



Opinion:

Politics, security and international relations: The contemporary challenges faced by the Global South

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Abstract

Countries in the Global South have for decades faced challenges which have included natural disasters, pandemics, weak health systems, gender-based violence as well as economic, cultural, and religious challenges. This has been in a context where these countries have been lagging in development when compared to countries in the Global North, a gap which they have found difficult to fill. This paper explores some of the challenges faced by countries in the Global South, drawing from the experiences of Zimbabwe. It is integral not only in identifying the challenges, but also in critically analysing lessons learnt and proffering recommendations which are important for socio-economic development and human wellbeing. Contributions to enhance social and economic policies and reform are also presented in this paper.

Keywords: *contemporary issues, development, Global South, politics, reforms, Zimbabwe*

1. Introduction

Since the 1980's, the world has been perceived as being roughly divided into two poles, the Global North and the Global South. This was according to the Brandt line, with the Global North and south named by Jeremy Bentham who coined the words and the relations governing states. The world was thus, seen as being divided into two broad 'economic worlds.' The Global North was seen comprising of the richer, more economically and technologically advanced countries, located mostly in the northern hemisphere with the exception of Australia and New Zealand. The Global South on the other hand, was seen as comprising of poorer countries located mostly in the southern hemisphere and the tropical regions (Dados and Connell 2012). The classification of the world was seen as denoting stages of economic development towards modernity, with the idea of modernity being strongly associated with the idea of progress or evolution (Ballestrin 2020). In terms of international trade and political economy, the Global South has been perceived as being controlled by the Global North in a skewed and dependent relationship. It has to be noted that the Global South does not merely refer to non-developed, non-modern countries localised in the former colonial zones of the world, but it refers to a subaltern geopolitical identity not confined to a geographical or territorial sense which presents a country's location in the international



system (Ballestrin 2020). The division of the world into a binary system has seen the Global South being perceived as facing several developmental and economic challenges and being socially, economically, and politically dependent on the Global North creating challenges. What are some of the challenges in specific country contexts? This is a question which this article addresses, drawing lessons from a country in the Global South, Zimbabwe with reference to other countries in the Global South.

2. Politics: instability and violence

Zimbabwe has a history of political violence which usually escalates during the pre- and post-election period (ZADHR Report 2018), and this has serious implications on economic development, and is a sign of political challenges which have bedevilled the country since the dawn of independence. In present day Zimbabwe, I would argue that the country's political challenges have grown. Since the ouster of the late former President Robert Mugabe in November 2017 in what many see as a coup, but what the incumbent government defends as a democratic transition, there are signs of political challenges which have continued to escalate at an alarming rate. This is exemplified by a striking incident as the country's harmonised election process was being concluded on 1 August 2018, when the military shot and killed six people and injured 35 during opposition protests in the capital city, Harare (note that the military has denied this, with the state accusing the opposition of the deaths and damages done). The protests resulted in extensive damage to property. It was later established that those killed were not part of the protests but just unarmed civilians, some who were going about their business, oblivious of the danger that was going to cost them their lives. This raised serious questions on the role of the military and police in maintaining law and order as well as their respect of human rights and crowd control tactics. There is consensus that the deaths of civilians could have been avoided, and the act itself highlights the difficulties associated with democracy and maintenance of law and order. This is a persistent challenge in authoritarian African countries.

In order to address concerns on the shootings raised in different quarters, the President of the Republic of Zimbabwe, Emmerson Mnangagwa established a commission of inquiry in terms of section 2 (1) of the Commissions of Inquiry Act [Chapter 10:07], through Proclamation Number 6 of 2018 published in Statutory Instrument 181 of 2018. The terms of the reference were simple, it was to look at the post-election violence. The commission was chaired by the former South African President Kgalema Motlanthe. The Commission did not directly accuse the military of any wrongdoing, but it seemed that the state, opposition and security services had contributed in different degrees to the tragic outcome of that day. It had four broad recommendations which included compensation of the victims' families, electoral reforms, political co-existence and security sector reforms. This was in addition to an acknowledgement that the problem in the country stemmed from political differences, hence, the need for a political platform for all the major actors to discuss political as well as



other issues affecting the country. This recommendation gave rise to the highly controversial Political Actors Dialogue (see Towindo 2020).

