

JOS MARTENS

ZIMBABWE:

WHAT IF THERE HAD BEEN NO VOTE RIGGING?

Since the first preliminary results of Zimbabwe's 31 July 2013 harmonised elections emerged, most talk has been about whether or not the elections were free, fair and credible, with the main bone of contention being the rigging of the voters roll¹. Little has been said about the voting behaviour of the Zimbabweans per se, why - apart from the rigging - still so many voted for ZANU-PF and 89 year old Robert Mugabe, who has been President since 1980.

A few days after the elections I spoke to an in-law who is a committed communal farmer in Eastern Zimbabwe. Like so many others she carries a ZANU membership card although she is an MDC supporter. She was equally surprised about ZANU's landslide victory, as were the other people in her village: "So many of us said, we want change, we want change", she wondered, referring to "Chinja Maitiro", MDC's (Movement for Democratic Change) rallying cry. When asked why people were still supporting MDC, she answered: "People really hate Mugabe. We all know that Morgan Tsvangirai (the Prime Minister since 2009) is friends with the Americans and they can help us. Mugabe is with the Chinese and these people are very cruel; they also did not re-open the companies that were closed. We also want the British to come back, not as rulers, but they do work hard. Many people who got plots of land are not working it, what can you do if you only have a hoe? They could assist there. Maybe they can open businesses again; we want our children to get employment. In the olden days life was hard but it was cheaper too. I was not afraid to vote the way I wanted. You are alone in the ballot box so why should I be afraid? "

Of course, one person is not representative of the whole population. For example, this in-law lives in a village where there wasn't much violence during the 2008 elections. Rainfall in the area is generally good and farmers use artificial fertiliser and commercial seed whenever they can get it. Many also receive remittances from their children working abroad, mostly in South Africa but also in Britain.

But even this short conversation shows that people's voting behaviour is largely directed by one main concern, their wish to improve their lives: more income, lower prices, employment, support services, safety...

WHY DID MDC LOSE POPULARITY?

Nobody expected this monstrous victory for Mugabe-ZANU-PF, but virtually everyone I spoke to in the past year expressed their doubts whether Tsvangirai would make it in the upcoming elections. Their feelings were that MDC had made too many blunders in the past 5 years, while ZANU-PF and Mugabe had been working tirelessly and cunningly to regain lost ground.

The 2008 elections had been a massive protest vote against the total economic collapse under ZANU-PF rule, so much so that it could not even be suppressed by the massive violence unleashed by the ruling party. Mugabe ended up with his back against the wall and only survived by grasping the straw of the GNU (Government of National Unity). However, only 4 years later in 2012, the Washington-based Freedom House, not a friend of ZANU-PF, published the results of a survey showing that among "survey participants who agreed to state their political choice, trust in MDC-T, in particular, dropped from 66% to 39%, while trust in ZANU PF rose from 36% to 52%"².

Which factors contributed towards this turnabout? What were the main events that common Zimbabweans have seen unfolding over the past 5 years and that changed the minds of so many?

MDC LEGISLATORS ENRICH THEMSELVES ...

Once they tasted the comfort of parliamentary seats and its emoluments, many MDC politicians quickly forgot by whom and why they had been elected and, instead of making a serious effort to change things, they occupied themselves with enjoying their turn to eat the cake. While a 2012 United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) report stated that "65% of Zimbabwe's current MPs require intensive

¹ Mugabe won the presidential election with 61%, while ZANU trounced MDC in the parliamentary race with 76% of the 210 seats.

² See <http://www.freedomhouse.org/article/zimbabwe-opinion-survey-reveals-hope-elections-cynicism-about-political-leaders> for the Freedom House press statement and a link to the report of the survey.

training in legislation and budget analysis as they are not skilled and competent to perform their tasks”, the MPs turned out to be very capable of looking after their own interests. Among other conditions, they each demanded and received a US\$ 1.400 base monthly salary, a write-off of their US\$ 30.000 car loans and a once-off US\$ 15.000 sitting allowance bonus. In May 2012 MPs demanded residential stands at subsidised prices in “respectable suburbs”, thereby literally revealing how much they had distanced themselves from their constituencies. A major bone of contention in the 2013 parliamentary discussions about the new constitution was the height of the daily allowances MPs were to receive during the consultation process. Of course, in these matters ZANU MPs behaved similarly, but hadn’t the MDC promised to do away with such practices?

