

## **Unemployment and Implications to Social and Political Conflict: Perspectives from Zimbabwe.**

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**Abstract:** *Unemployment of a large proportion of Zimbabwe's urban youth, particularly those with secondary level education and above, is a major social and political challenge. Within the last three decades, Zimbabwean youth have been involved as the main force behind social unrest and violent insurgencies in the country on several occasions. Dissatisfaction and frustration of youth, especially educated urban youth, is therefore regarded as one of the major threats to social and political stability. Consequently, the state has launched a number of programmes and planning strategies to meet the needs of young people, mainly through the rapid promotion of productive employment opportunities for unemployed urban youth. As this paper argues, multiple factors play into young people's perceptions and anxieties around accessing jobs, their abilities to do so, and implications for social and political conflict. This paper presents challenges Zimbabwean youth face in this regard and their implications to social and political conflict. The paper discusses answers to questions such as: What is the socio-economic, cultural and political context within which youth unemployment is linked to conflict in Zimbabwe? What are the characteristics of youth-focused policies and interventions? What lessons can be drawn for policy and practice elsewhere in southern Africa?*

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### **I. Introduction**

There has been a recent gradual shift from discussions about children as the 'victims' of violence to 'youth' as a threat to security and stability. In particular, there have been multiple assertions that a surging youth population or 'youth bulge' combined with unemployment, urbanization and other factors can lead to violence and most recent analyses of conflict identify some form of youth factor in the generation or perpetuation of violence. The focus of this chapter is to present the challenges Zimbabwean youth face in this regard and their implications to social and political conflict. It is concerned with youth opinions regarding the causes of youth frustration and unrest, causes of unemployment, who and what youth regard as responsible for the problems they face, their aspirations, attitudes regarding social and political conflict in urban centres of Zimbabwe, youth participation in politics, and their experiences and opinions of youth-focused development interventions.

Outbreaks of violent conflicts are rarely one-off events, but usually result from longer-term structural processes of social and political disintegration whether at a national or local level. Neither do violent conflicts, especially the protracted conflicts of recent years, typically occur in a linear cycle. Although levels of violence vary in intensity and there are usually recognisable phases of escalation and de-escalation, violence can be ongoing at a low-level for long periods of time. Indeed, several authors (e.g. Richards, 2008) argue that it is increasingly difficult to distinguish between situations of war and peace, with many countries in limbo situations of unstable peace or suffering ongoing localised violence. With regard to Zimbabwe one is left with the following unanswered questions: What is the socio-economic, cultural and political context within which youth unemployment is linked to conflict in Zimbabwe? What are the characteristics of youth-focused policies and interventions? What are the implications of youth grievances for social and political conflict in Zimbabwe? What lessons can be drawn for policy and practice elsewhere in southern Africa?

Unemployment has social as well as economic consequences for young people. Unemployed young people are forced to find alternatives to generate income, including activities in the survival-type informal sector and, in extreme cases, criminal activity. Urban youth unemployment is further exacerbated by rural-urban migration. Rural migrants believe that more jobs and social opportunities are available in urban areas, but once in the cities they find themselves without a job and with limited social networks. Trapped and discouraged by bleak job prospects, some turn to the sex, criminality and drug industries to survive.

### **II. Employment situation in Zimbabwe**

Absence of employment opportunity, whether formal or informal, is one dimension that characterizes urban youth unemployment in Zimbabwe. The on-going political impasse in Zimbabwe is affecting both the performance of industries and the preparedness of youths to equip themselves for employment. As cited by Melville and Mesevenzi (2008) the International Labour Organisation (ILO) noted that in 2002, '71.4% of the unemployed in Zimbabwe were constituted by youths aged 15 to 24 years old'. The United Nations Office of

The Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs cited by Zhangazha (2012) noted that '480 000 people were formally employed in Zimbabwe in 2008 out of a population of about 12million.' This shows an upward trend of unemployment levels in the country. Recent studies have revealed an upsurge in this figure by almost 10 per cent.

