important values, but international actors will need to avoid too heavy a reliance on foreign and local NGOs. Their operations can delegitimize government; distort delivery and prevent capacity developing; deprive the civil service of the best young local talent; and external support to NGOs can create envy, apathy and resistance from state officials. Ideally, there will be a mix of some direct budget support to key ministries, an emphasis on technical capacity over aid (using Zimbabwean skills as far as possible), enhancement of parliament’s oversight role (strengthening its committee system rather than creating parallel consultative bodies), and civil society partnerships.

¹⁸ A related balance is that between the coordination and other service-delivery advantages of centralisation of government, and devolution of responsibility to provinces (and particularly to the city of Bulawayo) and to local government. While international actors can push a particular line, this more politicised issue is more likely to be governed by domestic dynamics, and is in some respects a constitutional issue to be resolved.

Fifth, international actors will need to tread carefully between supporting capacity building, and avoiding a discourse that revolves around 'capacity' and technical issues when the problem is rather a political one. Experienced Zimbabwean development experts will agree that international actors will in the coming years need to avoid a discourse centering too exclusively around 'capacity' – while there will be capacity issues, there is a danger that what is really lack of political will or bureaucratic intransigence is portrayed as being a more technocratic issues of lack of capacity. The local media has a vital role here.

Sixth, in the more immediate term, but setting the tone for these various balances and particularly affecting the UN agencies, will be the now-familiar political manipulation of humanitarian aid and subsistence farming assistance. While all signs are of improving cooperation on this matter, to the extent that any government may hold the rural population to ransom, the international community will need to balance between humanitarian imperatives and political ones. That is, if ZANU-PF has systematically used food as a political weapon, and remains a political force, to what extent and in what manner can or should external actors engage in the same sort of conditionality game-playing, in order to achieve what are partly political objectives?

Conclusion: between Engagement and Entanglement

Zimbabwe has sufficient ingredients of conflict-proneness, state paralysis and state atrophy to be considered alongside other case studies of recent international involvement in peacebuilding. Now that there is greater fluency with the issues involved in external interventions and support, 'Zimbabwe in 2015' can serve as a template of how well lessons have been absorbed and applied.

Part of the test of 'lessons learned' will be balancing international involvement with the benefits of locally-driven self-correction. Governance, anti-corruption and rule of law issues are a revealing area to consider the possibilities and limits of international oversight and encouragement. A combination of top-down and bottom-up governance strategies and systems reflects the wider need in Zimbabwe's longer term: a strong and capable-enough state to provide for the population, but equally strong-enough societal and local government structures that the state is not the totality of national life. International actors can, by nuanced intervention and non-intervention, assist in this process. That includes a supportive but not undemanding role in helping Zimbabweans in the medium term to agree upon, take responsibility for, and implement a vision and program of action for the country towards 2015. It is a role that can include strong mechanisms and emphasis on rule of law and governance issues. It can include underwriting the assurances and standards vital to local political cooperation and to economic and investor confidence.

Zimbabwe needs longer-term planning, built on partnerships that do not obscure explicit responsibilities of local actors, and supported by long-term, predictable assistance from international institutions and governments. While currently stop-gap material assistance and strong external political support is needed towards political solutions and non-repetition safeguards, in the longer term it is the agencies and actors that enable Zimbabweans to sustain and economically empower themselves, within stable good governance parameters, who will be the significant peacebuilders.

The 'Zimbabwe 2015' vision simply cannot happen without considerable international support, but international actors cannot – and should not – attempt to shoulder delivery on long-term policies and peacebuilding interventions: therein, as Shakespeare's apothecary said, the patient must minister to itself. International bodies are somewhat institutionally programmed (and their experts sometimes professionally interested) to seek significant roles in 'fixing' the new patient on the table. In the medium to long-term in Zimbabwe, external actors ought to have the grace to accept the things they should not attempt to manage (so as to avoid entanglement, empower Zimbabweans to rebuild themselves, and to avoid the scapegoating problem); the courage to stand firm and united where they can make a considerable difference (ignoring claims of paternalism on governance standards, for example); and the wisdom to know the difference.

Summary of Key Points and Recommendations

- Difficult issues arise in 2009 about the conditions on which external re-engagement in Zimbabwe ought to take place: recognizing and supporting some political compromise, but not rewarding misconduct and mendacity by simply extending full cooperation status. However, more policy debate is needed on longer term peacebuilding challenges in Zimbabwe, and the likely and ideal role of external actors;
- Efforts to map longer-term challenges can assist in assessing the trajectory and priority of problems and opportunities, ensuring short-term responses are tied to longer-term plans, enabling judgment on the best roles for a variety of external actors, and in conceiving of problems as reform possibilities;
- The UN's overall role in Zimbabwe will likely remain limited relative to bilateral donors and IFIs, and ought in any event to be based on comparative advantage in the specific country context; coordination and frank role-division between various international actors will be critical to early and longer-term peacebuilding success;
- Recent experience shows that successful state-building and peace-building are essentially locally-driven; while often now spoken of in the same breath, Zimbabwe is not quite in the same category as certain 'failed' states; for at least these reasons while external support can be crucial, it ought to be acknowledged that the role of external actors is limited from the outset;
- The state has been simultaneously too strong, and too weak or unwilling to meet the population's needs; outsiders ought to push to narrow the scope of the state's involvement in society, while bolstering its role in key service-delivery areas;

- In the decision by external agencies whether to privilege program delivery through 'direct' (non-government, off-budget channels), rather than through government departments, here the longer term imperative calls mainly for rehabilitating and reorienting the state, rather than undermining and by-passing it;
- In addition to political design interventions, foreign economic aid, assistance and private investment are vital. These require outsiders to insist on and support certain rule of law and governance safeguards; a degree of external oversight is not entirely inappropriate given the record of state abuse and neglect in Zimbabwe;
- There is a considerable law reform and rule of law challenge, given the legacy of erratic economic policy-making, interference and appropriation, to reassure foreign investors to commit to the longer term in Zimbabwe;
- Anti-corruption and transparency measures must be given priority by international actors, from the earliest opportunity. Large levels of external support risk strengthening existing patterns of patronage and nepotism, diverting resources and undermining transformation;
- Technical governance interventions stand little prospect of success without efforts to obtain political and bureaucratic buy-in and broad popular demand for transparency; efforts towards generating a culture of good governance, patterns of openness and legitimacy of oversight as the norm may be as significant as structural governance mechanisms; focus on capacity discourse by donors bears the a risk that lack of local political will is portrayed as a technical issue of lack of capacity;

- A combination of top-down and bottom-up governance strategies and systems speaks to the main longer-term challenge: a strong-enough state to provide for the population, but equally vibrant civic and local government structures. International actors can assist by selective intervention and non-intervention;
- There is a role for international actors in supporting Zimbabweans to develop and implement a coherent and inclusive national narrative for recovery and revival; outsiders need to lend enough profile to the process to ensure confidence and oversight, but not become so directly involved that they inhibit local capacity or allow a non-delivering government to blame outsiders for any delays and failures;
- Other delicate balances for external actors include between involvement and intrusiveness; some external oversight while avoiding an externally-facing Zimbabwe government unresponsive to local needs and priorities; balancing responsibility with responsiveness in addressing and sequencing priorities and service delivery; the right balance between early results and less glamorous groundwork; inclusivity and effectiveness while avoiding too heavy a reliance on NGOs;
- In 'imagining' Zimbabwe's longer-term revival there will be a rare opportunity for the World Bank, UN and others to enhance regional linkages, infrastructure and institutions, both economic and political.

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