These shootings portray the political challenges the country is facing and lack of consensus by political actors on social cohesion in the post-election period which have included lack of acceptance of POLAD by the main political opposition, highlighting the nature of Zimbabwean society which is polarised. The country's security forces have been shown as being impartial and as a ruthless instrument that can be used to crush dissent among citizens by the political elite. The deployment of security institutions to settle political scores, and as an instrument of authoritarian consolidation and the by-passing of democratic processes with civilians being abused by ruthless state machinery highlight an issue which is of major concern globally and by human rights defenders. It can be found existing in many countries in the Global South which are exemplified recently by Uganda, Myanmar, the Republic of Sudan and Chad.

With Zimbabwe being politically polarised, with a ruling elite who are focused on consolidating and retaining power at all cost, to the detriment of the economy and the wellbeing of citizens, questions arise on how this impasse can be broken and the country moves forward and attain economic development which is not retarded by divisive politics. I would argue that there is need to go back to 2015, when the United Nations General Assembly adopted the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDG's). The SDGs were premised on a universal call to action to end poverty, protect the planet and improve the lives of people everywhere. A 15-year plan was adopted to achieve the goals (UN 2015). For this paper, the goals are of particular significance highlighting what should be addressed in order to achieve sustainable development. This is important for countries in the Global South which have faced perennial challenges. Goal 16 is particularly significant as it addresses the promotion of peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development. It highlights the importance of states providing access to justice and building effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels. This is particularly important for Zimbabwe, where I would argue that there has been the politicization of state institutions with the selective application of the rule of law and justice. This has been problematic. As a matter of urgency, the government of Zimbabwe should address the 1 August shootings in a transparent process that provide justice to the civilians. In addition, a reconciliatory process needs to be undertaken to address all historical incidents of injustice perpetrated during periods of political violence which resulted in death, injuries and the destruction of property. One can never underestimate the power of a true and conciliatory national healing process. This should be in a context where there is concerted effort by ...the authorities...(to)...immediately put an end to security force abuses and allow for peaceful protests as part of the democratic process...that would signal that there is indeed a new dispensation of respect for rights and the rule of law in Zimbabwe" (Dewa Mavhinga, Southern Africa Director at Human Rights Watch, HRW 2018). Political challenges, fear of persecution, lack of respect and capture of state institutions, subverting democratic processes and authoritarian tendencies all pose serious political challenges which retard



development, and the situation is worsened by Zimbabwe's weak economy and a multitude of food insecure, precariously employed and vulnerable citizens.

3. Power struggles within the ruling party and its implications

Proponents of realism theory like Thucydides, argue on the importance of power in politics and see human nature as a starting point for classical political realism. Realists view human beings as inherently egoistic and self-interested to the extent that self-interest overcomes moral principles. At the debate in Sparta, described in Book I of Thucydides' History, the Athenians affirm the priority of self-interest over morality. They say that considerations of right and wrong have 'never turned people aside from the opportunities of aggrandizement offered by superior strength' (Thucydides, Finley and Warner 1972). What is the importance of this view? I am of the opinion that it helps us understand the reasons why human beings pursue power, which in essence is to be stronger and to dominate the weak. Hans J. Morgenthau (1904–1980) further developed realism into a comprehensive international relations theory. He was influenced by the protestant theologian and political writer Reinhold Niebuhr, as well as Hobbes. Morgenthau places selfishness and power-lust at the centre of his view of human existence. The insatiable human lust for power, timeless and universal, which he identifies with *animus dominandi*, the desire to dominate, is for him the main cause of conflict. As he asserts in his main work, *Politics Among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace* (1954), that '...international politics, like all politics, is a struggle for power.'