Youth unemployment is a global phenomenon. Worldwide, youth are 43.7% of the total unemployed people (ILO, 2010). In sub-Saharan Africa, about 60% of the unemployed are youth (ILO, 2010). The situation is no different for Zimbabwe with the Zimbabwe Poverty Assessment study (1995) revealing that the youth have the highest unemployment rate among all the age groups in the labour force in Zimbabwe. More recent figures indicate that out of the country's 12 million people, only 480,000 were formally employed in 2008, down from 3.6 million in 2003 (The United Nations Office of the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs [UNOCHA], 2008). Formal sector unemployment stood at 94 percent of which 67.7 percent constituted the youth ([www.mydec.gov.zw](http://www.mydec.gov.zw)). The rate of youth unemployment with regard to both formal and informal sectors of the Zimbabwe economy stood at 19 percent for females, 11 percent for males (Chakanya, 2008). It was during the decade of long political and economic crisis that plagued Zimbabwe since 2000 that youth unemployment peaked. The unstable economic environment during this period led to the proliferation of the informal sector and parallel (black) market which absorbed most young people as agents and dealers. With the signing of the Global Political Agreement, the economy stabilized and these activities came to a sudden halt, worsening the situation of the youth. Against this backdrop, the Government of National Unity took reducing unemployment to be one of the key areas of action.

In Zimbabwe's urban areas, most of the youths are underemployed since the labor market is not offering competitive opportunities. Youths who are graduating from various colleges far outnumber the employment opportunities available on the market. According to ILO (2009:13)'unemployment among youths is further worsened by the fact that the formal economy only absorbs 20 000 to 30 000 from the 200 000 to 300 000 school leavers per year'. Faced with the prospect of abject poverty, many youths are ready to take any job even if they are over qualified for it. On this score, Zhangazha (2012) noted that 'due to lack of jobs graduates for instance in accounting have found themselves driving taxis and working at fast food outlets, something they never imagined while still at university'. Some graduates are opting for self help projects such as cross border trading and exchanging foreign currency at the parallel market. As such, there is no relationship between level of education and the nature of employment. Besides the fact that the formal sector is drastically declining, the government of Zimbabwe has frozen recruitment of new employees into the public sector. This has adversely affected the capacity of the country to absorb jobseekers. Therefore the argument is: With all the resources in the country how can the government freeze posts rather than exploring ways of creating employment. Such short cited policies can only find space in a country where the policymakers are locked in unnecessary squabbles that will only drag the nation into the doldrums of abject poverty.

### **III. The effects of urban youth unemployment in Zimbabwe.**

One obvious result of increased and uncontrolled urban youth unemployment is a blurred future for the nation. According to the Reserve Bank of Zimbabwe (RBZ) (2005), the high unemployment rate will lead to an increase in crime rate especially in urban areas. In Zimbabwean urban areas such as Harare, Bulawayo, Mutare and Chitungwiza, a measurable number of youths has been involved in petty thievery as they lack meaningful forms of livelihood. The RBZ further noted that the incidents of white-collar crime including fraud have been on the rise due to lack of employment opportunities among the youths and the middle-aged population in Zimbabwe. This view is supported by Curtain (2004:5) who noted that creating employment opportunities for young people improves national security by lowering the chances of young people engaging in violent criminal activity. Young people are both disproportionately responsible for violent crime and are also more likely than other age groups to be victims of such crimes.

The behavior of some young males in particular may be a major source of urban insecurity.

It is worth noting that there is a relationship between the increase in number of youth living in poverty and incidents of political violence. Curtain (op cit) noted that, 'the English Revolution of the seventeenth century, the French Revolution of the eighteenth century and most twentieth century upheaval in developing countries have occurred when exceptionally large bulges in the population were present'. Hamauswa and Manyeruke (2012:40) concur with this view noting that it was inequality and joblessness that sparked the revolutions in North Africa and the Middle East that came to be known as the 'Arab spring'. The two authors cited Distant (2011:1) who correctly observed that protests in Tunisia started with a college educated street vendor (Mohamed Bouziz) who had grievances with the national government. Therefore an increased risk of political violence is often associated with an expanding population of higher educated youth who are facing limited opportunities to obtain elite political and economic positions. The current level of unemployment among Zimbabwean youths is likely to increase the gap between the rich and the poor. It is also a historical fact that most revolutions arise from inequalities where the masses are claiming equality denied them or a minority is

claiming superiority denied them (Lovetoknow. corp, 2002). It is therefore worth noting that Zimbabwe as a nation is facing a serious challenge that if not addressed will cause instability and political turmoil. However the only lasting solution to this predicament lies in politics. Those who wield political power need to put their house in order to enable efficiency in policy formulation and implementation at all levels.

