

The Elders' Zimbabwe Initiative: Report on the Visit to Southern Africa, November 2008

Executive Summary

Zimbabwe was once one of Africa's leading economies. For two decades after independence it was a net exporter of agricultural products, its health and education systems were among the best on the continent and annual growth rates in the 1980s exceeded 4%. Today, half the population needs food aid, water supplies have broken down, cholera is spreading, public schools and hospitals are closing and macroeconomic mismanagement has brought the economy to a halt.

Three members of The Elders, Kofi Annan, Jimmy Carter and Graça Machel carried out an assessment of the humanitarian situation in Zimbabwe on 21-24 November 2008. Unable to travel into Zimbabwe itself, they held meetings over three days in South Africa. On the basis of those discussions, the Elders are strongly of the view that there is a major underreported humanitarian crisis in Zimbabwe – and that conditions are deteriorating at an alarming rate. As Graça Machel said: "We were expecting a gloomy situation, but the situation is far beyond what we could have imagined."

What also became clear is that Zimbabwe's knowledge base and infrastructure are recoverable; the crisis can be turned around with sound political leadership, economic reform and sufficient regional and international support. In practice this will be a challenge and requires considerable effort and persistence, particularly on the part of Zimbabwe's regional partners in SADC.

Food is the greatest and most immediate concern. Nearly four million people currently need food aid and the number will rise to 5.1 million – nearly half the population – by January. However this is also a multi-faceted crisis involving the collapse of the economy and breakdown of health, education, water and sanitation services. Hyperinflation, cash shortages and short-sighted macroeconomic policies have produced an absurdly distorted economy where monthly salaries are worthless, prices are written in quadrillions and the country can no longer feed itself.

Zimbabwe's people are the greatest victims of their government's mismanagement, but the entire region is paying the price. 3-4 million people have left, primarily for South Africa, Botswana, Mozambique and the UK, while erosion of water and health systems has provoked a potential trans-regional cholera epidemic.

Increased food and medical assistance is urgently needed to address immediate needs, but the crisis in Zimbabwe can never be properly addressed without a functioning government. The Elders urge all parties in Zimbabwe to implement the Global Political Agreement (GPA) of 15 September in good faith, and form a truly inclusive government. Failure to end the political impasse and to fully and fairly implement the power-sharing agreement will worsen the socio-economic situation and increase the flight of Zimbabweans into neighbouring countries.

While discussions about the formation of an inclusive government continue, the Elders urge the three parties to the GPA to make the humanitarian crisis their priority. The

parties – and ZANU PF in particular – should work transparently with the World Food Programme and others to more clearly define the food gap and ensure that the current US\$140 million shortfall in funding for food aid until the end of 2008 is fully resourced. Zimbabwe's authorities should also ensure that humanitarian agencies have unimpeded access throughout the country to assess needs and deliver humanitarian assistance.

It is in the interest of SADC countries, especially those closest to Zimbabwe, to press the parties to implement the GPA in good faith as soon as possible. SADC governments should also establish regional mechanisms to address the cross-border consequences of the humanitarian crisis as a matter of urgency. Closely coordinated efforts are needed to contain the fatal cholera outbreak from becoming a regional epidemic. Effective and humane policies should be put in place to deal with refugees – including suspension of deportations and provision of adequate support to those who have left Zimbabwe.

The international community should immediately increase emergency relief and humanitarian assistance. The Consolidated Appeal issued on 19 November calls for \$550 million to address emergency needs across all sectors in 2009. The Elders urge donors to pledge those funds as soon as possible.

Detailed recommendations to Zimbabwe's leaders, SADC leaders and donor countries appear at the end of this report.

Introduction and purpose of visit

“There has been a lot of focus on the political situation. In the process the needs of the people were forgotten. We came to focus on the people and make a judgement on what we can do.” (Kofi Annan)

Since they first came together as a group in 2007, The Elders have been following events in Zimbabwe with concern. Earlier this year, they spoke out against the political violence and human rights violations associated with the election periods and noted with alarm the decline in economic and humanitarian conditions. In recent weeks and months, the pace of decline has accelerated significantly, although world attention was largely focused on the political negotiations between Zimbabwe's political leaders.

