



## **Zimbabwe: Future Scenarios**

### **Background**

With the recent development of the SADC initiative on Zimbabwe, and the enforced nomination of Robert Mugabe as the ZanuPF candidate for "harmonised" elections in 2008, the political problem in Zimbabwe has significantly altered. It is also significant that some dialogue has taken place between factions of ZanuPF and the MDC, apparently brokered by the South African government. These "talks" suggest that some discussion has taken place, within ZanuPF and between ZanuPF and the MDC, on ways to resolve the "succession" problem in ZanuPF. Details of these discussions are not available, but some sources suggest that they have explored at least the possibility of the "soft landing" through a return to the 1980 configuration of a non-executive presidency and the return to having a prime minister. Here it is assumed that Mugabe would be given the presidency in this form in order to provide a modicum of immunity.

As regards the first, all available information indicates that the SADC initiative is serious, and, although the initial reports suggest a focus upon elections only, it must also be assumed that there is, within SADC, some thought being given to approaches aiming at getting Robert Mugabe to relinquish power altogether. Thus, it is probable that the SADC facilitation has broad objectives, even though these may not be publicly expressed, outside of the concern with legitimate elections.

As regards the second, the elections themselves, Robert Mugabe's forcing of ZanuPF's endorsement of his candidacy, and the proposed harmonisation of elections, indicate his strong determination to remain in power under the current constitution, and to remain in control of the succession problem. It is probable that this is now strongly predicated on his distrust of his own party, and the likelihood that no-one succeeding him will have much motivation in protecting him. Thus, it is critical for Mugabe that he remains in power, and can either dictate or strongly influence the processes following elections, with the undoubted idea that maintaining political power, even in a deteriorating economy, is more desirable than leaving his fate in the hands of others. It can be concluded that this will lead, and is already leading, to a state within a state, with repression outside the existing security forces in the main.

In opposition to Mugabe, and dealing with a possibly "weak" intervention by SADC, is a disrupted opposition, both with the political parties and civil society. On analysis, it is clear that the divisions within the MDC, and also within civil society, are not based on strong ideological differences generally: all accept the need for reform, including a new constitution, and all require an election playing field that is genuinely unbiased and fair to all parties. All are unanimous in the need for the removal of draconian legislation, adherence to the rule of law, non-violence, a free press and media, and the existence of wholly independent Chapter 9 institutions in their Zimbabwean incarnation, and especially the Electoral Commission.

However, the central weakness of the opposition is its failure to build strong alliances based on principled positions. Furthermore, there is a failure to "lateralize" struggle through the building of strong community structures that are inclusive of political parties, civics and NGOs, and a concentration on "vertical" structures concentrating on the national questions rather than the local issues. This produces all manner of confusions at the local level, where people may have

multiple allegiances that operate incompatibly; for example, most activists are both members of the MDC as well as the NCA, and probably a number of other groups. Thus, mobilization is highly complex, and can be disastrous when there are conflicting messages from different groups; for example, MDC supporting a stay away and NCA not.

Against this local background, there remains the united opposition in the West and the multi-lateral financial institutions – IMF and World Bank – to Mugabe’s continuance in power. This is both in reaction to Mugabe himself and the inevitable problems that stem from the powers inherent in the office of the Zimbabwean Presidency. Presidential powers in Zimbabwe are near-dictatorial, and allow any president over-weening influence over all areas of governance, and this can have catastrophic effects on policies, as has been evident under Mugabe in the past 10 years. Thus, it can be presumed that the opposition to Mugabe by the West, and now SADC, is based partly in a desire to remove Mugabe’s pernicious influence, as well as the perception that future stability and development will require a reform agenda. Certainly, this seems indicated in the conditions expressed by the Western governments and the IMF/World Bank for substantial re-engagement. Here there is information that a rescue package has been agreed by these forces, conditional on certain indicators being present, and that the terms of this package are well-known to all parties.

The situation thus has considerable risks, but creates a whole raft of new opportunities. These risks and opportunities can be described through a number of different scenarios.

