ZIMBABWE: LAND, IDENTITY, AND POWER

GLOBAL CRISIS SOLUTIONS

INTERNAL POSITION PAPER

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Global Crisis Solutions is a consulting group of preparedness, humanitarian, conflict and recovery specialists. We offer rapid response capacity and strategic planning strengths that position us as the most effective partner in any crisis. As an agency we are changing to face the realities of the social, policy, political and environmental processes that have brought about increasing poverty in the world.

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Summary
Zimbabwe is currently facing numerous socio-economic crises. The destabilization of its agricultural sector, has resulted in food insecurity, unemployment (currently at over 70%), inflation (as of April 2004 at over 584%), and deteriorating social services.¹ The past decade has seen the country move from its place as Africa’s bread basket to a nation where over half the population is dependent on food from external sources.² This environment has been caused by a combination of political and economic factors, at the center of which are a struggle for control of land and the political manipulation of this struggle.

Land has played a critical role in the last 200 years of Zimbabwe’s history. With the beginning of European settlement in 1890 came policies that marginalized Africans, forced them into wage labor, and displaced them onto infertile settlements. Decade of oppression gave rise to a liberation movement in the 1960s that called for repossession of land and independence from white minority rule. With independence in 1980 the country faced challenges to:

- Resettle indigenous Africans;
- Maintain Zimbabwe’s agricultural output (for both internal and external consumption);
- Ensure a stable and growing economy; and
- Create an inclusive social environment.

Post-independence land reform was key to many of these challenges and together with the British government, the Zimbabwean administration lay in place frameworks for land reallocation. These processes however, did not fulfill expectations. Their execution was riddled with poor management, opacity, inadequate funding, and corruption.

When political opposition against President Mugabe’s rule began to mount in the late 1990s, he placed land reform at the center of his agenda. However, his brand of reform diverged from previous processes. He called for radical ownership change through forced and uncompensated acquisition of land owned by white farmers. In so doing, he consolidated his power among rural peasants—many of whom were to be rewarded for their contribution to independence.

The international community reacted sharply to the forced takeovers. Mugabe used racially divisive rhetoric, accusing developed nations, especially Britain, of being imperialist and hypocritical. Domestically, this language and associated actions increased in frequency as the 2002 elections drew close. It fuelled takeovers and caused insecurity among white farmers. Many emigrated while those that remained reduced their agricultural output.

Since the 2002 elections, which Mugabe won through unfair methods, the political and economic environment has deteriorated. Zimbabwe faces intermittent food shortages, economic decline, isolation from the international community, threat of chronic authoritarianism, and the social division.
Given current trends, *Global Crisis Solutions* recommends the following actions for the government of Zimbabwe, civil society organizations, and the international community:

**Land reform**
- Create a transparent framework that reviews past allocations, redresses outstanding issues, and lays a path for future reallocations. This framework would be based on an international, national, and/or community-based dispute resolution mechanism accepted by Zimbabweans.
- Assess the economic feasibility of reallocation (costs of smaller parcels, adjusted production levels) and identify sources of funding to cover costs.
- Examine all aspects of land reallocation in a comprehensive and multi-dimensional fashion (for example, adequate compensation, funding, and training for new farmers).

**Food security:**
- Create a sustainable food security strategy even as Zimbabwe resolves land reform.
- Allow the unhindered access of humanitarian support to the vulnerable communities of Zimbabwe.
- Facilitate the coordination of humanitarian aid efforts.
- Recognize and support social protection responses as a food security option.