Social disintegration or fragmentation is also directly linked to high levels of unemployment among urban youth. Breaking up of marriages no doubt occurred and abated with trends in employment and poverty levels. Another effect is the emigration of young people to other countries in search of greener pastures. The economic hardship experienced over the past decade has seen the largest flight of skilled work force ever witnessed in post-colonial Africa. It is estimated that as many as three and half million of the country's close to 14 million population (25 per cent) left the country to seek employment and a better life elsewhere. This again is causing many problems in the receiving countries. A classic example is the case of South Africa where xenophobic related attacks were recorded because of an increased number of emigrants in the country. Thus, the crisis in Zimbabwe assumes an international dimension. Urban youth unemployment in Zimbabwe is as old as urban settlements themselves. However, the current unprecedented levels called for critical assessment of what is really causing the spiral increase of unemployment especially amongst youths in urban areas.

Although there is a lack of large-scale statistical analyses linking levels of unemployment to the risk of violence (mostly due to poor data quality), there are many case studies that suggest that youth unemployment can cause instability and conflict. For example, Sommers (2007b) describes how many of the thousands of urban youth who rioted in Liberia in 2004 were frustrated unemployed ex-combatants. Sommers argues that a fundamental problem is that mainstream youth employment approaches in West Africa focus on rural areas and the formal sector, but are unlikely to succeed as youth are increasingly concentrating in the opposite direction, in cities and in the informal sector. In a context of widespread youth exclusion from paid employment, a minority of young people take the opportunity to make a livelihood by becoming involved in criminal activities, such as the local drugs trade, armed groups and other illegal trade. For example, youth gangs in Nicaragua are argued to be a form of social sovereignty, providing localized frameworks of order that allow for the coherent articulation of livelihood strategies in poor urban neighborhoods within a wider context of failing state sovereignty (Rodgers, 2005: 3). Unfortunately in some cases, gang activities are accompanied by violence.

The demands of the war veterans in 1997 required the government to raise 4 billion dollars that government had not budgeted for. They demanded payment of gratuities amounting to Z\$50 000, and a monthly pension of Z\$2000 for each of the 30 000 war veterans. War veterans demanded land from the commercial farmers. Meredith (2002) suggests the veterans demanded 50% of all commercial land taken from white farmers. On November 28, 1997 government published a list of 1503 farms to be expropriated. This was followed by the occupation of white commercial farms by War veterans accompanied by unemployed youths.

The economist, bankers, and businessmen advised against occupation of farms but their advice was not heeded. The occupation of farms in 2000 led to the collapse of the Zimbabwean Stock exchange. The Zimbabwean local currency became valueless over a number of years such that in 1990 5 US cents were equivalent to one Zimbabwean dollar. By 2008 a trillion Zimbabwean dollars could not buy a bag of mealie-meal. It is in such an environment that Zimbabwean youths were supposed to look for employment. No wonder why 85% of Zimbabwean population is out of employment.

66% of the respondents argued that most youths are unable to get any jobs immediately after their education. As a result the majority of youths were relocating to South Africa and other neighboring countries to look for employment. Most of these youths who are uneducated get employed in farms and mines. 34% of the respondents argued that they manage to get jobs in Zimbabwe.

One of the major challenges facing the youths is failure to secure finance if they decide to start their own business ventures. Most financial institutions in Zimbabwe are not providing bank loans schemes to the youths mainly because the youths do not have collateral that is required by the bankers. A number of banks could be considered as quasi government, with partial government ownership, these include the Commercial Bank of Zimbabwe, Infrastructural Development Bank and Agribank of Zimbabwe. Not all banks were willing to answer questions or fill questionnaires. The general trend amongst the banks was that when screening the youths for loans, all institutions considered collateral in the form of fixed, immovable assets whilst others considered movable assets though these are exceptions. Movable assets were seen as a problem as they could easily be sold, lost or stolen after the loan is granted.