Why is this of relevance to the Zimbabwean context? If we look at Morgenthau's argument, all politics is struggle for power. Both national and international actors falling into his realism. This is applicable to the domestic politics of Zimbabwe. The Zimbabwe African National Union-Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF) was one of the African-led political wings which waged the country's armed struggle and resoundingly won the elections in 1980 to form the first African government. Since then, it has managed to stay in power in spite of disputed elections especially over the past two decades. Despite managing to overcome its political opponents, a major challenge to the ruling party has been factionalism, which is not a new phenomenon to the party as it was born after a factional breakaway from the Zimbabwe African Peoples Union (ZAPU), which was the other party that fought the country's war of liberation. Over the years, the party has experienced factional fighting which intensified after 2010. Factional fighting in ZANU (PF) has seen the jostling for positions, smearing campaigns, blacklisting and underhand dealings as the factions and people have fought for political supremacy. This has been detrimental to governance, democratic processes and development. The economy has also been negatively affected. In the past few years three main political factions have emerged in the country with the current military backed 'Lacoste' faction which is loyal to President Mnangagwa being dominant. There was also another faction commonly referred to as the 'Gamatox' which was loyal to the late General Solomon Mujuru (a war commander of note) and his wife and former Vice President in the Mugabe government, Joyce Mujuru. This faction went into oblivion following the dismissal of its



principals by Mugabe during a faction purging spree with Joyce Mujuru being the most prominent victim. The last dominant faction which was aligned to Mugabe's wife Grace was the 'Generation 40' which was made up of the party's young politicians and was canvassing for a Grace Mugabe succession. Following the ouster of Mugabe, the members of this faction were purged, and some fled to exile with those remaining facing persecution and arrest. While current ZANU (PF) members do not openly acknowledge their sympathies to this faction, the presence of its sympathisers in ZANU (PF) is still very much strong, with some feeling that the Lacoste faction betrayed Robert Mugabe. Factional fighting within the ruling party is problematic as it affects the performance of those in government who at times fear labelling and are restricted in serving citizens fearing stereotyping and concentrating on political battles at the expense of service delivery. It impacts on governance, economic performance, long-term planning, policy making and other issues which are critical for sustainable development. Political instability in such situations is a real challenge and the factional fighting in the ruling party can be seen as having derailed. In some contexts, for example, in South-East Asia, factions have been shown as having a deleterious effect of inhibiting the authority and effectiveness of leaders, causing party volatility, party fragmentation, and a lack of party cohesion (Chambers and Ufen 2020). This can be a serious challenge for countries in the Global South which already have a multitude of other challenges and are desperately in need of political stability for them to develop.

4. Natural disasters and the pandemic

In the past few years, Zimbabwe, just like other countries in sub-Saharan Africa has faced climate-induced environmental challenges which have contributed to food insecurity and a precarious humanitarian crisis. Food insecurity has become a reality due to failure by the government and local communities to respond to shocks, build resilience and mitigate the impact of the natural disasters. Natural disasters are a serious challenge faced not only in Zimbabwe but also in many countries in the Global South, posing a serious challenge to humanity. In 2020, Zimbabwe's challenges were compounded by the effects of Cyclone Idai which had hit the country in 2019 and the catastrophic COVID-19 pandemic.

Cyclone Idai: In March 2019, Zimbabwe was hit by the tropical Cyclone Idai, which was a result of a tropical depression originating on the east coast of Mozambique. It swept through Mozambique, Zimbabwe and Malawi as a category two storm that was moving at above 105 miles per hour, leaving behind a trail of destruction including loss of human and animal lives and massive destruction to crops and property in all these countries. In Zimbabwe, the cyclone and subsequent flooding destroyed homes and latrines, contaminated drinking water, washed away roads, dams and bridges and other infrastructure as well as crops among other serious damages. With a country already suffering from economic challenges, the situation became dire especially for populations living in the Eastern parts of the country. The United Nations estimates that in the region, 100 000 homes were destroyed



with US\$773 million worth of buildings, infrastructure and crops being destroyed with deaths in excess of 1 200 (World Vision 2019). The cyclone highlighted shortcomings when it comes to disaster preparedness, timeous response by disaster management agencies, and lack of preparedness by local communities in disaster response. It also exposed the precarity of local communities in the face of major shocks and the decay of infrastructure which is easily destroyed if confronted by major environmental shocks. This is a situation which is not unique to Zimbabwe but can be found in other countries in the region.

