

Promoting Good Governance in Crisis Ridden Country: The Zimbabwean Dilemma in the 21st Century

Torque Mude¹
Percyslage Chigora¹

Abstract

Zimbabwe has been in a serious political and socio-economic crisis since 2000. Arguably, the major cause of crisis is attributed to Western induced sanctions following the fast track land reform programme in June 2000. By 2008 agriculture had crumpled, and inflation had reached astronomical levels, violence intensified in the run –up to elections 2000-2008, while the health and education systems had almost collapsed. Despite the setback, the government didn't collapse. Methodologically, anyone attempting to understand 21st century Zimbabwe has to be equipped with a number of research methods that complement each other if a comprehensive grasp of issues pertaining to governance and development has to be found. This is so given the politicisation and to a larger extent of personification of the crisis. Among other research methods participant observation is the key to this research though with limits to the level of one's involvement especially as it pertains to access to principal actors and documents that are supposed to be state secrets. Of importance is the review of literature on Zimbabwe as it pertains to the crisis. The focus of the paper is premised on how and with what level of success good governance has been promoted by civil society, business and the state itself during this period. Furthermore, it examines how far the inclusive government has gone in promoting good governance in a bid to ward off the crisis. The paper looks into how the ideologies of inclusiveness, shared–government, shared –responsibility and shared prosperity go to meet the nation of good governance. At most how applicable is the concept of good governance in a state hit by a crisis affecting all spheres of life, i.e political, economic, and societal.

Introduction

Zimbabwe entered the 21st century with contestations concerning governance issues with reports on the lack of the rule of law, accountability, transparency and overall failure of observing democratic principles dominating the development discourse. Blame has been put on the Mugabe's regime and the ruling party Zimbabwe African National Union Patriotic Front (ZANU PF) that has been at the apex of decision making institutions. Emerging has been the intensification of contestation for political space with the emergence of a worker based political party, the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC). The interaction of these major political gladiators at national level brought significant changes in Zimbabwe's political system with an ultimate negative consequence to development. The research will investigate the extent to which these political actors have major drivers to the decline of good governance.

¹ Torque Mude and Percyslage Chigora are lecturers of Political Science, International Relations in the Department of Politics and Public Management, Midlands State University, Private Bag 9055, Gweru, Republic of Zimbabwe

Following the no-vote against the proposed new constitution in June 2000, black Zimbabweans who had been eagerly waiting for land began large scale invasion of white –owned commercial farms. The move which was spear-headed by war “veteran of Zimbabwean’s war of liberation came to be dubbed the fast –track land reform programme. The affected commercial farmers together with their backers from countries such as Australia, New Zealand and Britain were quite frustrated by the whole process. Consequently, sanctions were imposed on the Zimbabwe government led by the Zimbabwe Union African National Patriotic Front (ZANU PF). Deteriorating relations with the west, failure by new farmers to produce abundantly and ecological misfortunes drove the country deeper into a crisis. To compound the situation, the good performance of the opposition Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) in both the parliamentary and presidential elections posed completely new political challenges which the ruling party had not experienced from independence in 1980. Increased levels of violence prior to the 2000 elections and thereafter was interpreted by some African countries and the North that indeed there was a crisis.

The paper argues that the March 2008 elections were held in an atmosphere of relative peace signifying semblances of democratic governance. However, the announcement of election results and the subsequent run-off left to be desired. The election results were announced after close to a month from the election date. Transparency and accountability on the part of Zimbabwe Electoral commission (ZEC) lacked. It is believed that ZEC was taking orders from the army, secret service and high profile politicians from ZANU PF. Chances are very high that the figures which were released were cooked and massaged by ZANU PF whom many believe had lost to the MDC. In spite of all that, there was good will on the part of the ruling and the opposition parties to negotiate and bring the country which had almost collapsed back to it’s knees. On the other hand, good governance has to be democratic. By implication, democratic governance refers to the manner in which institutions of democracy are operated. Finally good democratic governance entails effectiveness, transparency and accountability way in which these institutions are operated. Owing to their willingness on inclusive government was eventually formed at the beginning of 2009. It is the intension of the paper to examine prospects of institutions which are accountably effective and efficient, participatory, transparent, responsive, consensus-oriented and equitable .Such is the requirement because where there is good governance, citizens participate in decision making process.

Background to Governance in Zimbabwe

Although the term governance was not widely used in Zimbabwe before the year 2000, it was all the same an operational term. Owing to bad governance the African population rose against the colonial in the liberation war. The coming of independence was generally thought to herald the end of colonial exploitation and brings good governance. According to the Oxford Dictionary governance refers to the manner of governing.

For purposes of this paper, to govern is taken to mean ruling a country .Put in other words, governance is the manner in which a country is ruled by those in authority, in this case politicians. The focus is therefore on the presidency, cabinet and generally leading politicians. Jenkins (2002) recently defined governance as the prevailing patterns by which public power is exercised in a given social control.