### **Scenario 1 – the status quo**

Here it is assumed that Mugabe continues with his tried and tested strategies, and it should be noted that Mugabe is a highly conservative strategist, which has been borne out over the past 7 years in his approach to elections. There is a concerted effort to disrupt the opposition through violence and intimidation, and increasingly the political control of food; a massive campaign on the international front that ties in all parties to protracted talks and meetings, against the vague promise of reform; total control of the electoral apparatus; and then a short period prior to elections when violence ceases and there is apparent open space. The exact mix varies according to the problem: in 2002, violence and total control of the election machinery, but, in 2005, minor reforms, with the use of political intimidation and partisan food distribution.<sup>1</sup>

As indicated above, he ties the party’s future to his own, and there is general agreement within ZanuPF that the maintenance of political power is preferable to any other consequences, even the continued deterioration of the economy. With political control there is at least the possibility of negotiating their way out of trouble. This is a highly probable scenario.

A period of repression of all opposition groups continues for several months, focusing primarily on local leadership, and resulting in the disorganization of the political parties and key civics, such as the NCA. During this period, Mugabe will engage in multiple-platform diplomacy over the terms and conditions for elections, pushing hard for local control as a “sovereign” state. The strategy will move from frank repression as in the 2000 and 2002 elections into the strategy seen in the 2005 election, where violence is replaced by wide scale intimidation, with control of food once again a key factor. All key election bodies will remain under his control, with minimal adherence to the SADC Principles.

The selection of candidates, and the new composition of the Parliament and Senate, will allow Mugabe to purge the party of all malcontents, and it can be expected that existing party leaders

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<sup>1</sup> For an analysis of election strategies, see Reeler, A.P., & Chitsike, K.C (2005), *Trick or Treat? The effects of the pre-election climate on the poll in the 2005 Zimbabwe Parliamentary Elections*. June 2005. PRETORIA: IDASA.

will come under extreme duress. There will be no acceptance of postal votes, and the constituency model will prevail since it allows him the greatest possibility for manipulation and intimidation.

Minimal modifications to the playing field will be allowed, but these will be tempered by claims that high security is necessary due to the "violent opposition". Pressure on the MDC will aim at trying to force MDC into pushing early for a boycott, and leaving the MDC seen as the spoilers as was the case in 2005.

There will be no non-African observers, using the imperialist argument, and the election will thus result in no acceptance from the West, but will leave African countries in the invidious position of having to endorse the elections, and continue the attempts at a negotiated settlement of some kind.

Mugabe will retain political power, and will hence force all discussions on the future of Zimbabwe to include him directly.

***Possible responses:***

The key to dealing with this scenario is to ensure the best possible supply of good information to the SADC team, and to delay a boycott until the last possible moment, ideally immediately before the election takes place. Participation should be measured against the SADC Principles, and boycott being predicated on these being clearly violated.

The key to the boycott will be the unanimity of all opposition forces in Zimbabwe, both political parties and civics. Hence the grounds for accepting an election need to be clearly specified in advance, and good evidence provided for all the indicators. This will take a strong agreement between the MDC and the civics, and there need to be strong efforts in the next three months to broker this agreement. The overall aim is to prevent any endorsement of the election by African countries, and efforts must be made to bring in other groupings such as the Commonwealth well ahead of the elections.

**Scenario 2 – internationally supervised elections**

It is possible that the SADC initiative could result in acceptance of internationally supervised elections, although Mugabe will resist this very strongly, as will a large section of ZanuPF. The danger for Mugabe and ZanuPF here is that such an election could see them losing both the presidency and the parliament, and leaving them open to investigation and prosecutions. Hence a key feature of this scenario is to ensure that ZanuPF [the party] can see a future separate from Mugabe, and there is no likelihood of being wholly eclipsed by MDC.

In this scenario, it is probable that the MDC will win the Presidency, but the Parliament may be split, or even have a ZanuPF majority. However, given the powers of the Presidency, this can leave ZanuPF in a very vulnerable position, and, at the least, produce paralysis in government. Hence, it will be critical that the groundwork for the post-election period is very carefully laid before the election.

There are a number of ways that this can be achieved.

Firstly, the SADC team may be able to persuade factions of ZanuPF to strike a deal with the MDC in which the MDC agree to abolish the office of the Presidency through a return to the 1980 configuration. Then, the ruling party – either ZanuPF or the MDC – undertake a period of reform, with immediate constitutional reform. These will be difficult negotiations, and it may be crucial to the success of these negotiations that the issue of the presidency is resolved. Here there are two options: abolition of the office or the return to a non-executive presidency appointed by the ruling party in Parliament. This would allow a stick and carrot approach for Mugabe ahead on any

election: accept a non-executive presidency and a degree of immunity, or face total loss of power and vulnerability. This is a possibility given the dissatisfaction with Mugabe within ZanuPF, but will require very delicate negotiations in a very difficult situation.