**Institution Building:**
- The international community and the democratic community within Zimbabwe must continue highlighting the disintegration of rights and political progress.
- African leadership, especially in the Southern African region should take on and aggressively engage Mugabe through mediatory or economic action and urge him to follow democratic principles. “Business as usual is no longer acceptable”

**Social Conflict:**
- Promote open discourse on Zimbabwe’s history and its effect on the present. This may include community dialogues on race and land or joint projects between groups, which may result in reframing the image of the country.
- Outlaw and eliminate rhetoric that promotes racial and ethnic division.
Zimbabwe’s historical narrative is built on a foundation of racial exclusion, oppression, and struggle. Like much of Africa at the turn of the 19th century, Zimbabwe faced an influx of European settlers and commercialists eager to profit from the continent’s resources. Southern Rhodesia, as it was then called, grew as a by-product of mining development in South Africa. Speculators envisioned it as a mining center to rival those further south. However, extracting Southern Rhodesia’s mineral deposits (gold, copper, nickel and chromium among others) was not cost-effective. In the wake of this realization came the development of large-scale farming and Europeans and white South Africans were lured to Southern Rhodesia to develop its agricultural sector. Between 1904 and 1911, the number of white farmers had more than doubled to 1,324. By 1931, the white population stood at 50,000.3

Settlement was facilitated by a colonial administration that provided support in the form of loans and training. The ownership and exploitation of land was at the center of the administrations policies; indeed their agenda rested firmly in ensuring white dominance of the agricultural sector. They made land available at low prices, evicting Africans from their homes in the process—primarily those located in arable areas—relocating them in low-lying unproductive areas. White farmers lobbied for policies that hindered black commercial farming to reduce competition and force Africans to seek jobs on white farms.
Land segregation was institutionalized in the Land Apportionment Act of 1930 which made it almost impossible for Africans to buy land adjacent to white farms. The Land Tenure Act of 1969 entrenched the 1930 legislation, by formally dividing the country’s land into two equal portions: 45 million acres each for the Africans and the whites whose populations at the time were approximately 5 million and 250,000 people, respectively.

The enactment of the Land Tenure Act was part of a hard-line shift in Southern Rhodesian politics. Four years previous, the white minority had announced the Unilateral Declaration of Independence under the rule of the Rhodesian Front’s President Ian Smith. The Rhodesian Front sought to move the country to a more separatist future. Although African agitation was crushed, with leaders being routinely arrested, a liberation movement was rising with two national organizations taking center stage: the Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU) and the Zimbabwe African People’s Union (ZAPU). ZANU took to military action especially in the rural areas.

The ownership of land was the dominant theme in this struggle, the Second Chimurenga. Land served as a battlefield as activist peasants boycotted dip-tanks, stole herds, and mutilated cattle. Guerillas politicized peasants, magnified their grievances and placed them in a national context of repression and exploitation. So important was this rhetoric that even in areas where peasants were coexisting with commercial farmers the guerillas contrived grievances to maintain the liberation narrative. The vicious guerilla war resulted in over 50,000 deaths.

However, even within what may have appeared as a cohesive national struggle there existed factions—mapped in an eerie premonition of political tensions to come—among the peasants and between the guerillas and the peasants. The guerilla leaders navigated these schisms throughout the war, holding out the promise of land reform as a post-independence certainty.

The dawn of majority rule in 1980, under the leadership of ZANU head Robert Mugabe, came with hope of resettlement for poor black Zimbabweans. The administration embarked on a journey to reallocate land while simultaneously maintaining the country’s economic infrastructure and agricultural output. Using frameworks negotiated prior to independence, the government initially used a willing-buyer/willing-seller reallocation model drawing on funds from the British government and its own coffers. Once the treaty expired in 1990, Zimbabwe switched to a compulsory acquisition model. Through this model the government identified areas that would be reallocated. The complexities of these models bureaucratically and logistically, resulted in the creation of what was dubbed the Fast Track process. Here, the Zimbabwean government identified over 9 million hectares for reallocation. This was in contrast to the original 5 million that was initially planned. This reallocation was to take place between July 2000 and December 2001.