COVID-19: Whilst the southern African region was still trying to recover from the impact of Cyclone Idai, recurrent droughts and other climate-induced natural disasters, a new corona virus later renamed COVID-19, emerged. COVID-19, which was declared a global pandemic by the World Health Organisation in January 2020 was seen as being caused by a severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2). It had originated in Wuhan, China and had spread at unprecedented speed to other parts of the world. By the end of 12 April 2021, COVID-19 had seen 135 646 617 confirmed positive cases being reported globally with 2 930 732 fatalities (WHO 2021). To contain the spread of the virus, the world witnessed national lockdowns, the closure of national borders, the restriction of unnecessary travel, the closure and partial opening of non-essential businesses and the informal sector. At some point, only medical professionals and other workers classified as essential were the only ones allowed to continue operating as a containment measure. Since COVID-19 started, it has undergone various cycles each with a different intensity and affecting different countries and geographical regions. Although there were fears that Africa would face many fatalities compared to other regions in the world, this has fortunately not been the case. It has however revealed hitherto serious challenges in the health sector across the continent. If one looks at the continents response and plans to counter COVID-19, what is clear is that the continent already had a struggling health care system which has been underfunded for years, hence health facilities are poor and dilapidated.

In Zimbabwe, COVID-19 has been seen as presenting a societal, health and economic crisis. By 22 April 2021, the country had reported 38 018 confirmed positive cases and 1 555 deaths (MoHCC 2021). The high number of cases and deaths was considered a serious challenge with fears that COVID-19 would also ravage the country as it has done in Italy, the United Kingdom, India, Brazil and other countries. This was in a context where over the past few years, Zimbabwe's health care system has been largely underfunded and has faced crippling resource constraints, a demotivated and poorly paid workforce and crumbling public health infrastructure. High morbidity and mortality trends show that the population continues to be ravaged by infectious diseases such as HIV and AIDS, lung diseases, tuberculosis, diarrheal conditions including nutritional deficiencies, and non-communicable diseases such as diabetes.

The COVID-19 pandemic has exposed the inequalities and inequities between the public and private health sector, and health access challenges especially by the poor. It has



shown the serious implications of lack of health care equipment including PPEs, shortage of therapeutic drugs, and overworked and underpaid health care workers, and there is need to relook at the public health funding model. The Zimbabwean situation broadly resembles what is occurring in many African countries. The closure of national borders and lack of access to health facilities abroad has exposed the necessity of building local health care facilities which are currently missing in African countries (Dandara et al 2021).

The negative economic implications of COVID-19 are discernible in the country's tourism sector. For Zimbabwe this sector is key in the economy, generating an estimated US\$1.4 billion (3.3 per cent of GDP) in revenue in 2018. Over the years, it has become key for generating foreign currency. COVID-19 and its attendant lockdown presented challenges for the tourism sector and this was not unique to Zimbabwe, but it impacted on other countries in the Global South whose economies have the tourism sector contributing a sizeable proportion to the economy. With COVID-19, most countries have been entering and exiting national lockdowns with strict travel restrictions being put in place and gatherings prohibited. This has seen a number of tourists cancelling their bookings, with major events being cancelled as well. In Zimbabwe, tour operators and hotels in the resort city of Victoria Falls for instance, had reported 80 per cent cancellations by early March 2020. Recently, indications are that most hotels have either restricted their operations or shut down altogether. A consequence of this has been loss of revenue, jobs and income leading to loss of jobs and income (UNDP 2020). The economic cost of the pandemic on the tourism sector which is a key sector in the economy is still to be seen but early indications point that it was catastrophic, and the sector will take years to recover.