In response to reports of the worsening humanitarian situation, three members of The Elders – former UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan, former US President Jimmy Carter and advocate for women's and children's rights Graça Machel – decided to travel to Zimbabwe to make a first-hand assessment of the situation on the ground and to remind political leaders of their responsibilities to their people. The Elders made it clear that they sought no role in the negotiations between Zimbabwe's political parties. Rather, the Elders intended to meet UN representatives, donors, ordinary Zimbabweans, aid groups and local organisations to evaluate what could be done to address the humanitarian crisis. They wrote to Zimbabwe's political leaders requesting meetings and to ensure that all parties were fully informed of their plans.

The Elders originally planned to travel to Zimbabwe on 22-23 November and Johannesburg on 24 November. However, on the eve of their departure, the Elders were informed by the SADC mediator, former South African President Thabo Mbeki that their visit would not be welcomed by the Zimbabwean authorities and that they would not be permitted entry into the country.

Instead of travelling to Harare, the Elders invited interlocutors to meet them in Johannesburg. In a quickly rearranged schedule, they met Zimbabwean political leaders, business leaders, civil society actors as well as aid workers, donor representatives and heads of UN agencies. They also met the Presidents of South Africa and Botswana and visited the Central Methodist Church in Johannesburg where some 2,000 Zimbabweans who have fled their country take shelter every night.¹

General situation

“The entire basic structure in education, healthcare, feeding people, social services and sanitation has broken down. These are all indications that the crisis in Zimbabwe is much greater, much worse than we ever could have imagined.”
(Jimmy Carter)

While the Elders were aware of the mounting humanitarian crisis in Zimbabwe prior to arriving in the region, even they had underestimated the scale, depth and urgency of the situation.

Millions are already dependent on food aid provided by the UN and other agencies and many households are cutting back on the number of meals eaten each day. To extend food stocks, the World Food Programme (WFP) has reduced rations to a daily allowance that provides less than 1,500 calories, well below the minimum needed for survival. Without immediate increases in food availability, malnutrition rates will inevitably increase sharply.

The crisis in Zimbabwe is, however, not only a food crisis; it is a deep-rooted and multi-faceted crisis across all public services and the economy. In recent weeks four major public hospitals have closed due to acute shortages of health staff, medication and running water, school attendance has crashed from 85 to just 20 per cent, few teachers are turning up for work, cholera has killed hundreds of people and there is a serious cash crisis. The ongoing impact of HIV/AIDS is destroying family life and leaving one in four children orphaned.

The Elders also learned that this crisis is not the result of natural disaster, conflict or economic sanctions. Rather, it is the result of years of macro-economic policy failures, made worse by corruption.

The insistence of the Zimbabwean government that it is being unfairly targeted by the international community, however, means that international humanitarian agencies are treated as part of the problem, not the solution. There is no acknowledgement by the authorities that the UN and other agencies are already keeping almost half the population alive. Humanitarian operations are hampered by the very limited opportunities to meet and work with ministers and other high-level government officials. Operational obstacles are also common. While humanitarian groups are now allowed to use US dollars to pay for the delivery of services in the country, it is not clear yet what bureaucratic strings might be attached to this change in the rules.

¹ For a full list of Elders' meetings in South Africa please see the Appendix.

The crisis in Zimbabwe now has serious regional implications due to mass emigration and, more recently, the outbreak of cholera in 9 out of 10 provinces. It is critical that all countries in the region cooperate urgently to address this health threat, and also acknowledge and address the refugee crisis that Zimbabwe has created.

While many long-standing factors have contributed to the present crisis in Zimbabwe, the key message from all of the Elders' discussions was that without a resolution to the current political impasse no real progress can be made in addressing the economic and humanitarian situation in the country.

Political impasse

“Unless the root cause of the political absence of a legitimate government is solved, the humanitarian situation will get worse and will implode or collapse altogether.” (Kgalema Motlanthe, President of South Africa and current chair of SADC, after meeting with the Elders)

The Elders made it clear that they had no intention of involving themselves in political negotiations to implement the GPA which was signed on 15 September. However it is obvious that the delay in implementing the GPA is making humanitarian matters worse.

The Elders were told repeatedly that the humanitarian crisis cannot be addressed effectively without a solution to the political impasse. In practice this means putting in place a legitimate government which institutes effective policies to address the underlying causes of the economic and humanitarian crisis, and willingly collaborates with donors and aid agencies.

The Elders are under no illusion that forming a truly inclusive government is an easy or straightforward task. Many of their interlocutors expressed doubts that President Mugabe will ever cede or share any real power with others, including within his own party – let alone with Morgan Tsvangirai and the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC).

