

Jacquelyn Barney
English Valleys High School
North English, IA
Zimbabwe, Factor 17: Good Governance

Zimbabwe: Mugabe Must Either Change or Step Down From Office

Twenty years ago, Zimbabwe was considered the “breadbasket” of Africa. They were the ideal example of their time for becoming their own country after colonization. They had some of the best health and education systems in the region. Life expectancy was 61 years. A single US dollar was worth \$.657 in Zimbabwean dollars. The country had an abundance of natural resources. Platinum, gold, asbestos, coal, nickel, iron, copper, and lithium could be found, not to mention precious gems such as diamonds or emeralds. Its economy was largely based on agriculture, mining, and tourism.

This thriving nation was the “poster-child” of what a country should be when it ceases to be a colony. The government was leading its people to a bright future. Mugabe was making the right decisions and was a great leader. Now, this once thriving nation has fallen. Its people are ravaged by AIDS, huge portions of the population are malnourished, and its economy has plummeted. What could have possibly happened? It’s simple really. Mugabe is making wrong decisions and refuses to step down from office. He is mistrustful and is driving his nation to ruin. He either must change or step down from office.

A typical urban Zimbabwean family is comprised of a man and his parents, the wife or wives, and any children. The term wives is used because it is not unusual for a man to have multiple spouses. About 11% of all women in Zimbabwe will marry a married man. Many of these men are from rural areas and have families back there. Men are expected many times to leave the agricultural work to their wives and will move to the cities to find jobs. Food is relatively simple. A thick porridge with green vegetables or meat is a classic meal. Bread is a staple in urban life but many urban families may eat out at a restaurant. School is very important to families. A child will go to school for seven years and, if they pass examinations, they will move on to higher schooling and may even go to college. This is a great honor for the family and child. (everyculture.com)

Zimbabwe has been through a lot of ups and downs since its independence from Britain but it has always overcome and pushed through. Lately though, it has hit a down and has stayed there. There are two main causes for this: the 1990s land reform and HIV/AIDS.

When Zimbabwe became an independent country in 1980 after a long civil war, the Lancaster House Agreement was drawn up. This agreement meant that the white commercial farmers would be able to keep their land and could sell it as long as both the buyer and seller were agreeing. In other words, the government could not force them to sell or give up their land and neither could outside sources. This agreement went on intact for about a decade as Mugabe knew that if he broke it, the economy would collapse. In 1992, Mugabe issued the Land Acquisition Act. This allowed the government power to obtain land as long as they provided fair compensation to the previous owner but by the mid 1990’s, any government land reform was at a standstill. (american.edu)

By about 1993, war veterans in Zimbabwe were calling for compensation for their service. A War Victims Compensation Act was in act at the time but Zimbabwe African National Union – Patriotic Front, or ZANU-PF, had already depleted the funds which left the veterans unserved. In 1997, Mugabe complied to their requests and gave them money, free healthcare and education and land. By 2000, the Fast Track Land Reform was enacted. The first goal was to acquire about 3,000 farms for redistribution. By February 2001, more than 2,706 farms were additionally acquired and by October, more than 4,588 farms had been seized by the government. These farms covered about 8.8 million hectares, or about 21.7 million acres. War veterans and young brigades also seized the land they believed they were entitled to. If the owners and workers refused to leave, they were often beaten and/or killed. Many of the government officials did not have the skills or means to cultivate the land and since the workers were often forced off the land, many of those farms are no longer in production. This caused Zimbabwe's already precarious economy to collapse. About 1000 white commercial farmers have their land but only about half are still somewhat successful. This has caused rampant food shortages. (american.edu)

The government is not only making poor decisions about how its land should be distributed but it is also inhibiting its peoples' healthcare. AIDS is a huge problem in Zimbabwe. Although AIDS may be the reason that Zimbabwe has such a poor economy and lack of food security, AIDS can be fixed. It can be treated and managed. America had a huge problem with AIDS in the late 70s and early 80s but we pushed through it. We conquered it and made it manageable. Why could Zimbabwe not do this? Why have they suffered so? The answer is simple really. The Zimbabwean government is not allowing its citizens to fend for themselves and they are making it increasingly difficult for internal organizations, such as NGOs (Non-profit, non-government organizations), to provide the needed assistance for the needy.