A second approach could be produced by the SADC team. If Mugabe remains obdurate over electoral reform, and no support can be found within ZanuPF for an agreement as above, the SADC team could call foul, using the boycott called by the civics and accepted by the MDC, and withdraw claiming bad faith on the part of Mugabe. Here SADC and the AU refuse to recognise the elections ahead of the poll, and insist that no conditions exist for an acceptable election under the SADC Principle. The matter can then be taken to the AU for a broader based intervention. This would be unlikely in the current climate.

Whilst this may result in the removal of Mugabe, it is not clear that the reform agenda – new constitution, transitional justice, etc – will easily follow. Any agreement will require enormous trust between ZanuPF and the MDC, and all reform steps will have to be negotiated sequentially. A most probable result will be the forcing of a GNU by SADC and AU, and the locking of the two parties into a situation in which only gradual reform is possible.

***Possible responses:***

A key need here is a strong coalition between the MDC and the civics, with careful timing of responses along the way. The MDC will have to be seen as willing negotiators for SADC, and, whilst they will need to state the reform position – new constitution, new elections, etc – they will need to show willingness to move away from this position towards an acceptance of elections. The negotiations will be complex and place great strain on the MDC: talks will become the only game in town, and this can easily interfere with the MDC's mobilising for elections.

In order to prevent a weakening of the MDC, there will be a need for a very strong and united civil society, capable of presenting stronger demands than the MDC, but always tempering these demands with an understanding of the immediate position of the MDC at the negotiating table. Although this united front has rarely been achieved by MDC and civil society, it is not improbable that it can be achieved if the civics that possess large membership take a strong lead. A basic position for the civics has already been stated by the ZLP, and this should be strongly endorsed by the civics:

- National stakeholders conference to determine the parameters for an interim administration;
- Passing of legislation by Parliament for an interim administration;
- Election of an interim administration;
- Constitutional reform;
- New elections.

This should be the rallying position for the civics for the coming 4 months, but these should be relaxed in favour of demands for an internationally supervised election just ahead of CHOGM. Civics should demand a Commonwealth-supervised election in preference to SADC in order to apply pressure on SADC. It will also be critical to insist that the Zimbabweans in the diaspora are able to participate in the election, and here there must be a serious push for proportional representation in order to facilitate their participation.

Failing any form of international supervision, the civics should then call on the MDC to boycott the elections. The rationale behind this strategy is to allow the MDC to negotiate without being seen as "spoilers", to provide the MDC with a reference group to consult whenever negotiations become difficult, and to create a situation where the MDC are seen as having mass support.

Assuming some space is created through the intervention of the SADC team, then the civics must use this to mobilise and create mass actions in support of their publicly stated demands. This does not require a single unifying organization, merely co-ordination between the many platforms acting to their own mandates. A key feature here must be the apparent absence of a single co-ordinating group for all groups apart from the MDC: make it easy for the MDC to consult, but very difficult for the SADC team and the Zimbabwe government to find a small leadership to consult.

The civics would need to remain united after an election to maintain pressure for the reform process, and hence there will need to be continued mass action and pressure applied on the government, whether MDC or GNU: this latter is probable and will be strongly pushed by the SADC platform.

### **Scenario 3 – Military coup**

This is highly improbable, but it is at least possible now that the military will act against Mugabe, either by applying pressure for him to comply with negotiations, but possibly even to facilitate his assassination.

A more likely variant here is the “bloodless” coup, with the military providing support for the removal of Mugabe, as in scenario 2 above. A key to facilitating this is to apply different pressures on the police and the army, and here the human rights groups can play an important role. The evidence to date suggests that it will be possible to apply enormous pressure on the police as the major agents of repression, with the targeting of senior management by report, civil suits, and possible prosecution in a neighbouring jurisdiction. Here there must be attempts to place the army in the position of the guardians of the transitional process, and key figures such as Mujuru and Zvinvashe must be discreetly lobbied to apply their influence against Mugabe. The best avenue for such pressure will be through SADC, and the liberation movements in the region.