Food security

“Either the [Zimbabwean] leadership doesn't have a clear picture of how deep the suffering is of their own people, or they don't care.” (Graça Machel)

The Elders heard from all sources that the most urgent issue to be addressed is the widespread food shortage throughout the country.

The post-harvest assessment carried out by the WFP and the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) in April 2008 estimated that 2 million people would need emergency food aid between July and September. By October that figure had almost doubled to 3.8 million and between January and March 2009 those in need will increase to 5.1 million, approximately half of the population.

Even these figures may be an underestimate as they were based on the assumption that the government would import food, as it has in the past. As this has not materialised, and food shortages are exacerbated by the economic and cash crisis, many more people are now believed to be in urgent need of food assistance. Desperation is driving people to take much greater risks in order to find enough to eat. The Elders were told of people

trading their livestock for maize, making them even more vulnerable once the grain is gone; of people eating seed meant for planting, some of which has been treated with pesticides; of people hunting wild fruits and birds to survive; and of desperate people eating anthrax-infected meat and falling seriously ill or dying as a result.

Health

Four major public hospitals in Zimbabwe were recently closed including Harare's main teaching hospital. Almost all patients are being turned away, including cholera victims. Pregnant women in need of medical assistance such as C-sections to give birth safely are also being sent away – an estimated 250-300 per month.

Hospitals have been shut down primarily due to the lack of medical supplies (essential drugs and medical equipment) and running water. Monthly wages barely cover the cost of transport or food for a few days, giving medical staff little incentive to come to work.

Zimbabwe is afflicted with one of the highest prevalence rates of HIV in the world at about 15%. Over 3,000 people die from AIDS-related illnesses every week. The food and health system collapse makes it increasingly difficult to distribute antiretroviral drugs and nutritional supplements that are essential for the survival of those with HIV. The AIDS crisis has left almost one in four children without one or both parents. Family breakdown is increasingly evident, with anecdotal evidence that the number of children leaving the country without their parents is increasing.

At the time of writing, 6,300 cases of cholera had been reported across the country, with a case fatality rate well above 1% which is the internationally recognised measure of a cholera emergency. The dry season cholera outbreak was caused by the breakdown of water and sanitation infrastructure and spread of raw sewage. The outbreak began before the start of seasonal rains and has increased since the rains began. Even the most prosperous parts of Harare have been without water for months. Clean or bottled water is expensive and out of reach for most Zimbabweans.

“The situation has just gone beyond a situation where we could say 'wait and see'. We are pleading to the leadership for the sake of the people to find a solution that would help them move forward.” (Jacob Zuma, President of the African National Congress, after meeting with the Elders)

Education

Zimbabwe once boasted one of the continent's best educated populations with literacy rates of over 90% and school attendance rates of over 85%. Today most primary and secondary schools are barely functioning, attendance rates are down to 20% and most university teaching in the country has been suspended. In effect, an entire school year has been lost.

There are several factors that explain the breakdown of the education system. First, teachers cannot afford to come to work: their salaries barely cover the cost of transport. Secondly, there are few resources with just one textbook on average per twenty students. Thirdly, schools are losing teachers to HIV/AIDS – around 20-30 teachers are believed to die every month. Fourth, teachers and academic staff, like thousands of others, are leaving the country to pursue work elsewhere. These factors have

contributed to the dramatic decline in pass-rates in high school examinations (O-levels) – from 70% in the 1980s to 13% in 2006.

Agriculture

Zimbabwe's once well developed farm sector meant that for the 20 years following independence it was a net exporter of agricultural products. The past decade has seen a collapse in agricultural production, falling dramatically in 2001 and unstable ever since. Economic and political pressures driving the question of land reform heightened in the late 1990s and the government took a more aggressive approach, encouraging land seizures that drove many of Zimbabwe's biggest producers off their land. Production collapsed for several reasons – the transfer of land to government supporters unable or uninterested in maintaining efficient operations, rigid central control and misguided pricing policies. This year Zimbabwe will not be able to feed itself and cannot afford to import enough to keep its people alive.

Some seed and fertilizer was made available this year to small farmers in communal areas by donors, but it only reached about 25% of the poorest rural smallholders. Even this had a limited impact. Hyperinflation gives little incentive to farmers to invest in the future and many people are so hungry that they have been eating the seeds that they received for planting. Even with the best growing conditions, the next harvest will be small and will not provide enough food for the country's consumption needs. Donors and government must start working together now to increase food imports and improve distribution – and also start planning for the next season's planting.