... WHEREAS THE ELECTORATE REELS UNDER AUSTERITY MEASURES...

After initial relief with the introduction of the US-dollar in June 2009 that stopped Zimbabwe’s hyperinflation³ overnight, the economy failed to recover and grow as quickly as expected by many people⁴, leaving little room for improvement. While MDC Minister of Finance, Tendai Biti, had little success in claiming the proceeds of the Chiadzwa diamonds⁵, he did receive US\$ 1 billion in humanitarian aid and in 2009, US\$500 million in Special Drawing Rights from the IMF. In response, he, among others, cut the government budget in half and abolished price controls. In February 2009 the Ministry of Finance started paying civil servant “salaries” in vouchers good for \$100 U.S. dollars, regardless of seniority. As this was still extremely low, teachers threatened to strike at the beginning of the school term in May 2009. In July 2009, the Finance Ministry announced a 20% increase in the public service wage bill, some of which was used to introduce some progression into the salary structure, from \$150 to \$250 per month. But in both 2010 and 2012 Biti froze civil servants’ salaries, while he capitulated to salary increases in other years though only under pressure of threatened or actual strikes. This contrasted sharply with his fulfilling the excessive wishes of the MPs. Tsvangirai did not always concur and sometimes even clashed with Biti, but in the eyes of the public it was “his” MDC Minister who was responsible for the continuous clash with the workers. Mugabe took advantage of the discord by – inconsequentially - supporting calls for salary increases. By 2013 the majority of civil servants earned a salary of between US\$250 and US\$300 while, according to the Consumer Council of Zimbabwe, a family of six needed about US\$570 to lead a normal life. Unemployment also remained staggeringly high, as in 2011 only 31 per cent of the economically active men were in paid employment and only 14 per cent of the women⁶. The informal sector, which had grown explosively during the collapse of Zimbabwe’s economy, remained the only alternative for millions of Zimbabweans. While many barely managed to survive (think for example of sellers of air time), others like cross-border traders, owners of small shops, small entrepreneurs in agro-processing and craftsmen sometimes fared better. Meanwhile Operation Murambatsvina, unleashed by Mugabe in 2005, had destroyed the livelihoods of many urban informal workers and had forced many to seek refuge in communal agriculture⁷.

Small-scale farmers had also scant reason to be happy with the MDC. The parastatal Grain Marketing Board, headed by ZANU stalwart Joseph Made, failed year upon year to pay farmers in time for their maize, blaming this on the late release of funds by the MDC Minister of Finance. Moreover, floor prices for maize, set by the Ministry of Finance-funded GMB, were generally considered unviable. As a consequence, farmers were forced to bypass the GMB and market their grain to commercial traders who paid cash but offered lower prices⁸. This subsequently cost them qualification for the GMB input provision programme.

³ Wikipedia gives a clear table showing Zimbabwe’s inflation from 1980 till November 2008:
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hyperinflation_in_Zimbabwe

⁴ As at 31 October 2009, Zimbabwe’s total debt including arrears stood at US\$5,4 billion according to Finance Minister Tendai Biti in the Zimbabwe Independent of 3 December 2009. Estimates of Zimbabwe’s GDP at the time are highly contested and can vary from US\$2 to around US\$ 10 billion. Estimates of GDP growth are therefore also unreliable but seem to fluctuate over the years between 4 and 10%. Of course this is growth starting from rock bottom.

⁵ See for example http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Marange_diamond_fields

⁶ ZimStat, Women and Men in Zimbabwe 2012 Report

⁷ Exact figures are difficult to come by. Combining several sources yields the following estimates: Zimbabwe’s total economic active labour force in 2010 approx. 6.600.000 (World Bank 2012) of which formally employed between 600.000 and 1.000.000. If 3.3 million people are, formally and informally, employed in agriculture (LO/FTF Council, Labour Market Profile 2012), about 2.5-3 million people have to find refuge in the non-agricultural informal sector. Zimbabwe’s Trade Union membership hovers around 165,000 (LO/FTF Council, Labour Market Profile 2012) while the membership of the Zimbabwe Chamber of Informal Economy Associations (ZCIEA) is around 440,000.

