

The Tripod of Economic Meltdown in Zimbabwe

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Abstract

Corruption alone has been blamed for the Zimbabwean economic problems. Many authors discussed how corruption and sanctions have affected the Zimbabwean economy as separate entities. There are however few discussions on how the issue of polarity together with corruption and sanctions affects the economic wellbeing of a country. Corruption as an umbrella term for other factors which include nepotism, homeboyism, abuse of office and fraud will be discussed. In the same vein, the author shall explain parallelism and polarity as two different sides of the same thing whilst the branches of political, social and economic polarity shall be explained. Sanctions, which are also touted as targeted or smart sanctions have been explained with the view of bringing to light how they have affected the nation of Zimbabwe. This article discusses in detail the interrelationship and collaborative impact of sanctions, corruption and polarity as the tripod that has led to the meltdown of the Zimbabwean economy. The author draws examples from some of Zimbabwe's cases in order to build the argument. The author then concludes that the blaming sanctions alone for the economic meltdown of Zimbabwe will be inappropriate since corruption and polarity have equally contributed to the economic meltdown of the Southern African country.

Key words: Sanctions, Polarity, parallelism, corruption, nepotism

1. INTRODUCTION

This paper argues that the effects of sanctions in Zimbabwe has been inflated and framed so that they fulfill the aspirations of the few elite

whilst they cover for other aspects like corruption and polarity which have ravaged the economy. The Zimbabwean Economy has been struggling for almost two decades. The cause of the decades' economic turmoil has however become a matter of controversy. Blame has been laid on many factors which included corruption, polarization and economic sanctions as the background to the Zimbabwean economic meltdown. The ruling government has vehemently pointed fingers on sanctions imposed on the nation almost two decades ago by the West as the root cause of the economic meltdown. On the contrary, citing various forms of corruption that are thriving in Zimbabwe, embezzlement and externalization of funds, nepotism, fraud, looting, plundering of resources and political polarity, critics have dismissed the sanctions mantra just as a scapegoat and propaganda tool by the elite designed to hoodwink ordinary people and observers from realizing and pointing to corruption and polarization which has crippled the nation's economy. Several indicators of economic decadence have been observed of the past years in Zimbabwe. Loss of monetary sovereignty, acute shortage of foreign currency, hyperinflation, high unemployment, flourishing of the black market, and deterioration of public and social services has led to the fall of the Zimbabwean economy.

2. SANCTIONS

Sanctions can be understood as embargoes covering various selected goods or services effected by one state or group of states against another, and are designed to influence the latter's behavior (Chingono, 2010). Sanctions in Zimbabwe spiraled from the FTLRP in the early 2000 spearheaded by the late former President RG Mugabe¹. The FTLRP was labelled as racial, brutal and marred with human rights abuses. From the ruling Zimbabwean government's point of view, the FTLRP was a correction of a historical imbalance in which the locals were dispossessed of their land by the white colonial regime in the 1890s. It argues that the land redistribution exercise angered the west and hence the imposition of sanctions. Land expropriation was a long overdue exercise upon which the government sought to redistribute land equally between the historically

¹ FTLRP - Abbreviation for Fast Track Land Reform Programme.

disenfranchised indigenous majority². Following other events such as the violation of property ownership rights, election violence in 2000 and the AIPPA which curtailed citizen's media freedom and broadcasting licensing, further restrictions were imposed on Zimbabwe³ (Moretti 2017). The Zimbabwe Defence Forces involvement in the DRC civil war saw Zimbabwean officials being accused of plundering diamonds in the DRC (Zimbabwe Today December 4 2017). This also led the US into imposing sanctions on Zimbabwe. It is against this background that the United States and European Union (EU) suspended funding and financial support for all projects except for those in direct support to the Zimbabwean population (Moretti 2017: 4). The EU also imposed targeted sanctions consisting of an embargo on arms and related material, suspension of technical assistance and financing military activities, travel bans and asset freeze on several individuals within the ruling party who were deemed to be hindering democracy and the respect of human rights in Zimbabwe (Zimbabwe and the EU, 2016). Furthermore, the World Bank (WB) also suspended loans and programs to support the balance of payment of Zimbabwe due to the continued failure in meeting payment of arrears (IMF, 2003). These sanctions are deemed to have precipitated the economic crisis that has been endured and worsened over the years eating into Zimbabwe's socio-political and economic fabric. Development assistance on social services was thus channeled through non-state actors such as NGOs and International agencies. Sanctions have robbed the Zimbabwean Government of FDI⁴. Many countries withdrew their investments from Zimbabwe citing threats to their investments due to the issue of failure to the violation of property ownership rights. Assets that are owned by the Zimbabwean Government and targeted individuals in the United States and the European Union were frozen.