### **Scenario 4 – interim government and reform**

This is possible and an outcome of either the “bloodless” coup or internationally supervised elections. In the first scenario, this can occur prior to elections – if this can be achieved – but is more likely to occur after an election. In either event, careful negotiating will need to take place in order to create an agreement between the parties: SADC will be in a position to do this if it is of a mind to.

In either of these scenarios, the political parties are persuaded to implement an interim administration, and to undertake a process of internal reform within their parties ahead of an election. Both parties would have some representation within an interim administration, which will provide some security for both.

For ZanuPF, this may be very attractive, as it will allow the party to remove all the obvious Mugabe acolytes, but this can be made immeasurably difficult if there is too strong a push for transitional justice at this point. ZanuPF will need to feel that it has a reasonable chance of winning elections after reform in order for it to accept this option.

This is already a position within the civics and needs to be strongly pushed in the next few months. The strongest stress needs to be placed on creating a level playing field for all political parties, and hence the concentration of the civics must be on the reform process and the constitution.

### **Scenario 5 – civil uprising, interim government and reform**

A final scenario may arise out of the creation of civic space by either the facilitation of international elections or the interim administration scenarios. Given the lack of cohesion amongst the civics, as well as possible interference by MDC, this is an unlikely scenario.

There are a number of ways in which this scenario could arise.

Firstly, if there is sufficient space created by the SADC team, the civics could undertake mobilisation on a massive scale, providing they are clear about their objectives. Here the reform agenda initially proposed by ZLP can be crucial, and provide the base for civics and mass organizations to reject anything short of reform, and, through gigantic mass action, pressure the political parties into accepting the reform agenda. However, given the time scale, the levels of trust, co-ordination and mobilization needed are unlikely to emerge, and, certainly in the context of internationally supervised elections, this will not happen.

Secondly, this can emerge as a post-election process, but only in the context of a non-boycotted election. This requires an "Orange" revolution approach, in which mass action emerges out of a parallel count approach. This too will be very difficult to do in the context of internationally supervised elections, but here it will depend on the type of supervision and which body supervises the election. In a "weakly" supervised election – with much of the election process in the hands of ZanuPF – this may be possible, but this will require massive organization and will need to begin almost immediately. It is unlikely that the civics could be united enough to undertake this action, and certainly not if all matters related to elections are left in the hands of ZESN. It will also require a level of co-operation between the civics and the MDC that has not been present to date.

Assuming that co-ordination can be achieved between the opposition forces, that a parallel tabulation mechanism can be set in place, that sufficient mobilization can ensure that tens of thousands of citizens can be put on the streets to protest the outcome of the election, and that the security forces remain inert during this process, then the reform agenda is pushed – as in the ZLP demands in scenario 2 above.

Whilst not impossible, this is a very unlikely scenario.

### **Required action**

In all of the scenarios above, there are a number of common steps that must take place irrespective of the outcomes that may occur.

- The setting in place of mechanisms to provide accurate information to the SADC team and the international community. Human rights groups need fast production of reports dealing with violations, as well as pushing hard on the transitional justice issue. This is in place, but needs to operate with greater efficiency and haste. Additionally, a reporting mechanism dealing with the indicators for a free and fair election needs to be put in place, and this can be easily done by repeating the election monitoring process put in place under the NCA in 2005.
- Strong efforts must be undertaken to ensure that the civics adopt a common platform but not a common mechanism. Here it seems sensible that the reform agenda proposed by ZLP be adopted, and then pushed by all civic groupings. Civics must make harder demands than the MDC in order to give the MDC negotiating space.
- Strong efforts must be undertaken to ensure that Zimbabwean groups in the diaspora develop powerful advocacy around exclusion, and endorse the common platform developed by internal civic groups. Good linkages must be developed

- between internal and external groups in order to provide complementary actions and advocacy.
- Development of a comprehensive electoral strategy, including steps need to provide a parallel tabulation system, etc.
  - A small, discreet co-ordinating committee needs to put in place in order to co-ordinate all actions. This needs to be composed of representative of key organizations, and capable of negotiating with all the major opposition players.
  - A method of providing reliable and non-partisan information and advice to the SADC team, through Mbeki, needs to be established in order to create the kind of trust necessary to producing support for either the reform agenda or the internationally supervised election.
  - Strong efforts must be made to widen the area of concern over Zimbabwe, and here the Commonwealth needs to become engaged at all levels.