⁸ Deliveries to the GMB dwindled from 249,792 tonnes of maize in 2010/11, to 212 622 tonnes in 2011/12 and 81 190 tonnes in 2012/13.

In the meantime Mugabe started his own parallel Presidential Agricultural Input Scheme. In 2011 the Communal, Resettlement and Small Scale Farmers Union, ZFU, issued a statement saying that 560,000 households had benefited from the presidential programme, surpassing the government scheme. "We have made our own assessments and we have realised that only a few households benefited from the GMB Scheme and the President's programme was put to good use and any good harvests are likely to be attributed to his timely intervention," thus Paul Zakariah, ZFU's executive director. Of course we should not discount the fact that the ZFU can be considered a ZANU-PF mouthpiece, but still...

.. AND MDC-RULED MUNICIPALITIES TURN DYSFUNCTIONAL DUE TO CORRUPTION AND INCOMPETENCE

Whilst MDC was quickly losing credibility with workers and small-scale farmers, it also managed to alienate many of its urban supporters in towns like Harare, Chitungwiza, Bindura and others where it scored massive victories in the 2008 elections and had taken over control of local councils.

In March 2009 Transparency International Zimbabwe called for an urgent forensic audit into rampant corruption by the senior staff of the Harare Municipality. Although some half-hearted attempts were made to address the problem (e.g. in June 2009 the Harare City Council adopted a report that probed illegal cattle sales and farming operations on its farms) the new councillors proved unable to contain their officials as, in particular, corruption in allocation of stands festered. Only in November 2012, after a directive by Local Government (ZANU-PF) Minister Chombo, was an internal probe mounted to address these matters. Service delivery of water and sanitation that had turned abysmal under ZANU-PF already (remember the cholera outbreaks of 2008-2009), continued to deteriorate resulting in a typhoid outbreak in Harare in January 2012. At the same time, residents received unrealistically high bills for services that often had not been rendered and were even threatened with eviction, resulting in demonstrations and, in November 2012, a petition to the mayor and the minister to write off debts incurred by residents⁹. Other MDC-dominated urban councils like Chitungwiza and Bindura were equally riddled with cases of graft and non-delivery of services.

In 2013 the Combined Harare Ratepayers Association demanded from MDC that candidates for upcoming elections be selected by virtue of competence and not having been involved in corruption. Although MDC heeded such calls, e.g. Tsvangirai fired the entire Chitungwiza Council and 12 others involved in corruption and also started screening prospective candidates before the MDC primaries, the damage had been done.

IN CONTRAST, ZANU EMBARKS ON A POPULIST-NATIONALIST, CHARM OFFENSIVE...

Of course, ZANU-PF politicians at all levels had not transformed into saints overnight, on the contrary. But, whereas MDC remained plagued by internal power struggles, ZANU became more and more united and focused ("bhora mughedi"). ZANU also surpassed MDC in keeping its deeds under the radar, assisted by its continued absolute dominance over the media¹⁰. This enabled it to promote its nationalist agenda and widely report real or perceived gains to the masses.

Not only had ZANU managed to keep a tight grip on the media and security forces, it also controlled the country's natural resources within the agriculture and mining sectors through the GNU-allocated Ministry of Lands and Rural Resettlement, the Ministry of Agriculture and the Ministry of Mining.

MINING

The Chiadzwa diamond scandal damaged ZANU's and Mugabe's image, but considering the enormous (illegal) proceeds from the diamonds and the localised nature of the conflict, it was probably worth it. In sharp contrast to its actions in Chiadzwa, the ZANU-PF-led Ministry of Mines, after initially clamping down on illegal mining in 2008 (Operation Chikorokoza Chapera/Isitsheketsa Sesiphelile), set out to legalise and support artisanal mining throughout the country. This apparently earned the party considerable goodwill amongst small-scale miners as the (ZANU-leaning?) Zimbabwe Artisanal and Small-Scale Mining Council (ZASMC), representing 25,000 registered small-scale miners (out of a potential 1.5 million), described ZANU's victory as a welcome development in the country's economic revival efforts.