Western policy documents on Zimbabwe argue that they imposed targeted or smart sanctions on Zimbabwe. A smart or targeted sanctions policy is one that imposes forceful pressure on certain individuals and entities and restricts selected products or activities while minimizing unintended economic and social consequences for vulnerable populations and innocent bystanders

² The indigenous majority are the black Zimbabweans who were dispossessed of their land by colonizers.

³ AIPPA – Abbreviation for Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act

⁴ FDI – Abbreviation for Foreign Direct Investment

(David, Lopez and Rogers, (2002). Mikael (2007) notes that there are specific 141 politically exposed individuals and companies on the sanctions list deemed to be impediments to democracy in Zimbabwe. The list was however revised as new names were added and some removed for various reasons. In that regard, sanctions imposed on Zimbabwe are said to be limited in scope and are aimed at particular individuals and corporations. Arguments are thus generated as to how restrictions on that minute number of individuals can affect the economy and nation at large. Some argue that although aid directed to the state was suspended, donors have continued to pledge vast amounts of money on various programs in health, agriculture, rural development and education sectors and Zimbabwe has also continued to benefit from preferential access to the EU market (Moretti, 2017:4). This being true as it may be, no country has ever been developed by donor aid. Gibson Mhaka explains that NGOs are involved in pseudo attempts to eradicate poverty and foster development whilst thriving on Africa's misfortunes which they wish to see continue to infinity (The Chronicle 23 October 2013). It must be noted that aid is not a requisite for development but it encourages dependency, laziness and underdevelopment. Therefore, channeling aid through NGOs is an effective way of crippling any nation's economy (ibid). It is therefore the argument by several critics that sanctions are carefully targeted not to hurt ordinary citizens but are directed towards specific individuals and specific government entities or private corporations linked to the selected individuals. Some dismiss the sanctions mantra as the main reason for the economic collapse of Zimbabwe by seeing it as a scapegoat and knee-jerk for the ruling elite to cover up for corruption since the imposition of sanctions on a few individuals cannot justify the existing economic meltdown Zimbabwe has undergone through the years.

In Section 4 of ZIDERA, the United States Treasury directs its executive director to multilateral development Banks and IMF to vote against any extension by that institution any of loan, credit or guarantee to the government of Zimbabwe. The US also instructs its executive directors to the multilateral development banks and IMF to vote against any cancellation or reduction of indebtedness owed by the Government of Zimbabwe to the United States or any financial institution. This clause of ZIDERA is clear evidence that the sanctions against Zimbabwe are not as targeted as they are always said to be.

This is the clause that hinders the Government of Zimbabwe from accessing development funds from multilateral institutions thereby bringing the economy to its knees. As a result of ZIDERA, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the WB and the African Development Bank (ADB) cannot extend loans or credit guarantee to the Zimbabwean government without the approval of the United States (US) President (Chingono 2010: 5). Any loan application efforts made to IMF, WB or the ADB by the Zimbabwean government have been opposed and thwarted directly or indirectly by the US. Blocking the Zimbabwean government from accessing loans from IMF, WB or ADB is tantamount to crippling its economy and the blockage does not have direct impact on the so called targeted individuals and corporations on the sanctions list. This writer argues that though the sanctions are named and said to be targeted to a few individuals, they were and are meant to cripple the Zimbabwean economy.