Through the two decades of reallocation, the goals of reform changed, from compensating the dispossessed and war veterans to eradicating poverty and reducing congestion on communal reserves. In addition, the administration also began to build a black farming elite by opening up large-scale farming in the late 1980s.
While a significant amount of reallocations did occur, the manner in which those to be resettled were identified were often unclear. Intentionally or not, the land reallocation process bore a certain level of opacity. From the outset the goals of the government appears to have been ambiguous. One commentator stated that, “… the government continued to give political statements of intent by announcing agricultural revisions … but in reality the whites were co-opting government into their mainstream rather than vice-versa.” The results often fell short of expectations. Indeed, there was a lack of supply during the willing-buyer/willing-seller phase and there was a lack of financial support from the international community. Of the land originally planned to be purchased only 42% was acquired; only 43% of those who were going to be resettled were actually moved; and despite the efforts of the government to provide funds for bore holes, schools, and roads, these facilities were difficult to access and impractical for many because the relocated plots were spread apart.

Claimants to the land were divided on the issue. Peasants charged black politicians and the African elite with grabbing land for themselves. In some areas, peasants occupied the plots of elites only to be evicted, sometimes violently, by police. The veterans were also disgruntled due to the corrupt and inefficient compensation scheme. Many of the real war veterans did not get compensated. In addition, the peasants felt that war veterans were being excessively compensated. Indeed, they were receiving compensation packets that were a mix of training, money, and land. The land issue also combined with other tensions, for example in Matebeleland an insurgency retraced pre-independence rivalries (drawn on ethnic lines) between ZANU and ZAPU.

It seemed that Mugabe's government was caught between creating and ensuring a legitimate process, negotiating claims of peasants and war veterans, creating a dominant black force in the agricultural sector, all the while ensuring political stability and shoring support. Despite efforts, discontent was growing. In 1997, Mugabe promised a generous compensation package of Z$4 billion to veterans. This financial commitment strained an economy reeling from the implementation of International Monetary Funds Economic Structural Adjustment Programs from 1990 which increased unemployment and inflation. Between 1997 and 1999 GDP fell by over US$3000 million, while per capita income fell by over US$200 to US$439. The country was plunged into a financial crisis.
THE CO-OPTATION OF LAND

The late 1990s also saw mounting opposition to Mugabe’s rule. In an effort to consolidate a constituency and dilute rural opposition, Mugabe reframed land reform to suit his purposes. In a radical move, he created an environment that promoted a wild grab for land, condoning the forceful acquisition of land by war veterans (who had never been fully reintegrated or demilitarized). Mugabe garnered support among two key constituencies: rural peasants and war veterans.

In a relatively short period of time, Mugabe capitalized on the growing discontent over land reform. He simplified the issue by delineating two camps: those with the black African struggle for land and those against it. He isolated white Zimbabweans—and anyone who sided with them—identifying them as the enemy, vestiges of a racist and separatist past in which blacks were exploited. Those supporting white claims to land ownership threatened the economic and social interests of the black Zimbabwean. Mugabe employed the language of the liberation movement, appealing to a sizeable population both within and without Zimbabwe. His rhetoric successfully shifted attention away from his governance shortcomings, political ambitions, and the cronyism of reallocation towards a narrative of race and exclusion played out and remembered from the Chimurenga.

Insecurity rose among the farming community which saw itself under attack and with no government support. By 2001, 157 farms had been occupied. These occupations failed to benefit the nation economically as support for the farmers (for example, financial assistance and training) were ignored.

Outside Zimbabwe, the racialized approach struck a chord with nations ambiguous about Western power and the legacies of colonialism. There was a loud silence from African leaders. The Western press followed Mugabe’s lead, framing the issue as one of racial exclusion, highlighting the plight of white farmers.

As the 2002 general election approached, the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) rose as an organized and formidable political opponent to ZANU-PF. They decried the slipshod tactics that Mugabe had employed in land reform. In turn, Mugabe clamped down on opposition activities arresting leaders and followers alike. Foreign journalists were arrested, some kicked out of the country, resulting in a limited number of independent press outlets. Mugabe flew in the face of international convention, condemning his attackers, labeling them racist and hypocritical. MDC was seen as the favorite internationally. However, expectedly, the elections were marred by violence and reports of rigging. ZANU-PF won.