⁹ Barely a week before the 2013 elections, Minister Chombo directed local authorities to scrap all outstanding rates as per 30 June 2013 in what many viewed as an attempt at urban vote buying by Zanu PF.

¹⁰ The Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act (AIPPA, 2002) which requires all operating media and journalists to apply for registration with the information ministry, which is controlled by ZANU-PF, was never repealed; neither was the Public Order and Security Act (POSA) of 2002 which sets narrow limits on public assembly. Any gathering which involves more than two persons is considered a public meeting requiring authorisation by state organs.

The formal mining sector in the meantime grew rapidly, from less than 3,000 workers at the height of Zimbabwe's economic crisis to some 43,000 in 2013¹¹, thereby providing much sought-after employment opportunities.

Then, in January 2010, the ZANU-PF Minister of Youth Development, Indigenisation and Empowerment, Saviour Kasukuwere, stepped up the indigenisation drive by publishing regulations requiring companies operating in Zimbabwe to provide specified information, including an indigenisation implementation plan, by April 15, 2010. After a prolonged battle, in January 2013 Impala Platinum (Implats), the world's second biggest producer of platinum, complied with government's demands and ceded 51% of its shares to black Zimbabweans. According to the Indigenisation and Economic Empowerment Act of 2007 "Community Share Ownership Schemes or Trusts shall be established by businesses involved in the commercial exploitation of natural resources, including minerals..", whereas "10% shareholding in qualifying businesses shall be reserved for the Community Share Ownership Schemes or Trusts". The same Act allocated another 28% of the shares to an Employee Share Ownership Scheme, of which a maximum of 5% points had been set aside for managerial staff.

Although in practice the black elite will possibly once again get most of the bootee, the setting aside of shares for employees and communities must have raised the hopes of many a worker and rural dweller to at least get some of the pickings. In contrast, MDC-T former chief of staff in the office of the Prime Minister Morgan Tsvangirai, Mr Crispin Mbanga, stated unequivocally during the election campaign in July 2013, that if elected into power the MDC-T would remove policies such as indigenisation¹².

THE FAST TRACK LAND REFORM PROGRAMME

The land redistribution exercise that had been delayed for the first 20 years after Independence showed similar nationalist and black empowerment trends. While many aspects of the Fast Track Land Reform Programme (the violence, the ZANU-connected elite getting the juiciest spoils, etc.), have been rightfully though one-sidedly criticised, the latest figures show that not only had the elite benefitted but also around 200,000 communal farmers had been resettled on new land. Even though so far little support has been given to the resettled farmers, one can imagine that these farmers would not be happy having to return their more fertile land to the former owners. In 2011 the Zimbabwe Tobacco Association registered 67,000 tobacco growers, who were resettled on former white-owned farmland. According to FAO-data the acreage under tobacco almost doubled, from 52,000 in 2003 to more than 100,000 immediately after the introduction of the US-dollar in 2009. In other words, life for these settlers has improved considerably.

In 2001/02 there were an estimated 250,000 to 300,000 smallholder cotton growers in Zimbabwe, mostly located in the North-West and Northern areas of Gokwe, Sanyati and Muzarabani. Small-scale cotton production increased steadily from the eighties, throughout the liberalisation period of the nineties and even under the Fast Track Land Reform Programme with all its associated problems. Although cotton farmers face a host of problems, not least being depressed prices, still many resettled farmers will have set their eyes on improving their lives through cotton earnings. Not surprisingly then that the Zimbabwe Farmers Union (ZFU), claiming to represent 1 million communal, resettlement and small-scale farmers, and the Zimbabwe Commercial Farmers Union (ZCFU) representing mostly black large-scale commercial farmers, endorsed ZANU's victory in early August stating that it would ensure the continuity and maintenance of people-driven programmes and policies.

Although in 2006 MDC had formally stated that it did not want to reverse land reform¹³, it generally failed to convince Zimbabwe's small-scale farmers otherwise and Tsvangirai had to placate his rural audience in this respect time and again even during his 2013 election campaign.