Taking ZIDERA into cognizance, the imposition of sanctions on Zimbabwe has economic implications that have contributed to economic meltdown. Without assistance from financial institutions, constraints are exerted on a government that was traditionally dependent on foreign assistance especially after the adoption of the disastrous Structural Adjustment Programs in the 1990s which crippled Zimbabwe's economy⁵. Furthermore, the sudden suspension of direct budgetary support to the government undoubtedly had a devastating impact on Zimbabwe. This culminated into a social services crisis which worsened the plight of an already burdened government. Even if the main aim of the sanctions was to assist ordinary Zimbabweans in the quest for a democratic change and the attainment of sustainable socio-economic growth and development, the sanctions precipitated economic collapse and caused immense suffering to the majority of Zimbabweans. In this regard, sanctions reinforced or gave birth to other factors that catalyzed the economic collapse of Zimbabwe. These issues included the issue of corruption. Sanctions can plunge a nation into a chaos ridden and an ungovernable state.

3. CORRUPTION

Corruption has been largely blamed for the economic turmoil unfolding in Zimbabwe. Looting and plundering of resources by

⁵ SAPs – Abbreviation for Structural Adjustment Programmes

political elites is a form of corruption that has crippled the economy. Corruption is behavior which deviates from the normal duties of a public role because of private- regarding pecuniary or status gains (Nye 1967:419). Corruption and large scale looting, plundering, misuse of resources and gains derived from natural resources extraction continue unchecked at the expense of the state and the masses. Proceeds realized from natural resources have been swindled and embezzled into private accounts for personal gains by a few influential elites. The pillaging or looting and plunder of the widely-talked-about Marange diamonds revenues by the ruling elite which saw the disappearance of an estimated US\$15 billion is testimony to the level of corruption in Zimbabwe (Magaisa, 2016). The accountability of the US\$15 billion diamond proceeds has until to-date remained a mystery. The disappearance of the US\$15 billion occurred at a time when the government was implementing an economic development plan in the form of ZIMASSET⁶, which was aimed at harnessing all natural resources for Zimbabwe's economic transformation (Wini-Dari and Hamauswa, 2016). Accountability is the basis of democracy, economic growth and a fundamental principle of a government and society (Brin, 1998). This proves that corruption is also the cancer killing Zimbabwe's economy just as sanctions because assuming such vast amounts of dollars are channeled towards development, the economy would be flourishing. Of interest is the fact that Zimbabwe is ranked 160 of the 175 nations on Transparency International's corruption list (Transparency International, 2018). On another dimension, the government seem to have thus turned a blind eye to ongoing corruption and economic mismanagement which is benefitting the politically connected elites, crippling the economy and chooses to name sanctions as the root cause of the nation's economic woes. Those who oppose the government say that sanctions are not responsible for the economic collapse of the nation but corruption is. However, this writer posits that both sanctions and corruption are equally responsible for the economic collapse of Zimbabwe because the two are inseparable. Corruption is factor that also led to the imposition of sanctions but this writer can aptly say that sanctions also cause corruption because life has become difficult for the ordinary

⁶ ZIMASSET - Abbreviation - Zimbabwe Agenda for Sustainable Socio-Economic Transformation It was an economic policy which was adopted by the Zimbabwean government in 2013.

people due to sanctions. The few who are able to smuggle necessities profiteer from the price inflation of goods and services at the expense of the suffering masses. However, middle to lower level corruption may not be detected or publicized but it is very rampant.