Since the elections Mugabe has tightened his hold on the country and continued his disregard for democratic political process. The existence of safe political spaces has deteriorated with the enforcement of the Public Order
and Security Act of 2002 which restricts public demonstrations and protests. A June 2003 report from Human Rights Watch outlined the increase in abuse by police and military personnel, especially against those known, or suspected, to be MDC followers. There are youth militias terrorizing those thought to be opposing Mugabe’s rule, peaceful demonstrations have been broken up, and there is legislation pending to further restrict the freedom of expression. The Zimbabwean government continues to create an environment of fear.

Mugabe has identified nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) as part of his opposition, stating that many are influenced by foreign donors with interests contrary to that of the country. This political paranoia has resulted in restriction on the work of many NGOs. Many are closely monitored, some have been kicked out of the country while others face threat from the government.

As Zimbabwe declines politically it also fares poorly economically. Since 2002, the levels of production on commercial farms have declined and foreign investment has been reduced to a trickle. In the past five years the Zimbabwean economy has contracted by 35%. This deterioration has been exacerbated by drought and reduced productivity due to the prevalence of HIV/AIDS and other communicable diseases. Zimbabwe can no longer feed its citizens: over half of its population receives food from extra-national sources. Prices of basic foodstuffs such as maize meal and bread increase daily, placing them out of reach of the average Zimbabwean.

In 2004 as in 1980, the government of Zimbabwe faces huge challenges to its political, economic, and social development. Again, land is playing the leading role. There is no doubt that land reform should and must occur. But, given how it has been manipulated in the recent past resolving it will be a complicated and messy affair.

As in every social environment, there are numerous conflicts in Zimbabwe. Social conflicts include those between the whites and the blacks, the rich and the poor, and the Shona and the Ndebele. Political conflicts include those between the MDC and ZANU-PF and Zimbabwe and the international community. The resources for which these conflicts are being waged vary from land, control over the economy, financial resources, political power, and sovereignty. Expectedly, the causes of conflict and the parties have overlapped. Some of these conflicts have remained non-violent while others have erupted. Unfortunately, this is all occurring within a failing humanitarian context. Mugabe’s continued isolationist stance has aggravated the provisions of food aid to Zimbabwe’s hungry citizenry.

Indeed, the discourse on land has birthed concerns—social and structural—that require as much scrutiny a land reform. Chief among these is the relationship between black and white Zimbabweans. The resentment on both sides runs deep. To ensure social stability, a process must be created that seeks to ameliorate the tension. At the
structural level, Mugabe has dismantled democratic mechanisms such as the right to free speech. This institutional breakdown must be addressed by the reinstatement of basic human rights and freedoms.

The tepidity with which African leaders have approached this topic may be linked to resource conflicts, current or looming, occurring within their own borders. The era of colonialism was very much a struggle for control of resources by Europeans, while the post-colonial period has seen countries face the dilemma of resource control and ownership. In many ways, the Zimbabwe land reform issue serves as a precedent for resource allocation conflicts in other part of Africa. Kenya and Malawi have faced this problem, while South Africa and Namibia will face it in the near future.

Zimbabwe provides an example of how stable economies can decline and how rhetoric can rapidly divide a community. Mugabe’s skill in maintaining political power lies in his ability to create enemies, define sides to a conflict, and take a potentially explosive issue and turn it to his advantage. It also emphasizes the inherent tension between international action and sovereignty and how the power of the latter can inhibit effective preventative action, both in the humanitarian and conflict arenas.

**MOVING FORWARD**

In light of this tumultuous history and ominous future, *Global Crisis Solutions* urges increased attention in the following areas: land ownership, social inclusion, institutional rebuilding, and food security. Unfortunately, many of the recommendations depend on political will. Given Mugabe’s actions over the past decade, it is unclear whether or not the tide of democratic and economic failure will change. However, with parliamentary elections in the coming year and general election in the next three years, the time is ripe for preventative action.

**LAND OWNERSHIP**

A cursory examination of colonial policies on land, labor, and resettlement reveal that they were designed to serve racist ends. The colonial administration deliberately and methodically institutionalized the exclusion of a group from resources that were rightfully theirs. It is not surprising, therefore, that reactions to these racist policies bear the strains of racial antagonism.

