

Zimbabwe: The Way Forward

Some Suggestions in the light of the SADC Troika Decision

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The State of the GPA

The SADC mediated Global Political Agreement, signed in September 2008, and brought into operation in February 2009, is clearly in trouble. Established as a modality for creating the conditions for a generally acceptable election, after ZANU PF's violent response to a popular vote against the Mugabe regime in 2008, many hoped, in the face of indications to the contrary, that the resultant interim government would serve as a bridge to an internationally acceptable electoral solution to the Zimbabwe crisis.

While the process has done little to open up democratic space in Zimbabwe, it is clear that after June 2008 some form of compromise between the parties was necessary given the balance of forces in the country. However, the prospects of a cohesive transition were always problematic given that the GPA was, in its very make up, a site of struggle for state power between the contending parties ahead of a future election. It was also a badly constructed and ambiguous document that in itself has led to unnecessary problems for governance.

In the two years since the establishment of the interim government, ZANU PF and the two MDCs have fared rather differently. For the once-dominant ruling party, the dent to its self-perception as the uncontested representative of the Zimbabwean people, provided by the 2008 result and power sharing arrangement that followed, forced a reappraisal of its future. ZANU PF's power is predominantly located in the military-economic complex that has been forcibly acquired over the last decade with the result that its control has been wielded largely through the deployment of force. Over the last two years, it has used its hold on the structures of coercion to obstruct the implementation of those aspects of the GPA which ostensibly sought to open up democratic spaces in Zimbabwe. In a persistent fashion, the Mugabe regime has held on tenaciously to the military and security sectors, blocked entry of alternative voices into the electronic media in the country (the central mode of information to the majority of the population), and delayed the implementation of the constitutional process. Moreover, at a regional level, ZANU PF has continued to command SADC support, largely through its manipulation of the '*sanctions issue*' and its construction of the issue within the context of longer term liberation solidarities. ZANU PF has thus used the GPA period to claw back lost political spaces, even as it was forced to give way in certain areas of state policy.

The most popular party in the inclusive arrangement, the MDC-T, has attempted to use this time to gain a foothold in state power, given its inability to translate electoral superiority into state power because of ZANU PF's monopoly control over the military. With its limited share of state power, the MDC-T made some progress in stabilising the economy and opening up a dialogue for future normalization of the Zimbabwean situation with international forces. It has however faced severe limitations in its capacity to change the democratic make up of the state, not only because of the obstacles placed in the way by ZANU PF, but also because of the lack of capacity and clearer strategic interventions at national, regional and international levels. This often led to a cycle in which the protests by the MDC, in relation to what they saw as the obstacles to progress, were followed by capitulation to ZANU PF's obduracy. Additionally, MDC's leverage within the state has been severely weakened by the decimation of its major social base, the urban workforce, as a result of the wholesale destruction of livelihoods during the crisis.

The smaller MDC formation, with its credibility always under question because of a weak social base, has been further weakened by the political delinquency of its one-time leader, and the ongoing constriction of its support base. Both processes have resulted in further fragmentation of this formation and a desperate need to find new ways to survive in the near future. The fact that the two MDCs have not been able to work together constructively in this period has also weakened both, to the advantage of ZANU PF. However, the recent cooperation between the two MDCs over the selection of the Speaker for the House of Assembly is indicative of how much more effective their interventions could be in the interim government.

In the event of an election, such cooperation could become particularly important in Matabeleland where the politics have fractured even further along regional lines, amplifying long-held Ndebele ethnic demands for more inclusion in national development, and a stronger political commitment to deal with the open wounds of Gukurahundi.

Regional and International Dimensions

Since the change of mediation teams between the Mbeki and Zuma administrations, there has been a decisive drop in the initiative and energy levels of the SADC intervention. Progress has been slow and there has been little movement in getting beyond the many outstanding issues in the GPA. Where there has been some movement it has largely been in SADC's support for Mugabe's call for the end of 'sanctions', an issue that has almost completely worked in ZANU PF's favour. At least this was the case until the meeting of the SADC Troika on Politics, Defence and Security Cooperation held in Zambia on 31st March 2011. The communiqué issued at the end of this gathering appears to have taken a stronger position on violence and the continued obstructions to the implementation of the GPA. In addition, most importantly, the Troika agreed to "*appoint a team of officials to join the Facilitation Team and work with the Joint Monitoring and Implementation Committee (JOMIC) to ensure monitoring, evaluation and implementation of the GPA.*" The Troika also agreed to develop Terms of Reference, time frames and provide regular progress reports, the first of which is to be presented during the next SADC Extraordinary Summit. This link between the officials appointed by the Troika, the Facilitation team and JOMIC could be an important step forward in a fuller implementation of the GPA.