5. Gender-based violence

Studies show that globally, domestic violence has negative impacts on human health and wellbeing. This is also confirmed in Zimbabwe for example, by research undertaken locally for example by Professor Rudo Gaidzanwa of the University of Zimbabwe over the past decades. Studies in different countries have shown that the scourge of domestic violence has had widespread social and economic implications and it also affects people of various cultural backgrounds. Interestingly it was noted that experiences of violence tend to decrease with an increase in education. A study by ZIMSTAT (2011) in its Zimbabwe Demographic and Health Survey 2010-11 showed that forty per cent of uneducated women and women with only primary school education reported that they had experienced physical violence since the age of 15. This was compared with 15 per cent of women with more than secondary school education (ZIMSTAT 2011). Thirty-one per cent of women in the lowest wealth quintile, and 26 per cent of women in the highest wealth quintile experienced physical violence (ZIMSTAT, 2011). This is confirmed by the UNFPA (2015) and the SAFE (2020) which notes that in Zimbabwe, one in three women aged 15 to 49 (39.4 per cent of all women) have experienced physical violence, and about one in four women have experienced sexual violence since the age of 15. These statistics are disturbing as they demonstrate that physical violence against



women is prevalent across all socio-economic strata in Zimbabwe. It shows that the quality of women's lives may not necessarily be determined and guaranteed by their incomes or those of their husbands or their access to material goods and services. The most frequent perpetrators of violence against women were current husbands and partners (57 per cent) and former husbands and partners (20 per cent) (ZIMSTAT 2011). The implications of gender-based violence are multiple and not only do they deny women the fulfilment of their basic rights as enshrined by local and international legal statutes, but they also impede on their important roles in social reproduction and production.

In countries in the Global South including Zimbabwe, I would argue that violence is largely negative as it sees women losing workdays hence, lower productivity and income. It is also problematic as it makes some women lose out on educational and employment opportunities as well as participating in socio-economic and political issues. All this ultimately negatively impacts on livelihoods and the role of women as primary care givers who play very critical roles in the household and local communities. The normal functioning of women is disturbed as they suffer from physical injuries. Psychologically it has negative effects which include depression, mental illness, post-traumatic stress disorders which can lead to them failing to function normally and in extreme cases, can lead to social marginalisation and even suicide. The implications of gender-based violence cannot be underestimated as they impact on development, the economy and social cohesion. It can be seen as contributing to developmental challenges facing countries in the Global South and at times it is challenging to deal with as it is supported by regressive traditional and cultural practices, norms and values which are embraced and never questioned by some communities.

6. Land reform and its implications

Some countries in the Global South that experienced colonialism can be seen as facing challenges of redressing historical legacies. Land reform is one route which countries have taken aimed at redistributing wealth from the descendants of the former settlers to the indigenous people. In Zimbabwe, land reform was undertaken from 1980 with limited success but was implemented in a more radical form in 2000, with land being forcibly acquired without compensation for the land and promises of compensation for improvements only. The land reform programme which was chaotic and characterised by nepotism, patronage, capture of state institutions and benefited mainly the ZANU (PF) political elite and its supporters, has in the past two decades caused serious negative effects on Zimbabwe's economy. It also contributed to the country's economic collapse and hyperinflation in the 2000's (Richardson 2004). There was witnessed a significant drop in total farm output if one compared output from the former large-scale commercial farms with the resettled farms. This, coupled with recurrent droughts, lack of farming experience and capital, contributed to low output compromising the country's food security, making starvation and famine a common occurrence in the country (Dancaescu 2003). Increasing poverty levels combined with the increased informality of farming operations amongst the resettled farmers has led



to poor working conditions among farm workers, a dysfunctional agricultural value chain system and in some instances, it can be seen as having led to an increase in the use of child labour especially by farmers in sugar cane production (Chingono 2019).