Embezzlement of state funds cannot be overlooked as another corrupt factor contributing to economic problems. This has contributed to economic woes in Zimbabwe since funds set aside for development purposes are diverted for personal benefit. Externalization of funds, leaking of forex from Treasury and diverting state funds to supply the parallel market making the few politically connected very rich at the expense of the majority. Most common examples include that of former Minister of Finance, Chris Karuneri, who embezzled one hundred and fifty million United States dollars from the state treasury between 2002 and 2004 while the state was in dire need of foreign currency for national development (newzimbabwe.com 2008). Such corrupt tendencies resonate well with Tizor (2009), whose views are that bureaucrats in Zimbabwe have turned public offices into a personal money generating machines. State funds intended for developing infrastructure which boosts economic growth was diverted to personal accounts derails economic progress and usually creates more havoc. For example, the Tokwe-Mukosi dam construction project demonstrates high levels of corruption by government officials which later became a national burden and strain to the state budget. Funds meant for the construction of the Tokwe-Mukosi Dam were embezzled through by government officials within the Zimbabwe National Water Authority (ZINWA). Resultantly, the Italian company (Salini Construtorri) with the expertise for dam construction terminated the contract due to non-remission of funds (Hove, 2016). Local subcontractors without the expertise were awarded the tender and failed to deliver leading to the partial collapse of the Tokwe-Mukosi Dam Wall in 2014 as a result of floods affecting over 60,000 people (Hove, 2016). This shows the extent to which embezzlement of funds affects the development of a nation. Corruption advances into the future, problems which strain the economy and may be difficult to contain.

Nepotism and homeboyism are a form of corruption prevalent in Zimbabwe which has caused further harm to the ailing economy⁷. The allocation of debt guarantees and tenders based on cronyism is rampant in Zimbabwe. A notable example is the RG Mugabe International Airport (Also known as Harare International Airport) scandal in which Leo Mugabe (late former President Robert Mugabe's nephew) and his company named Hazy Investments were implicated in nepotistic bidding for the new airport tender in 2001 (The Standard 13 November 2019). Most contracts acquired through corrupt bids normally lack the technical capacity for a satisfactory and efficient completion of projects, hence unreliable projects are handed over to the public (Munyae and Gwen 1999:64). Huge sums of funds are channeled into individuals' pockets at the expense of the state while the economy continues to bleed. Similarly, in 2016, an American firm won the tender for the construction of the Dema Power station but the government cancelled the contract and awarded it to Sakunda holdings which had not even placed a bid (Nyoni, 2017). Such corrupt tendencies damage a nation's reputation and drives away potential investors. Credible investors are a pillar to economic recovery but they are deterred from investing in Zimbabwe by such tendencies. Sanctions are thus a convenient gate away for a corrupt government destroying its own economy through corruption. In this regard, some can conclude that Zimbabwe's economic challenges have little to do with sanctions, but are also associated with corruption. However, there are other factors that are at play in Zimbabwe.

Failure to uphold the rule of law by the ruling elite and the politically connected has exacerbated the flourishing of corrupt tendencies which have led to the crippling the economy in Zimbabwe. Senior government officials and the politically connected seem immune to prosecution owing to politicized judicial institutions. Politicization of judicial institutions by the ruling party has affected the autonomous discharging of duties by judicial institutions. The politicization of public institutions builds a culture that destroys the rule of law subsequently creating a conducive environment for corruption to breed. Political figures flex their muscle over judicial

⁷ This writer defines homeboyism as the awarding of positions (in government or private entities) to individuals who hail from the same place as the awarding person(s) or authority.

-According to UNDP, 2009, Nepotism is the granting of positions and or benefits to relatives or friends regardless of their abilities.

institutions to protect themselves and their corrupt allies. In 2016, former Vice President Phelekezela Mphoko ordered the police to release former ZINARA officials who were arrested on allegations of defrauding the parastatal of USD1,3 million (Nyoni, 2017). Such abuse of office and failure to observe the rule of law and unconstitutionality has affected the justice system and this has caused the failure to address corruption in Zimbabwe. Corruption scandals are reported through newspapers or whistleblowers but the cases just end there. Since the 1980s, Zimbabwe has endured one major corruption scandal after the other, all benefiting the ruling elite but no single official has been held accountable (Nyarota, 2006). The Willowgate scandal in which high profile political leaders were involved in grand corruption but managed to escape censure demonstrates how the legal system has been guarded by those in power since independence in Zimbabwe. Corruption scandals go unpunished while they are contributing to destroying the ailing economy. The absence of the rule of law to punish such behavior has made corruption the catalyst for the economic demise of Zimbabwe. The absence of the rule of law has aggravated corruption since the ruling elite and their allies are guaranteed immunity from persecution no matter how guilty they may be (Nicholls et al, 2006). This has caused the opposition to conclude that whoever is associated with ZANU PF is corrupt leading to polarity. Some members of ZANU PF are not corrupt whilst even some members of the opposition MDC party are also corrupt.