Of course, MDC's performance was not all that dreadful; some commendable work was done, in particular by the Ministry of Health (headed by MDC-T Minister Henry Madzorera) and the Ministry of Education (led by David Coltart of the split-off MDC-M). In the final account, however, ZANU appears to have been the true master in claiming credit for the (little) progress made under the Government of National Unity while laying the blame on MDC for the continuing hardships.

¹¹ Edward Mubvumba, National Employment Council for the Mining Industry in an interview with IRIN News on 11 April 2013

¹² Bulawayo 24; 11 July 2013; <http://bulawayo24.com/index-id-news-sc-national-byo-32924.html>

¹³ Towards a Comprehensive Transparent and Equitable Agrarian and Land Reform Programme for Zimbabwe; the MDC' Standpoint and Proposed Way Forward, February 2006: "As previously stated the MDC does not in any way advocate for the return to the pre 2000 land ownership patterns, neither will it condone the inequalities and land aberrant distribution arising from ZANU PF fast track land process and the "Third Chimurenga." The MDC is now geared towards bringing the Zimbabwe land crisis to closure, through an all-inclusive, participatory and professional process. The new process seeks to achieve equitable, transparent, just and efficient land distribution. In addition the process will address the overall structural problems in the agriculture sector originating from the colonial and ZANU PF's political and economic policies."

WHAT WOULD YOU HAVE VOTED?

Returning to the overarching question, it remains to be seen whether MDC would have won the 2013 elections if no rigging had taken place. What would you have voted if you had been that communal dweller who had received a fertile piece of land; if your small mine claim had just been registered; if you were a jobless ex-farm worker; if your small business was gradually getting off the ground (whom would you credit?); if you had lost your livelihood under Murambatsvina in 2008; if you had just received U\$1,500 dollars at the tobacco auction; if you had been struggling with corrupt MDC council officials about a plot for your house; if you had a job in a mine and were hoping to get a share of it; if ...?

But even when you had no positive reason to vote for ZANU, you might still do so, fearing another wave of violence against MDC-voters, as happened in 2005 and 2008.

Many MDC-supporters must have been wondering too whether it had been worth all the pain and sorrow to support an MDC that after 5 years still had so few results to offer apart from many of its politicians being perceived to only be feathering their own nests. In that light, it remains an open question whether MDC would truly have won if there had been no vote rigging.

TO MAKE DOUBLE SURE

Post-election discussions have so far focused predominantly on this year's voter registration, the rigging and the late release of the voters roll. However, already immediately after the 2008 election disaster ZANU started to make double sure that this would never, ever happen again. The first stage was the reorganisation of the constituencies.

Towards the end of 2009 MDC and ZANU clashed over the delimitation process, in which the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission demarcated new boundaries for the various constituencies to increase their number from 120 to 210. MDC alleged that they had been short-changed as traditional MDC strongholds in the cities gained only 28 extra constituencies while 62 had been taken up by the 3 rural Mashonaland provinces - the core of ZANU power. In addition MDC cried foul over the registration of 800,000 new voters, allegedly mostly the elderly, while youngsters were told that their chance to register would come later. But in July 2013 the UK Telegraph reported that only a quarter of the youth aged between 18 and 25 - who are expected to more likely support Tsvangirai - were understood to have been registered.

Add to this the continued exclusion of maybe more than 2 million voters (almost a quarter of the electorate!) living outside Zimbabwe and the open threats from army and police bigwigs that they would never accept Tsvangirai as president and it becomes clear that the stage for the elections had been set much earlier. Clearly, by 2013 MDC had been doing too little too late to try to balance the scales.

ZANU can only be blamed that they had overdone matters in their eagerness to "never, ever let this happen again", as such a colossal victory is simply unbelievable.

It is quite astonishing that the MDC leadership, when it became increasingly clear that - on top of all the machinations mentioned above - an uninspected (and probably rigged) voters roll was going to be used, still unanimously decided to go ahead and remain in the race. Only two weeks before the elections Tsvangirai was quoted in the UK Telegraph as saying: "Although there is relative peace, the administration of the vote is so chaotic I can only foresee disaster."

QUO VADIS ZIMBABWE?