As well as short-term needs, the Elders discussed with various interlocutors the prospects of making progress on food security in the medium- to longer-term. The Elders heard of the distortions and disincentives to agricultural production being caused by the artificially low prices offered to farmers by the Grain Marketing Board. Major policy changes will be necessary to return to pre-2001 production levels.

Economic situation

"I think it's the established policy of the Mugabe government that there's no crisis in Zimbabwe and to blame imaginary sanctions. There are no economic sanctions against Zimbabwe." (Jimmy Carter)

In the 1980s Zimbabwe had an annual average GDP growth rate of 4.3%, an employment growth rate of 1.9%, inflation of around 12% and impressive levels of savings and economic investment. In the past decade, GDP and employment growth rates have gone backwards (-5.7% and -7.5% respectively), the official inflation rate is over 230 million per cent (although the real figure is widely believed to be many times more than that), the country is unable to service its debts and all economic sectors have experienced serious declines.

In effect, there is no economy to speak of in Zimbabwe. The country's economic decline and financial crisis is the result of gross and sustained policy failure, mismanagement and corruption. The government's persistent claims that the economic collapse is due to sanctions are not true. Some Western governments (Australia, Canada, European Union member states, New Zealand, Norway and the United States) have put in place targeted sanctions such as a visa ban and asset freeze on certain individuals from or closely

linked to ZANU PF, banned sales or export of arms to Zimbabwe and suspended development assistance programmes that would give direct support to the government.

Nor is Zimbabwe subject to 'sanctions' from the International Financial Institutions (IFIs) such as the IMF, the World Bank and the African Development Bank. Rather, Zimbabwe is unable to access finance from these institutions because the government has defaulted on its loans. National debt is estimated to be around US\$5bn, of which approximately US\$2bn is owed to the IFIs.

Responsibility for the collapse of the economy lies with the government. It is their policies that have driven hyperinflation, the devaluation of the currency, huge price distortions and disincentives to invest. Restrictive regulations and hyperinflation have led to cash shortages which the government has tried to address by setting daily limits on withdrawals at banks of Z\$500,000 per day, an amount that barely covers the cost of a loaf of bread. Payment for goods and services is increasingly being made with US dollars, South African Rand and fuel coupons, but these remain out of reach for most Zimbabweans.

Regional implications of the crisis in Zimbabwe

"SADC should be more assertive and make sure that the political agreement is implemented...for the sake of the people." (Graça Machel)

Zimbabwe's failing economy, the humanitarian disaster and political persecution have already driven an estimated 3-4 million people to leave the country. The SADC region has largely ignored the mass exodus of economic migrants and refused to recognise that a refugee crisis is underway. The failure to acknowledge and name the refugee crisis as such means that service provision to these people is difficult, and many of those who leave risk arrest and deportation. In recent months the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) has recorded an average of 10,500 Zimbabweans per month deported from South Africa and around 4,000 from Botswana. Because of the lack of services and their legally uncertain status, most of Zimbabwe's refugees seek shelter in the poorest parts of their host societies, adding to domestic tensions. Xenophobic attacks against foreigners are not uncommon in South African townships and the recent cholera outbreak has increased hostility.

The Elders urge SADC members to publicly and urgently acknowledge the gravity of the crisis in Zimbabwe and its impact on their own countries. Further deterioration in Zimbabwe will increase the flow of refugees, pose further economic costs on the region and damage the region's reputation. The Elders believe that it is in the interests of all SADC members that the crisis in Zimbabwe be addressed immediately.

Recommendations

To Zimbabwe's political leaders:

- Implement the Global Political Agreement immediately and in good faith and form a truly inclusive government;
- Show goodwill by collaborating immediately to address the country's humanitarian crisis. Failure to make progress in implementation of the GPA is prolonging the people's suffering.