4. POLARIZATION

It is however improper to tag sanctions and corruption as the only root causes of Zimbabwe's economic woes. Polarization is another aspect that is causing the economic collapse of Zimbabwe. Jensen et al (2012) points several influencers or causer factors which led to political polarization. The referee explains that polarization may be a result of ideas that are spread by influential persons who may be public intellectuals, media or even churches. The greatest medium for polarization in Zimbabwe is the media, especially the electronic media. *"The travails of traditional media and the rise of overtly partisan outlets seem intimately linked to the growth of the internet"*,

as Gentzkow (2020) puts it with reference to polarization in the United States. This writer shall also call it parallelism⁸.

On the 20th of October 2013, Desmond Kumbuka reported that then Minister of Information and Broadcasting Services Professor Jonathan Moyo called for an end to “... *blatant media polarization...*” which had become the norm in Zimbabwe (the Standard 2013). The newspaper explained that the minister was referring to an undeclared war between different media entities which took conflicting positions as far as governance and democracy are concerned in Zimbabwe. The State media supports the ideological stance of the ruling party and government while suppressing opposition views and the independent media took an anti-government and pro opposition stance.

Barber and McCarty (2012) explain some of the causes of polarization in the United States. These include lack of cross partisan norms, intra-party changes and shuffling, party directives and majority rulership among others. Zimbabwe is no exception as far as these causes are concerned. This is evidenced by the rate and extend of factionalism in both the ruling ZANU PF and opposition MDC parties. Factionalism is a factor that breeds polarity in politics. The Zimbabwe Situation of April 3 2014 reports that factionalism is a phenomenon which is a characteristic of all political parties in Zimbabwe. The Daily News of November 5 2019 reported about the growing fissures in the opposition MDC in Masvingo Province.

The issue of factionalism in Zimbabwe often leads to divisions which often become centers of parallelism. Tribalism is also another aspect that leads to polarity or parallelism in Zimbabwe. “*Sharp partisan divisions are at the center of every committee vote, every regulatory action, every judicial appointment in Washington.*” (Gentzkow M 2020). Zimbabwe is also no exception as far as this issue is concerned. Concerns rose by the Movement for Democratic Party legislators and dismissive answers by government ministers shows that there is serious polarization in the Zimbabwean parliament (thezimbabwesituation.com). It is said that legislators from the ruling ZANU PF and MDC parties spoke past each other and ignore important concerns raised by the other (ibid). All raised concerns run parallel and they never meet. This is evidence of the

⁸ This writer defines parallelism as a situation whereby the ideas brought forward by one party or entity, no matter how good they maybe are met with fierce opposition from the opposing party or entity.

presence of polarization in the Zimbabwean parliament. The issue of polarity is also seen when the ruling ZANU PF members of Parliament disrupted the Biti (MDC Vice President) led PAC hearings ahead of the Sakunda hearing due to the fact that the MDC is not recognizing President Mnangagwa as the legitimate President of Zimbabwe⁹. This comes after the MDC legislators walked out of events that were attended by President Mnangagwa. All these activities affect the economic wellbeing of the nation since no investor would invest in a country which is laden with political uncertainty because of polarity.