The attention given to this issue by all parties has focused on the treatment of racial groups in the present. The historical context has been subsumed in favor of a current exclusionary narrative. Domestically, Mugabe has done the reverse, tending to ignore the norms of the contemporary world. Two critical questions must be addressed: How should the injustice of land dispossession (both historical and recent) be addressed? And who is entitled to
own land in Zimbabwe? Without a thorough examination of these questions, land will remain a source for actual and perceived conflicts in the future.

The Zimbabwean government must candidly and comprehensively address land reform soon. Zimbabwe must create a solid and transparent framework for reform that examines past, present, and future concerns and that is both reconciliatory and preventive.

**Recommendations:**

- Create a transparent framework that reviews past allocations, redresses outstanding issues, and lays a path for future reallocations. This framework could be based on an international, national, and/or community-based dispute resolution mechanism accepted by Zimbabweans.
- Assess the economic feasibility of reallocation (costs of smaller parcels, estimated/adjusted production levels) and identify sources of funding to cover costs.
- Examine all aspects of land reallocation in a comprehensive and multi-dimensional fashion (for example, adequate compensation, funding, and training for new farmers).

**FOOD SECURITY**

Currently, 58% of Zimbabwe’s population depends on food from external sources. Between 2002 and 2004 the World Food Program distributed over 350,000 metric tons of food to 5 million people. Food-related health problems abound, with malnutrition currently at 38% of the population. Food in markets, when available, is often prohibitively expensive for the average Zimbabwean and the urban poor and displaced farmers are the hardest hit.

**Recommendations:**

- Create a sustainable food security strategy even as Zimbabwe resolves land reform.
- Allow the coordination of humanitarian aid efforts.

**INSTITUTIONAL REBUILDING: GOVERNANCE AND DEMOCRACY**

The last general elections provided evidence of poor governance in Zimbabwe. The failure of Mugabe’s administration to support free and fair elections indicated a greater interest in political ambition than in the rule of law. Mugabe has not reversed this trend since 2002; political opposition and activity are being stifled. Continued decline in governance will create conditions for the entrenchment of dictatorial and authoritarian rule.
In order to retain a culture of democracy Zimbabwe’s leadership must be urged to adopt a commitment to, and practice of, democratic principles and the entrenchment of democratic mechanisms.

**Recommendations:**

- The international community and democratic community within Zimbabwe must continue highlighting the disintegration of rights and political progress in Zimbabwe.
- The international community (especially regionally) must continue efforts to engage the Mugabe administration either through mediatory or economic action to urge it to follow democratic principles.

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**SOCIAL INCLUSION**

The rhetoric employed by the Mugabe administration has aggravated the racial and class divisions in Zimbabwe. Disparities between the whites and blacks and the poor and rich have been widening both culturally and economically. To date, the expression of this discontent may become more pervasive creating internal insecurity. Zimbabwe faces declining social cohesion which places it at the threat of implosion and internal conflict.

Zimbabwe must address its multicultural nature, even within its historical narrative of conflict. The threat of communal conflict must be arrested.

**Recommendations:**

- Promote open discourse on Zimbabwe’s history and its effect on the present. This may include community dialogues on race and land or joint projects between groups, which may result in reframing the image of the country.
- Outlaw and eliminate rhetoric that promotes racial and ethnic division.
GLOBAL CRISIS SOLUTIONS (GCS) IN ZIMBABWE

GCS’ position is that without urgent and comprehensive action, the political, economic, and humanitarian environment in Zimbabwe will disintegrate, placing it at greater susceptibility of internal conflict. Unfortunately, much of the hope for change lies in a national leadership that has the intent to improve. Given the governments’ current stand, GCS strongly urges regional and international leaders to continue to engage the Mugabe government to stabilize the government through democratic governance.