The imminent danger is that because of the overwhelming victory, arrogance and revenge will gain the upper hand within ZANU and it might decide to deal with the opposition "once and for all". After all, Mugabe has shown time and again that he neither forgives nor forgets. Though it would make sense to try to "reward" SADC and the AU for their support and even appease the UK and USA by making a gesture of peace and offer MDC a junior position in another government of national unity, chances are slim that ZANU will do so. Most likely MDC will be relegated to the opposition benches.

Common Zimbabweans unfortunately have jumped from the frying pan into the fire. They might have "elected" to denounce exploitation by an MDC elite mainly driven by self-interest and foreign influence, but instead will be further manipulated by a vengeful and unscrupulous ZANU-dictatorship that, under the guise of nationalist and pseudo progressive rhetoric, will continue enriching itself and its cronies.

Zimbabweans are therefore in for the long haul in their pursuit of freedom and prosperity for the masses. Two main questions immediately emerge here, one of content and one of strategy: What should a future Zimbabwe look like and how and with whom can such a vision be pursued?

On both matters, many ideas and opinions exist.

Some can of course be found in the election manifestos of the various political parties that contested the elections. NGO's, from human rights organisations to the industry, will undoubtedly also have been conferencing about "after the elections" scenarios. One of the most detailed economic development options has been formulated in recent years under auspices of the ZCTU and laid down in an extensive document "Beyond the Enclave"¹⁴. After having been translated into an abridged and simplified version, it is being popularised in a nationwide campaign from union branches, NGO's and churches to the media, relevant Ministries and Parliamentary Portfolio Committees. More radical views also exist, for example those held by ZANU-PF's, although as shown above, one should question how genuine their rhetoric is. There are also "true" radicals like international socialist and former MDC-MP, Munyaradzi Gwisai, who is very explicit about what he wants (political democracy, nationalisation and international socialism) and sees no salvation in striving to achieve this with either ZANU-PF or MDC¹⁵.

Clearly, ZANU-PF has once more gained the upper hand, not to say absolute control and a lot of soul-searching will have to be done by individuals, political parties, unions, churches, social movements and other civic society organisations to analyse and admit their shortcomings and learn from them. A first step might be for small groups or pockets of genuinely concerned, likeminded people to come together in frank conversation to explore a way forward based on thorough analysis of events over the past years and the role each played. Such people do not necessarily have to be from within the same party or grouping; they could collaborate across borders, from within or outside the various political parties, or from society at large. The next step could be that some of these pockets reach out to each other, agree on basic principles and combine forces in a probing search towards a common goal.

It will however take a long time for a broad movement to be built from below by radical yet truly genuine ordinary people, activists, community leaders and aspiring party politicians who, with common vision and shared strategy, could mount a fourth Chimurenga¹⁶.

Johannesburg, 14 August 2013
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¹⁴ See: www.ledriz.co.zw

¹⁵ <http://www.newzimbabwe.com/opinion-11969-Elections+rural+poor+vote+against+austerity/opinion.aspx>
Munyaradzi Gwisai, 07 August 2013; *"Mugabe landslide: Rural poor vote against neo-liberal austerity":*
"The (only) way forward for working people is to break from MDC and lay now the foundations for a new working people's movement to continue the struggle against the regime. A movement that does not replicate MDC's right-wing ideological bankruptcy but positions itself left of Zanu PF on an anti-capitalist, democratic and internationalist basis. Such a movement has to be slowly and organically built from the struggles of the poor, anchored around the newly radicalizing trade unions and social movements. It cannot be built or decreed from boardrooms. One that will not only fight for political democracy, but also for the full expropriation of mines, banks, big businesses and big farms now under new black exploiters and place these under democratic control of workers and rural farmers for the benefit of all, as part of a regional and international struggle to smash capitalism and build socialism.".....

¹⁶ Chimurenga is ChiShona for revolutionary struggle. The First Chimurenga refers to the Ndebele and Shona insurrections against the British South Africa Company during the late 1890s. The Second Chimurenga was the war for Independence from the white Rhodesian government during the 1960s and 1970s. The Fast Track Land Reform Programme is sometimes referred to as the Third Chimurenga.