Social polarity was witnessed after the emergence of the black and parallel markets in 2002 according to Masamha P in the Zimbabwe Independent of 31 March 2019. This scenario emerged just after the imposition of sanction on Zimbabwe. Be that may, these two markets ran parallel to the official bank and supermarkets where forex and commodities should be bought respectively. Sanctions and corruption caused the scarcity of forex and commodities and the emergence of the black market. It is interesting to note that black markets flourish in countries that are under sanctions such as Iran and Venezuela (ibid). The aspect of polarity comes in when Zimbabweans collectively chose to keep their foreign currency in their homes than depositing it in the banks and also choosing to buy the foreign currency from the black market than from the banks which do not have. The same scenario is also when the people chose to buy cheap basic commodities from the physical goods parallel market than from the formal and legal outlets which are expensive. This involuntarily induces polarity in the nation because of lack of trust in the government. *“As a starting point, the Zimbabwean physical goods parallel markets are triggered mainly by the various economic cycles that the country has gone through”* according to The Zimbabwe Independent of March 31, 2019. The aspect of polarization or parallelism in Zimbabwe is another factor that is responsible for the economic collapse of the nation.

As long as the ordinary citizens and the legislators are engaged in polarity in its various forms, there will be never be economic development because party and personal agendas will take precedence before the national agenda. The opposition accuses the ruling party of being undemocratic, corruption, elections violence and

⁹ PAC - Abbreviation of Public Accounts Committee.

failure to uphold the rule of law among others which are some of the reasons for the imposition of sanctions. This automatically aligns the opposition MDC with the west and the US. This issue led to parliamentary and social parallelism and political polarity between the ruling party and opposition. This also led to the failure of good fiscal policies and programs like ZIMASSET, indigenization among others which will be viewed with political or social eyes instead of viewing it from the national dimension. The ruling party insists on de-dollarizing the economy whilst the MDC insists on re-dollarizing. The government then re-dollarized because of the COVID-19 epidemic. Instead of the two parties coming together to discuss what is best for the country they take parallel sides which will never meet. Even in the advent of the COVID-19 epidemic, the ruling party and the opposition tried to fight the epidemic from different fronts through party awareness programs thereby furthering the aspect of polarity.

Sanctions are responsible for the economic collapse of Zimbabwe as they have denied the nation of the much needed foreign direct investment and intergovernmental aid. Assets and funds that belonged to Zimbabwe in European Union member states and the United States were frozen thereby affecting the Zimbabwean government businesses abroad. Zimbabwe's access to funds and loans from international multilateral financial institutions are always being blocked by the US through ZIDERA. This caused an increase in debt interest rates thereby also affecting Zimbabwe's ability to apply for loans.

5. CONCLUSION

This article discussed how economic sanctions, corruption and polarity have all contributed to the economic collapse of the Zimbabwean economy. Different examples were put forward to explain how the above factors relate and affect the economic wellbeing of Zimbabwe. The article posited that to label sanctions as the only factor that has affected the country will be inappropriate since corruption and political polarity have also contributed to the failure of the economy. However, SAPs and corruption scandals from the 1980s had already made the Zimbabwean economy fragile and ZIDERA exacerbated the plight of an already failing economy. There is overwhelming evidence that over the years the Zimbabwean government has plundered and mismanaged funds and resources contributing to the on-going

economic turmoil. Corruption in all its forms is the cancer that has over the years eaten into the national economic fabric. Corruption, aided by the politicization of public institutions and the absence of the rule of law has enabled the ruling elite and the politically connected to destroy the economy. To cover up for corruption and the government has persistently pointed fingers at sanctions imposed on Zimbabwe as the root cause of economic collapse thereby ignoring the impact of corruption and polarization. Sanctions have been regarded as targeted or smart in nature whilst nepotism, abuse of office and nepotism has been explained as some of the forms of corruption that has affected Zimbabwe. The forms of polarity or parallelism which are social, economic and political in nature have been explained. Sanctions, political polarity and corruption are an interrelated tripod stand that caused economic decadence in Zimbabwe and they are all equally responsible for the economic meltdown of the economy. Corruption begets sanctions, sanctions beget and reinforce corruption, sanctions beget polarity and they all lead to economic collapse.

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