Zimbabwe's macro-economic environment which has faced challenges since 2000, characterized by hyperinflation, collapse of the banking sector, shortages of foreign currency and key commodities such as fuel and agricultural inputs (see Kanyenze 2005) cannot be separated from the dynamics of land reform. It presents contemporary challenges facing countries in the Global South where attempts to redress historical injustices become intertwined with poor governance, poor public policy choice trajectories as well as neo-patrimonial tendencies. This has seen the emergence of new challenges as attempts are made to redress historical inequalities. In Zimbabwe, the land reform programme exacerbated already existing inequalities while creating new ones as it decimated the economy. The damage which it caused will take years to solve and there are high chances that it has been a catalyst for intergenerational poverty as the economy continues facing serious challenges.

7. Recommendations and Conclusion

The discussion above has touched on a number of contemporary dynamics which impede development in the Global South with Zimbabwe providing insights on challenges. Internal and external political subtleties, natural disasters, social challenges like gender-based violence and the recent ramifications of the COVID-19 pandemic all contribute in different ways to the challenges faced by developing countries. While remedies for each challenge faced are country and context specific, I believe that for the Zimbabwean case a lot can be done to remedy the challenges. Political reform, tolerance, respect of the rule of law and justice, respect for political institutions and democratic tenets are key considerations to take into consideration. These will help to deal with some of the country's political challenges which unfortunately have impacted on economic development and the citizens wellbeing. The COVID-19 pandemic and natural disasters faced in the country have exposed the need for an increase in social service funding especially in health care, social welfare and disaster management. The social service ministries were found wanting when they were confronted with challenges and in some instances failed to cope. It is important for this sector to be supported and be able to cater for challenges that may arise. In the health sector, investments need to be made in the health services infrastructure and workers need motivation so that they continue to discharge their responsibilities professionally. As noted earlier, for Africa, COVID-19 was not as bad as was anticipated. Epidemiological, scientific and governance responses to the pandemic were modelled along responses from Europe. With the continent's large informal economy. This impacted on citizens welfare. For the future, it is important for governments in the Global South to have responses which are context specific, and that take into consideration local dynamics rather than a 'one shoe fits all approach.' Small businesses for example, should be allowed to continue operating during national lockdowns during this ongoing COVID-19 pandemic era, with observance of the World Health



Organisation (WHO) coronavirus regulations. The economic and welfare cost of mimicking lockdowns undertaken in other contexts has been shown as being detrimental. Over the past few years, natural disasters have become a perennial challenge for countries in southern Africa. This has impacted on economies, livelihoods and resulted in unnecessary loss of life. It is time for the region and other regions to look at the feasibility of setting up a Disaster/Emergency Fund and not to be over reliant on donor support during emergencies. Alternatively regional governments in African need to capacitate the region by making sure each country establishes a disaster emergency fund and they implement it, and more importantly it serves its purpose. Saving money for emergencies is now imperative given that countries in the Global South are facing regular climatic catastrophes and unprecedented events like the COVID-19 pandemic whose ramifications are detrimental to economies and citizen's livelihoods. The last important recommendation is for economic and policy reforms which decisively deal with the challenges of different countries in the Global South. These need to be explored and implemented to improve people's lives in the future.

Notes on contributor

Nothando Petra Magwizi was born in 1986 in Nyanga, Zimbabwe. Her father was an educator at Emmanuel Secondary School and her mother was a housewife who later became an educator. Growing up, she was fascinated by reading different books from bedtime to biblical storybooks. Nothando considers family as the most important aspect of life, hence, spends most time with family. She graduated with a Bachelor of Arts degree in 2010 at the University of Zimbabwe and later graduated with a Master of Science in International Affairs with Midlands State University, Zimbabwe. During her studies in International Affairs, her interests in national and international development grew bigger to the point where concepts of international relations give her pleasure to write, read and talk about. She submitted a dissertation entitled "*An analysis of the effects of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) conflict in the African Region from 1996-2006*" in 2017.

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