In colonial Zimbabwe, people had a rough idea of the kind of government they wanted. Although they did not use the word governance in most cases, what they disliked was clear. They disliked racial discrimination in areas such as land, education, taxation, employment and health .Such issues are detailed by Phillis Johnson and David Martin in their 1981 book.

Reaction to bad governance also made itself explicit in the several strike at the University of Rhodesian and Nyasaland against specific pieces of Legislation which students felt were draconian and promoted racial disharmony. Several stakeholders also openly and privately challenged Zimbabwean the government on issues of governance .The Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace in Rhodesia lobbied the state to promote good governance by publishing voices of African people of Rhodesian in the Moto magazine which was subsequently banned on 12 November 1974.

In fact the government became so heavy-handed such that several missionaries were departed from the country on the grounds that they were collaborating with nationalists .Some were even grossly murdered as evidenced by the killing of missionaries at St Paul's' Musani Missions. The Post –colonial government did attempt to correct colonial evils but still it's mode of governance raised more questions than answers. Following violent clashes between the ruling ZANU-PF party and PF-ZAPU from 1982-1987, a unity accord was eventually signed on 22 December 1987. It marked the end of ZAPU. Through this gesture, relative peace eventually came to the Provinces of Matebeland North, South and Midlands. The absorption of PF-ZAPU indicated for a brief period the end of multi-partism which is viewed as a requirement for both democracy and good governance.

Civil Society groups including the CCJPZ continued to act as watchdogs but were increasingly being rebuffed because of its displeasure to the violent and unconstitutional means of suppressing activities of dissidents in the Midlands and Matabeleland provinces. In the 1990, pressure for multi-partism intensified seeing the emergence of small political parties which did not win in the subsequent elections. Leaders of these parties were reticules but most importantly they kicked what it required to be reputable politicians.

Contending Governance issues in the 21st Century

The term governance came into widespread use in the 1990s not only in Zimbabwe but all over the world following the collapse of the Soviet Union .This time around, good governance was promoted by governmental and non-governmental development agencies which sought to operationalise the term by restructuring state bureaucracies, reforming legal systems, supporting democratic decentralization and creating accountability enhancing civil societies. The identified groups took good governance to mean any mode of public decision making that helped to advance human welfare, however conceived. In fact, good governance was closely attached to aid .That way therefore, it was an intrusion into the affairs of aid receiving countries .Even to date, there are externally funded agencies which probe the finances of leading politicians and sometimes even restructure courts all in the name of good governance .Corruption has also been added to the aid has been used to create a type of Civil Society Organisation (CSO) that would check on the power of government without taking it. Events in Africa however indicate that CSO are sometimes bent on taking over power .An NGO leader funded by Americans seized power in Burundi in 1996.

In Zimbabwe, Mike Auret, the former Bulawayo Agenda Director of CCJP ended up as an opposition MP while G Moyo is now the Minister of State in the Prime –Minister's office. Such developments sour relations between the state and CSO in a supposed joint venture to promote good governance.

Development assistance has been denied to Zimbabwe over the past decade on the grounds that governance is bad .The state did promote elements that indicate its commitment to good governance .In 2000, the government gave in to people's pressure for a new constitution .More than 100 CSOs joined hands under the leadership of the National Constitutional Assembly (NCA).All this was done to deepen democratization .Setting a crisis of governance, the National Working People's Convention

On the other hand, good governance has to be democratic. By implication, democratic governance refers to the manner in which institutions of democracy are operated. Finally good democratic governance entails effectiveness, transparency and accountability way in which these institutions are operated. Agreed that there was a crisis of governance in Zimbabwe and ZCTU was given the mandate to transform itself into a political party. That alone indicates that 21st century Zimbabwe had space to allow those who wanted to challenge the state to do so openly.

Zimbabwe also promoted good governance by complying with the SADC guidelines on elections in 2005 and also March 2008. In December 2004, the country's bipartisan parliament passed the electoral Commission Act and the electoral Act both which came into force on 21 January 2005. Thabo Mbeki even pointed out that Zimbabwe was a step ahead of other SADC countries in terms of codifying the SADC standards.

The 2005 election was however marred by violence, intimidation and all sorts of ugly acts particularly perpetuated by the ruling party. However, the March 2008 election was peaceful and fair. However, delays in the announcement of election results and divergent views of politicians indicated movement away from democratic governance. It is still debatable whether or not the March 2008 elections did not produce the people will.

The current inclusive government has greatly improved Zimbabwe in terms of governance issues. The president currently does not enjoy excessive powers which he had in previous dispensations. Currently he shares some of his powers with the Prime Minister. The current set-up gives the Prime Minister some powers taken from the president. Of late, hate speeches have come to an end. The Prime Minister and the president attend national events jointly. They were together in March at the burial of the late General Vitalis Zvinavashe. Furthermore they attended independence celebrations together. All this is indicative of the fact that national healing has somehow been achieved. It is a central component to good governance. However, the sustenance of the inclusive government remains to be assessed. Good governance comes through a good constitution. Zimbabwe still uses the Lancaster House Constitution which has been amended nineteen times. The recent constitutional making process has shown that people full need to be involved. Civil society groups have insisted that the contents of the Kariba Draft become public knowledge. Although there is no clear manner in which the populace has been directly involved, it seems that the move is on course.