Given GCS’ remit, we will pursue the following seven-step plan to avert social conflict, further land reform, and prevent a humanitarian disaster:

1. **LAND REFORM:** Train conflict resolution specialists to help reconcile past land reform disputes. This may entail:
   - Training mediators at the village and district levels.
   - Sharing lessons from other land reform processes in Africa with District level leadership mechanisms.
   - Engaging the regional integration mechanisms in developing a regional code of standards for land reform that would be pegged to the peer review mechanism.

2. **FOOD SECURITY:** Prepare for and provide livelihood support to vulnerable communities affected by the food crisis and HIV/AIDS. This may entail:
   - Coordinating and supporting partner initiatives in livelihood recovery and support. This will particularly focus on social protection responses including safety nets, crop insurance and advocacy work.
   - Strengthen the analysis on vulnerabilities in the HIV/AIDS context to sharpen partner program responses through supporting Participatory Vulnerability Analysis processes.
   - Contribute to strengthening the existing national and regional Vulnerability Assessment Committees by sharing analysis and evidence resulting from the participatory vulnerability analysis process.
3. **GOVERNANCE:**

Strengthen democracy and good governance initiatives. This may include:
- Workshops on good governance.
- Engaging the regional integration mechanisms on more robust “track one” political peer dialogue on the specific issues of elections standards and the APRM within the SADC and NEPAD frameworks respectively.

4. **SOCIAL CONFLICT:**

Create processes at the community and national levels that prevent social conflicts. This may entail:
- Developing dialogues on race in Zimbabwe
- Catalyze discussion and truthful dialogue on the atrocities committed in Zimbabwe in the past.
- Providing support to peace building education for the now highly polarized youth.
- Support Human rights surveillance and monitoring through partners

5. **POVERTY REDUCTION:**

Provide support to development agencies and actors in the delivery of poverty reduction programs. This will continue within the focus of GCS program strengths and mission objectives.
- Support preparedness and vulnerability reduction processes through our partners.
- Strengthen community resilience through addressing the negative impacts of the food crisis and HIV/AIDS especially on women and children.
- Engaging on policy influencing and advocacy activities through partners at national, regional, and international levels.

6. **AWARENESS:**

Continue engaging local and international NGOs and partners on the issue facing Zimbabweans at the political and social level.

It is only with a multifaceted approach that this issue can be resolved setting a framework for regional action and resource ownership reform for the rest of Africa. Interventions will need to be local, regional, and international, and must require the involvement of local activists, civil society organizations, and international leaders.
GCS believes that without rapid change, especially as we draw closer to the next general election, there will be little hope for economic development or social stability. The local and international community must act now to reduce the possibilities of social and economic breakdown in Zimbabwe.

2 www.who.org.
4 The First Chimurenga (1896-1897) pitted settlers against the Shona and Ndebele people.
7 The Zimbabwean government undertook three reform processes. The Land Reform and Resettlement Program Phase I, which featured the willing-buyer willing-seller model and then in the early 1990s the compulsory acquisition model, occurred from 1980 – 1997. The Second Phase of this program occurred in 1998-1999; and the third program was the Fast Track in June 2000.
11 United Nations Development Program.
13 The Bill renders the advocacy of, or engaging in, peaceful acts of civil disobedience a criminal offence. It also criminalizes “publishing or communicating false statement prejudicial to the state” and making a public statement with the intention to, or knowing there is a risk of “undermining the authority of or insulting the President. This prohibition includes statements likely to engender “feelings of hostility towards” the President, cause “hatred, contempt or ridicule” of the President, or any “abusive, indecent, obscene or false statement” about him personally, or his office. The Bill also strictly regulates the organization and conduct of public gatherings. www.humanrightsfirst.org/defenders/hrd_zimbabwe/hrd_zim_3.htm (January 11, 2002).
16 2010 35% of children will be AIDS orphans. Zimbabwe has the highest incidences of TB in the world. (500 Cases per 100,000 people (Centers for Disease Control, www.cdc.gov/nchstp/od/gap/countries/zimbabwe.htm).
17 Cite.
18 www.who.org.
20 note on the elimination of food aid.