The international bloc, for its part, has attempted to use a dual strategy in Zimbabwe. On the one hand it has provided humanitarian-plus support for the inclusive government as an encouragement for further reforms, while holding on to the stick of 'restrictive measures' as a means of continued pressure on the Mugabe regime. The problem is that this strategy has largely backfired on the West and the opposition, providing little leverage to move the recalcitrant ZANU PF, while at the same time providing the latter with its sole message for the forthcoming election. Whereas in 2000 and beyond, the land was the single election message for the ruling party, the bearer of this task has now moved to the 'anti-sanctions' campaign, allied implicitly to the discourse on land, and carried out with monolithic fascist-style singularity. Thus the international forces caught up in the Zimbabwe question are now left with a strategy that has not worked, that they would like to move away from, but cannot do so without more movement on the GPA.

Recent Developments

Two issues have become clear about recent ZANU PF strategy. Firstly, the party does not want the 'sanctions' removed as this would undermine their single election message, one directed more at SADC

and the AU than at the people of Zimbabwe. Secondly, there was a strong push from the dominant elements in ZANU PF to go for an early election in 2011 for several reasons including:

- ZANU PF was feeling stronger than they did after their 2008 defeat;
- SADC wanted Zimbabwe off the agenda as soon as possible;
- Zimbabwe was off the AU agenda, in light of what have been interpreted as more compelling events in Ivory Coast and North Africa;¹
- While the 'restrictive measures' were still in place there were clear indications from the West of a lesser appetite to adhere to these, and thus a grudging admission that in one form or another, more normalised relations would have to be established with the Mugabe establishment;
- The MDCs and the civic movement were weaker than they were in 2008, and had lost momentum;
- Mugabe's health was a concern, and the military in particular would have thus preferred an early election in which Mugabe is still able to take the leading role.²

However, as is frequently the case in Zimbabwe, the political terrain has altered more recently, in what would appear to be a direct result of the SADC Troika decision in Livingstone and changing understandings of Mugabe's health. Thus, the desire for an early election by certain elements in ZANU PF has been affected in a number of ways:

- The SADC decision has shaken ZANU PF's assumption that SADC is entirely biddable;
- SADC has quite clearly placed Zimbabwe centrally on its agenda, with an apparently strong desire to resolve the crisis;
- The discomfort felt by SADC over the North African revolutions is being exacerbated by recent developments in Swaziland;
- The AU approach to crises in its members will be strongly affected in the future by their decisions in relation to the Ivory Coast;
- Mugabe's health now seems an increasingly serious issue, and must be raising concerns over whether he would be able to withstand a rigorous campaign as ZANU PF's only plausible candidate to oppose the popularity of Morgan Tsvangirai. (Given the provisions in the Constitution and also the GPA relating to succession, there may well be differences of opinion within ZANU PF. It is relevant here to point out that evidence suggests there are increasing divisions within ZANU PF on the way forward and the desirability of maintaining the GPA);
- The possibility of the Troika decision being ratified by the Emergency Summit in May has increased pressure on ZANU PF and may further exacerbate divisions within the party.

It is in this context that the recent arrests of MDC and civic leaders, and violence in some parts of the country, need to be understood. It serves as a reminder to the electorate of ZANU PF's capacity for electoral violence, while making it difficult for the West to consider moving away from the sanctions strategy. It may also be an indication of the strategic battles within ZANU PF over how and when to fight the next election.

¹ However, the Ivory Coast issue does have some traction for Zimbabwe since it is a crisis around an election with the refusal of the loser group to step down, a clear endorsement now by the AU that Gbagbo must go (and has gone), and the difficulty for the AU in whether Gbagbo's refusal to go is a 'coup'. The resolution of the Ivory Coast crisis may be more relevant for Zimbabwe than the uprisings in North Africa.

² But some within Zanu PF may favour delaying an election in the light of the President's health, and prefer to deal with the succession problem in Parliament rather than through the ballot box.

The Way Forward

All of the above suggests that this is a critical time for civil society to make a major input into the process. Fundamental to any input would be a cohesive and unified position by civil society.

The following suggestions constitute a possible way forward:

1. It seems crucial that civil society as a whole strongly endorse the decision of the SADC Troika without amendment;
2. Following such endorsement, representatives of the major civic platforms should undertake the following:
 - Present their position to all the political parties in Zimbabwe;
 - Present their position to JOMIC;
 - Present their position to SADC, both as SADC and to the individual members countries;
 - Present their position to the international community outside SADC.
3. Ensure that there is widespread dissemination of the civil society position within Zimbabwe through statements, newspaper articles, opinion pieces, and meetings.

These interventions should culminate in the convening of a regional conference of civic actors to pressure the SADC mediators into enforcing their new position and ensuring conditions for a free and fair election.

This analysis was undertaken during two roundtable discussions, and is endorsed by the following organizations:



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