For the past two decades, HIV/AIDS has cut down huge portions of the population. Children are left parentless, forced to fend for themselves. Parents lose children everyday thanks to Mother-to-Child AIDS. This is typically caused during the pregnancy, during childbirth, or during breastfeeding. Since one third of the population is married before eighteen and typically have a child by the end of the first year of marriage, it is no wonder 1 in 8 children die before age 5. (trust.org) The increase in AIDS infections is probably due to the fact men will have multiple wives and in many cases, multiple families. If the man has been infected with AIDS, then he will then spread it to his wives and then they will in turn spread it to any children they may have.

One fifth of the population has AIDS/HIV and about 565 people are infected every day. Many of these people will go untreated. There are about 1.7 hospital beds per thousand people. Nurses are sent out everyday to treat infected people but thousands still go untreated. (irinnews.com) This has affected the agricultural economy greatly. Many of the women left behind are too sick to tend the fields and many others are forced to care for their sick family members. (our-africa.org)

At first the government was slow to acknowledge the problem. In 1987, when AIDS first started to spread, the government established the first AIDS program (NACP) but it was more of a piece of paper than an actual organization. It wasn't until 1999 that the first AIDS policy was announced. This policy was enforced by the National AIDS Council (NAC), which eventually took over whatever was left of the NACP. A tax was placed on everyone to help fund this program but since many are below the poverty line or unemployed, taxes dwindled and the government struggled to find funds. (worldpulse.org)

Shortage of money has affected the health care system in so many ways. Lately, the Zimbabwean government has stopped the recruitment of nurses. Thankfully they still allow the training of all the

previously recruited. Sadly the nurse in training and the official nurses are not enough. Since hundreds are infected every day and many are unable to stay in the hospital, nurses must be sent out into the cities to treat the sick. Unfortunately, many of the sick will go untreated. (irinnews.org)

Many of the sick cannot reach a hospital or they can't afford to make the trip. Rural women and children have an especially hard time gaining medical help. As income is very low for rural women, often they cannot afford to buy the lifesaving drugs. They also may have to travel long distances to reach a medical facility. Even when centers are fairly close, shortages of health workers have caused long waiting lists and administration problems. Many now have no access to health care centers. Due to the land reform in the late 1990's, as many as 79,500 adults are now in a position where they have no access to healthcare. This displacement has also caused disruption in home treatment services. Many of the people cannot be located and many others are now homeless. (worldpulse)

Those who can easily reach the hospitals often cannot afford to pay the fees. Costs of the treatment drugs have nearly quadrupled in the past three months. This is most likely due to the poor economy. The hospitals and pharmacies need more money to buy the drugs and in response jack up the prices. The increasing costs have led to a number of problems, such as the selling of fake drugs in flea markets. Many Zimbabweans have been forced to pay bribes or to perform services to acquire medicine. Lack of public accountability and health workers' low salaries have been to blame for this. Since so many are below the poverty line, they may feel that it is necessary to force patients to pay a little extra for the medicine in order to be able to provide for their families and maybe even to get the medicine easier for themselves. (avert.org)

Sadly, the Zimbabwean government is inhibiting many treatment possibilities. Government officials have been known to intercept drugs on the way to health care centers. They will then use these drugs on themselves. This has been causing some drug shortages. (avert.org)

Lately though, many non-profit, non-government organizations (NGOs) have stepped up to help the sick and needy. Unfortunately, the president of Zimbabwe, President Mugabe, has banned these organizations in the past and is threatening to ban them again. His reasoning? "They are really a type of government in the background of a formal government. I don't know whether this creature is for better or for worse, but in our country we have seen a situation where they have exceeded their terms of reference, and perhaps we must reconsider the advisability of having NGOs." (irinnews.org) How have NGOs exceeded their terms of reference? According to Mugabe, "They are posing as shadow governments that threaten the viability of the inclusive government" (Mugabe warns) In fact, this suspicion has gotten so bad that he has resorted to spying on "rogue" NGOs or NGOs that are more on the outskirts of the larger NGOs. (newzimbabwe.com)