Financial institutions considered capital in terms of whether the applicant had already invested in infrastructure was prepared to invest or had his or her own resources in a proposed project. When considering the character of the loan applicant, the financial institutions insisted that they would only consider a person or persons of sound character for loans. Individual who succeed in getting the loan should not have a record with the police. They should have a documented record of their past business activities. It was clear from the study that securing a loan from the bank was an uphill task that most youths faced. As a consequence youths get discouraged.

#### **IV. Causes of Youth Unemployment in Zimbabwe**

Unemployment in Zimbabwe has been caused by quite a number of factors. Most of these are mainly because of political reasons. The following are some of the factors that are causing unemployment:

- Sluggish investment and growth
- Weak export performance
- Poor macroeconomic policy environment
- The investment/business climate is unfriendly
- Population growth rate/age structure
- The growth path - reliance on primary products - is suboptimal
- Geography (proximity to South Africa, no direct access to the sea)

The investment and growth of the Zimbabwe Economy has been shrinking of late. This has had a significant impact on the Zimbabwean companies. In the past 3 years, over 500 companies closed operations...Through focus group discussions, a number of arguments were discussed regarding Zimbabwe's youths. The respondents argued that over the last decade been at the summit when it comes to literacy levels in Zimbabwe and still continues to churn out thousands of world class graduates every year. Every year each prospective graduate is full of optimism of graduating, being capped by the president, being called a graduate, getting a job and contributing to their country's development but that optimism is soon replaced by heartache because our industry and economy cannot offer them anything. The biggest challenge that the youth are facing is that of unemployment. With more than 85% unemployment rate, it means that only a fraction of the estimated 12,4 million people is employed, roughly over a million if we are to go with the estimates. Every year, close to more than 5 000 people graduate in Zimbabwe, from state universities, poly techs, nursing school, teachers colleges, apprenticeships to name but a few and all these people are expecting to be part of that 10%.

The Zimbabwean economy continues to grow at a painfully slow rate. Things have gotten better in the country but people continue to struggle for a decent living. Wages and salaries continue to be stagnant and despite the cries from the people salary raises continue to be a pipedream. The President has on many occasions called for all our foreign graduates to come home and contribute to the building of our economy and resuscitating our country's fortunes. Locally we have thousands graduating from high schools and universities and already the country cannot support all these graduates and apart from all those foreign graduates the president is calling on, we have thousands more from his Presidential scholarship from all the major universities in South Africa coming back as well to scavenge for the little resources that are already exhausted. I wonder where the learned President of the Republic of Zimbabwe wants all those professionals earning a decent living overseas, want to put them when the local professionals here have nothing. Does he want them to contribute to the unemployment rate? There is need for the country to create job opportunities for youths here in Zimbabwe before calling on all those foreign graduates.

In developed countries, even in some African countries it is unheard of for graduates to go for prolonged periods of time unemployed but in Zimbabwe, it has become the norm. Most youths will regard the four years they spent studying for a degree, for that diploma, for that profession as a waste because most people usually end up in trades that have nothing to do with what they studied for just to make ends meet. A lot of people with a professional qualification are swallowing their pride to do menial jobs. Most youths edit their CVs removing their degrees so as to get a job because most companies will not employ a graduate with a degree for a menial job. Thus, most youths in Zimbabwe who are certificate holders are not doing what they went to school for all for the sake of making ends meet.

What the youths need is a government that gives them a guarantee that there will be jobs. Jacob Zuma promised to get 500 000 jobs for his people after a certain period. At least people can hope. The ZANU PF government engages in policies that are killing the economy where most people see the only alternative as going overseas. The ZANU PF government destroyed the Zimbabwean economy using policies that have destroyed the industries effectively destroying the source of employment for the majority of the people. The government needs to provide a guarantee and an effective plan and policy of providing for jobs. The Ministry of Finance continues to freeze out jobs in the public sector effectively rendering all the graduates jobless because the government is the biggest employer in the country yet they are failing to provide youths with employment, yet the president is calling on graduates to come home.

The respondents argued that what the youths need is a treasury that is able to support the populace through the provision of releasing funds and unfreezing jobs in the civil service. The treasury has to release funds to bail out the industries so that the youths get employed. Zimbabwe is becoming centralized with everything being reduced to Harare. This is a sad reality particularly for the other youths based in other parts of the country. It is even sad for those in Bulawayo as most industries there are relocating to Harare. The Finance

Ministry should bail out cities of Bulawayo because the youths there are realizing that their dreams disappear in front of them because they cannot get jobs.