The obtaining situation in Zimbabwe has been that of accusations and counter accusation on the obtaining crisis emerging from almost all quarters of life, i.e. media, academia, political and civil society leaders, and the general populace. The media has played a dominant role in many African countries in quest to promote democratic processes. (Nyamnjoh, 2005). The Zimbabwean situation depicts a fragmented media platform with government controlled media presenting defense for the government (Wagdhal, 2004) with other private domestic and international media obtaining as the staunch critics and providing the mouth piece for opposition political parties and civil society organisations that were anti government. (Chigora, 2008c). This division based on political affiliation or sympathy has been noticeable in almost all sections of human grouping with others for and others against. Undeniably, polarization that has existed in Zimbabwe and the international community has taken toll of Zimbabwe's development and the loss of good governance principles and institution.

In it the actors in Zimbabwean politics have found scapegoats on unfolding events that depicts the total lack of good governance. The research locates actors involved in the lack of good governance and subsequent promotion of good governance. In essence the research exposes the involvement of not only local actors in Zimbabwe's national body politic but also the involvement of other international actors (regional, continental and the wider international community). Identifiable in Zimbabwe are the political leaders, civil society groups, non-governmental organisation, and individuals with their varied motivations. (Chigora, 2007a).

Internationally, there has been reluctance by some actors in the promotion of good governance notably through policies that were geared towards propping up the Mugabe's regime or punishing the regime leading to backlash by the political leadership as they struggled for their survival. (Chigora 2008 a, b; 2006a, 2007b,). Since the inception of the fast track land reform program which frustrated the influential members of the international community, dire efforts were made to frustrate, isolate, discredit and overthrow the ruling political leadership in the country. This have had negative effects on governance in Zimbabwe as the political leadership were prompted to resort to politic of survival rather than politics of good governance.

The lack of development in Zimbabwe has been blamed on the lack of good governance. The research interrogates the relationship between lack of good governance and the subsequent lack of development in Zimbabwe. Obtaining on the ground is the prevalence of a number of factors which are directly linked to crisis in governance in Zimbabwe. Political and socio-economic development are manifestly lacking in the country. Poor service delivery coupled by economic down since 2000 are symptoms of lack of development in the socio-economic sphere. High unemployment rate, inflation and deteriorating education and health standards are other signs of lack of economic development. Political instability compounded by political bickering between ZANU PF and MDC are undoubtedly signs of lack of political development which combined together with socio-economic turmoil are a recipe for bad governance. Political instability leads to poor service delivery, hence bad governance.

Besides the outlined environment pertaining to governance, historical processes in Zimbabwe's development has to be looked at very closely in order to fully comprehend the dilemma of development. Nature of Zimbabwe's colonial history, how Zimbabwe's independence and the subsequent government policies has a strong influence on what is obtaining in Zimbabwe in the 21st century. In essence, it has to be noted that development in Africa's former settler colonies cannot be removed from trajectories of colonialism and the subsequent alienation of land and designation of policies and laws that favored the colonialist and its subsequent beneficiaries.

The theory and practice of good governance requires further exploration when it comes to Zimbabwe. The research examines the gap between what is and how things ought to be. An analysis of the environment that is conducive for the attainment of good governance has to be provided. Pre-occupation has been on understanding who is leading Zimbabwe, how can his/her power base be reduced for the attainment of democracy and overall achievement of accountability, the rule of law, and transparency. In essence that has had a negative effect as the target has to formulate means and strategies embraced in some democratic principles to ensure self survival and protection on one hand and negatively affecting the manipulation of political system.

The Future of Governance in Zimbabwe

As the future of good governance in Zimbabwe hangs in balance, the envisaged Government of National Unity (GNU) has been the source of hope for some Zimbabweans and some sections of the international community. Others still think any regime under Mugabe's leadership cannot lead the country on a development path and the return to good governance. The research will interrogate the extent to which aspects of development and good governance for Zimbabwe are depended on a single individual. Further the research will examine actors that are central to the achievement of good governance in Zimbabwe that includes: at national level; individual citizens, private and public organisations, civil society and non-governmental organisations: at international level; donor countries and institutions, and international non-governmental organisation. A progressive move towards development in Zimbabwe has to be achieved with an end to political bickering that has dominated both the domestic body politic and international community. This is depend very much on how much well African states design policies that negotiate the delicate balance between public interest and private concerns.

Conclusion

As the research demonstrates good governance is a noble concept in theory its tenets can be measured in a given polity and deductions can be made on whether a polity practice it or not. But as the Zimbabwean case demonstrates it is easier to pick those aspects to denigrate the system. However a deeper analysis of issues reveals that aspects of governance are embedded in the historical settings of a polity and blaming bad governance for the occurrence of a crisis in Zimbabwe becomes void and involves crude reductionism. In comprehending the crisis in Zimbabwe one has to take cogniscance of the historical, personal, regional, and international factors that are at play in the polity rather than assigning the blame to one research variable of good governance.

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