To Zimbabwe's authorities:

- Work with the World Food Programme and others to more clearly define the food gap and request that the immediate US\$140 million shortfall in funding for food is fully resourced;
- Provide guarantees that humanitarian agencies will have unimpeded access throughout the country to assess needs and deliver vital humanitarian and food assistance;
- Join a regional coordination mechanism to address the cholera epidemic and prevent it spreading;
- Work with donors and countries in the region to ensure the provision of essential life saving medication and medical equipment, including antiretroviral drugs;
- With assistance from donors, take immediate steps to treat existing water sources, improve water and sanitation infrastructure, and ensure medical supplies and expertise are provided as a matter of great urgency to tackle the widespread outbreaks of cholera and other water-borne diseases;
- Work with donors to retain and encourage the return of doctors, nurses and other health staff by offering transport allowances, salary top-ups and food;
- Work with donors to explore innovative ways to get teachers back to school, through incentives such as transport allowances, salary top-ups and food;
- Review agricultural and pricing policies to increase farmers' incentives to produce;
- Together with international donor agencies, make a concerted effort to ensure that inputs such as seeds and fertilizer are available at affordable prices for the 2009-10 season.

To SADC leaders:

- Urgently develop a regional coordination mechanism to address and contain the fatal cholera epidemic in collaboration with Zimbabwean government authorities and WHO, with Zimbabwe's closest neighbours taking the lead;
- Engage directly and assertively with the political leaders of Zimbabwe to encourage the full implementation in good faith of the Global Political Agreement and the creation of a truly inclusive power-sharing government;
- Formally acknowledge that a refugee crisis exists and suspend deportations of Zimbabweans until there is full implementation of the GPA, conditions for safe return exist, the cholera epidemic is under control and the humanitarian situation in Zimbabwe is vastly improved;
- Provide adequate support and services to those who have left Zimbabwe, and offer those in an irregular situation a temporary legal status that would allow them to be documented, to work and to live with dignity;
- Carry out an official SADC mission to Zimbabwe to assess first-hand the humanitarian situation on the ground.

To donors:

- Immediately provide \$140 million to WFP to maintain its planned food assistance programme in coming months;

- Fund the Consolidated Appeal of \$550 million launched on 19 November by 35 humanitarian agencies operating in Zimbabwe to address urgent needs in all sectors in 2009;
- Consider offering special assistance to medical and teaching staff to return to work so that services can be resumed;
- Encourage WFP and FAO to explore a 'Home-Grown Help' initiative to provide seed and fertiliser to farmers for the 2009-10 growing season and potentially sell produce to WFP programmes;
- Provide sufficient funding for the implementation of a Zimbabwe-led comprehensive development programme as soon as a power-sharing government is in place and macro-economic policy changes are underway.

The Elders will continue to follow events in Zimbabwe closely and use their influence wherever and whenever they can to ensure that the crisis in Zimbabwe is widely acknowledged and addressed with urgency.

Appendix

The Elders met the following persons in South Africa on 21-24 November 2008:

Political leaders:

- Ian Khama, President of Botswana
- Thabo Mbeki, former President of South Africa and SADC-appointed mediator of negotiations on the Zimbabwean political agreement
- Kgalema Motlanthe, President of South Africa and current chair of SADC
- Arthur Mutambara, leader of the MDC – Mutambara faction
- Morgan Tsvangirai, Prime Minister designate of Zimbabwe and leader of the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) – Tsvangirai faction
- Jacob Zuma, President of the African National Congress

Representatives of UN agencies operating in Zimbabwe:

- Kelly David, Head of Office, OCHA Regional Office for Southern Africa
- Alberto Mendes, World Food Programme Country Representative a.i.
- Roeland Monasch, UNICEF Representative a.i.
- Marcelo Pisani, Head of Mission, International Organisation for Migration
- Agostinho Zacarias, UN Resident Coordinator/Humanitarian Coordinator

Diplomats and donor representatives based in Zimbabwe:

- Phil Evans, UK Department for International Development
- Gunnar Foreland, Ambassador of Norway
- Karen Freeman, United States Agency for International Development
- Xavier Marchal, Head of Delegation of the European Commission
- Barbara Richardson, Ambassador of Canada
- Josef Wetering, Ambassador of The Netherlands

Non-governmental actors:

- Zimbabwean civil society leaders representing humanitarian relief and agricultural support agencies, civil and political rights organisations, women's rights groups, HIV/AIDS support networks and trade unions
- Zimbabwean displaced persons living in the Central Methodist Church in Johannesburg
- Representatives of international NGOs providing food and humanitarian assistance in Zimbabwe including Care International, Save the Children UK and World Vision
- Zimbabwean businessmen

The Elders' media statement: "Zimbabwe is failing its people" (24 November 2008) is available online at: <http://theelders-news.blogspot.com/2008/11/elders-zimbabwe-is-failing-its-people.html>. Further information and press releases on The Elders' Zimbabwe Initiative as well as photos and video footage are available online at www.TheElders.org