Respondents in focus group discussions argued that unemployment is a bigger challenge to the youths and there is need for politicians to walk their talk because the time has come where the youths will not tolerate their improbable plans for them because they need something to look forward to for tomorrow. The economic structure undermines the growth of rural incomes and the expansion of domestic Zimbabwean markets such that over 60% of the rural people are unable to afford basic health and educational services. Zimbabwe's human poor (Poverty Assessment Study Survey, Go Z 1997) stated that capital is thus constrained by an inefficient economic structure, which underutilizes its people and degrades the quality of their life.

The growth of poverty, unemployment and income disparities in the face of the underutilization of substantial parts of Zimbabwe's land and natural resources, despite the continued significant growth in commercial agricultural production and tourism, is the main factor which fuels today's land debate. While historical grievances over land alienation are important, these tend to be subordinated to the more generalized demand for the redistribution of land for productive uses by a variety of potential and actual small and large scale indigenous land users. In the formal media, the most visible demands for land, contrary to widespread grassroots land bidding processes, are those of indigenous elites.

### **V. The impact of the land question to youth unemployment**

The demand by indigenous elites for large scale farms, such as those of some white owners whose size is not conducive to efficient land utilization, is not a primary factor in the land policy formulation because the economic rationality of this focus is questionable. The key objective of land reform policy is to establish a more efficient and rational structure of farming and land and natural resources utilization. A rational land policy should not defend the interest of minority elite groups at the expense of optimal land utilization, increased productivity, employment growth, improved income distribution, and environmentally sustainable use of resources. But Land reform, without creation of youth employment is only leading to the alienation of youth groups that will fight against the establishment.

The key issue facing Zimbabwe's land reform policy therefore is how to balance the control and access to land, by redistributing land from large scale landholders who underutilize their land to new small and medium scale users. Such landholders include: individual large scale farmers whether white or black, large parastatal land holdings, large multinational firm landholders, large domestic conglomerates which specialize in mainly non-agricultural activities, and large private natural resource conservancies. The challenge here is how to „transfer peacefully" land from those who have been and remain unwilling and incapable of mobilizing adequate financial and labor resources towards the optimal use of land and natural resources at their command.

One key problem is that most of these landowners are not socially grounded in the land tenure value system of Zimbabweans and are remote from its mainstream party politics. The non-Zimbabwean nationalities and physical absence of many of the large landowners and the increasing use of stock holding land tenure arrangements for the control of land, especially in the growing eco-tourist industry, has increasingly globalised the fundamental interests of Zimbabwe's land question. This has tended to make elusive the negotiated redistribution of land since Independence. The utilization of a government led compulsory land acquisition and redistribution approach partly reflects the failure of all interested parties to redress Zimbabwe's land problem.

The objective of this analysis therefore, is to evaluate systematically the political economy of Zimbabwe's emerging land policy. We assess government's consistency in addressing the land question through an empirical evaluation of the outcome of its efforts to identify land to be acquired compulsorily. The criteria used to evaluate the policy direction are the GoZ's own administratively set criteria namely: land under utilization (including derelict land), multiple farm ownership, farmer absenteeism, proximity to communal areas, and oversized farms in relation to their agro-ecological potential.

### **Recommendations**

The following key recommendations are made:

- There is need for a multi-sectoral approach and the involvement of all relevant ministries working on the youth, labour and employment issues to create synergies in attacking unemployment.
- There is need for revision of the curriculum to make it compatible with the needs of the industry
- Resources need to be provided to the youth to support their development.
- An efficient apprenticeship system should be put in place so that firms have more input into the system.
- Practical subjects like Physical Education, Music and Arts should be examinable to encourage participation in them.
- There is need for the establishment and strengthening of entrepreneurship education in schools and tertiary institutions to foster the development of an entrepreneurial culture among the youth to facilitate self-employment.

- A loan and grant scheme should be in place to assist the needy to finance their education in vocational training colleges, technical colleges and universities.
- A skills requirements audit in the economy should be carried out so that education and training respond to the needs of industry.
- There is need for wide dissemination of the skills requirements of the economy through career guidance and counselling sessions so that students make informed decisions

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