Millions of Zimbabweans depend on NGOs for food, medication, and education. Approximately 29 NGOs are located in Zimbabwe, each ranging from alleviating food security to helping the disabled. Many NGO workers have been harassed, detained, and even arrested even when NGOs are not banned. (irinnews.org)

Now of course, the government is doing quite a bit of good. While they may not be supportive of local NGOs, they do work with outsiders, like PMTCT (Prevention of Mother-to-Child Transmission). With the help of the National AIDS Council, the Zimbabwean government has set up a plan to help prevent infections and to get treatment to those who can reach it. They are issuing acts such as National AIDS Council Act, Income Tax Act, Zimbabwe National HIV and AIDS Strategic Plan. The government is also helping spread the message and is organizing groups to hand out condoms and other contraceptives. Already HIV incidence in adults has reduced 50% and from 30% to 5% for children. Mortality has been reduced to 30%. Counseling and ART (Antiretroviral Therapy) is being distributed and Voluntary

Medical Male Circumcision (VMMC) is already helping with preventing the spreading of HIV. (unaids.org) Many other outside programs are helping, especially in the case of low governmental funds. From 2003 to now, Zimbabwe has received more than 707 million dollars from the Global Fund to Fight AIDS. Zimbabwe has also received 435 million from the Health Transition Fund (HTF). HTF has helped pay for nearly 98% of the currently available drugs while the remaining 2% is paid by the tax levy managed by the NAC.

Many other organizations are also coming together to prevent the spread of AIDS and to extend the reaches of the health care centers. The J.F Kapnek Trust is already playing a role in AIDS prevention. They are teaching professionals at hospitals about AIDS testing, counseling, and how to properly administer drugs to prevent Mother-to-Child AIDS. They have helped over 200,000 expectant mothers with this program in just the past year. They have also helped fund a Medical Scholarship Program. This allows young adults to finish their high school and college education. Kapnek Trust has already helped 37 doctors graduate. (jfkapnektrust.org)

The Elizabeth Glaser Pediatric AIDS Foundation (EGPAF) has been helping since 2001. They currently support 1,453 sites out of 1,560, accounting for nearly 93% of coverage. They work on expanding health centers and their reach. EGPAF also will help train new doctors and nurses and are even trying to get the government to pass new AIDS policies. (peaids.org)

President Mugabe needs to allow local NGOs their right to help the AIDS victims. These programs could make all the difference in the battle against AIDS and they could also help the economy. They provide jobs, access to healthcare, and are even helping the farming industry by planting communal farms. They should be allowed to use the land taken in the land reform. This would allow more food to be produced and that land wouldn't be wasted. The government is inhibiting any possible progress by constantly banning NGOs and harassing their workers.

Many organizations are calling for a change in leadership such as the the Movement for Democratic Change for Zimbabwe (MMCZ), the leader of which is actually Mugabe's former Prime Minister, Morgan Tsvangirai. This organization has been around since 1999 and tried to unseat President Mugabe in 2013. (britannica.com) MMCZ is actually one of the reasons Mugabe is so wary to trust NGOs for he is comparing the two. He is worried that many NGOs are working with MDCZ to kick him out of office. That is why he has been spying on many rogue organizations and allowing the harassment of workers. (irinnews.org)

Mugabe must step down from office. He was once a great and wise leader but he has led his country to ruin. What Zimbabwe needs is a new set of eyes on the situation and to help those who cannot help themselves. A new set of eyes will allow the government to move forward in controlling AIDS and allowing NGOs to do their job. They would see that they are not a threat as Mugabe says but see that they are trying to help with the limited resources they have. The government should provide them with whatever they may need. These two powers should work together in organizing transportation for those who cannot reach the hospitals themselves. They should have a M.A.S.H type hospital that travels to rural families and towns. Healthcare workers should be held responsible for abusing their power and forcing civilians to pay extra. They could make use of the land that sits unused and allow the workers back to cultivate it. America had an issue with AIDS once but because we *worked together*, we were able to overcome this obstacle and push forwards. Zimbabwe needs change. Change can only happen when we work together.

Zimbabwe was once the breadbasket of Southern Africa.

Let us bring it back to its former glory.

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