Let's Sit Down and Talk About This
Introduction

We are ordinary Zimbabweans. We are telling this story because we have been thinking about the way we (all Zimbabweans) work together.

Since the harmonised elections, the turmoil in Zimbabwe has continued. Our leaders are trying to work together and sometimes they move forward. We hope they will succeed. But it will be difficult. Tensions are high and there is little trust. So the different parties are haggling, not talking.

It seems as though all of us in Zimbabwe are looking to other cultures in matters of politics. Some are looking West, others are looking East; it does not matter. Both East and West, in their different ways, treat politics as a confrontation. Are we forgetting what our own culture has to offer? If our politics were African, it would be a dialogue.

Our problems are too big to be solved by calling each other names. But if we talk - really talk – perhaps we can find a solution.

Perhaps we can find a way to help our leaders work together – or find another solution that they could accept. Is that really possible? It would not be easy. But, if we understand the problems of all concerned, perhaps we will find the way. Chokwadi chikabuda pachena. The true path will come out in the light. And perhaps we will also find the path to reconciliation for all of us.

If we talk, perhaps we can help to create a new constitution that will allow us to elect future governments that are truly representative and accountable to the people – a constitution that will allow all voices to be heard.

And, if we talk, perhaps the ideas and plans proposed by experts and future governments will be tested against our values and, most of all, against common sense.

Let’s consider some of the things that make us proud to be African.

Politics

In traditional African culture, politics is a constructive dialogue based on mutual respect. If our democracy were African, voters would be choosing representatives to contribute to the dialogue.

In the Western model of democracy, parties compete for control. And it is possible for a party to gain control even if nearly half (sometimes, much more than half) of the people disagree. The winners impose their will on the rest of the people.

The Eastern Socialist model does not give the people any say in the matter. The elite, who believe they know what is best for the people, impose their will.

Justice

In traditional African culture, justice means putting things right. All involved are responsible for making this work: those who have done harm, those who have been harmed and also their relatives. The harm must be healed and forgiven so the community can stay whole.

Neither the Western nor Eastern Socialist models of justice are about healing.
Let’s Sit Down and Talk About This

In the Western view, justice means punishing those who do harm, both to discourage them from wrongdoing and because they “must pay for their crimes”. Too often, Western justice becomes equated with revenge. When people say they want justice, they mean they want the offender to suffer.

The Eastern Socialist view of justice is even colder. For Socialists, justice means punishing offenders to maintain order. If it is felt that punishments have to be very harsh to maintain order, then that is considered acceptable.

**Society**

In traditional African culture, the individual and the community have equal importance. Every individual contributes to the community, caring for and taking responsibility for other members of the community. Every individual is an integral, cherished part of the community.

In the Western view, the individual is more important than the community. A high value is placed on each individual’s freedom to do as they please, so long as they do not actively harm other members of the community.

For Eastern Socialists, the community is more important than the individual. Individuals are readily sacrificed for the sake of the “greater good”.

If we think our values are important, if we want to establish a dialogue, how can we do so? In Zimbabwe today, people are suffering. Much harm has been done; angry words have been spoken. Dialogue requires respect, humility, forgiveness and trust. In our hurt and our anger, many of us are not ready to offer these things.

Perhaps if we look at how we have got to where we are today, if we understand what has happened and why it has happened, we may be in a better position to understand each other’s points of view. Perhaps we can find the beginnings of dialogue.

This is our story – the story of all of us in Zimbabwe. It is the story of who we were before the colonials came. It is the story of the colonial period and what it did to us. It is the story of what came after independence: of the decade of hope, when we achieved so much; of the years after that, when things began to unravel; of the violence that has haunted us since the liberation war.

This is the story of where we have been and where we are today. It is for all of us to decide what we will do tomorrow.

This story presents many different points of view. Most people will disagree with some of the things that are said. Some people will disagree with most things that are said. That is good – it will start people talking. And if we start talking – if we have an honest discussion – we will be on our way to fixing this mess.

[15 February 2009]
Acknowledgements

Before writing this story, we did some research to try to get things straight. Memory plays tricks. When we are living through things, we do not see what is happening at the time. Afterwards, we look back and each of us puts together our memories from our own point of view. So we needed to check and get it straight. We would like to thank all of those who have recorded the things that have happened. Different people have recorded different things and they have each had their own view. We hope this story is balanced.

This story, when first written, was dull and dry. To make it better to read, we have borrowed words from those who can make them sing. When we borrowed these words, the story changed. Those storytellers saw things we did not see. And so the story truly became the story of all of us in Zimbabwe. To all of the authors listed below: Thank you for your words. We hope you do not mind; your words have not been borrowed for pretence or to make money, but in a good cause. We hope this story will help Zimbabwe

Alan Paton
Charles Mungoshi
Alexander Kanengoni
Yvonne Vera
Gugu Ndlovu
Julius Chingono
Judy Maposa
Christopher Mlalazi
Gothatone Moeng
Edward Chinhanhu
William Saidi
Peter Ncube
Let's Sit Down and Talk About This Before Colonisation/Colonial Period

**Before Colonisation**

Before the land that is now Zimbabwe was colonised, it was home to less than a million people. There are still people alive today whose grandparents were children in that time. We have heard their songs and their stories.

There were not too many people and not too much land was cleared. The roots of the trees drew water from deep under the ground and the leaves breathed it out, helping to make rain. Not too many cattle grazed and not too many fires burned. The grass was thick and held the rain when it fell, so that it soaked into the ground. When fields became poor, they could rest; there was land enough for other fields. When even resting was not enough, when the fields had no more to give, the people moved to a new place and cleared new fields. The bush grew back over the tired fields and healed them.

The work was hard. Although the rains were mostly good, sometimes they would fail and there would be little food in the dry season. When people were hurt or sick they could easily die. The people needed each other to survive. They worked together. They shared their food and they shared their burdens. When they had problems they talked. Together, they found ways to put things right. They told stories and danced and sang together; they laughed and they cried together. They were free.

**Colonial Period**

When the first white visitors came to our land, we made them welcome. We said: Build there, the land is the Earth’s, there is enough for everyone. We couldn’t understand this desire of theirs to call everything mine, mine, mine. They took our hospitality for stupidity. In 1890, they began their invasion. They seized our cattle and our land. We had received them with food and they thanked us with guns.

We soon rebelled against this occupation. We went at them with sticks and rocks but they had guns. We were defeated. For a long time, we stayed defeated. We watched while they marked out the land. We watched while they said: We will live here and you must go there. When they told us we must move, we moved.

It was hard to survive on the little land they left to us. Some of us went to work for the whites. We worked hard and were paid little. We wore the old clothes they discarded. They called us lazy and stupid. When they were angry, they beat us. Other times, with great ceremony, they gave us little gifts of broken toys or stale biscuits. We clapped politely. They looked at each other and said: “See? We are good people. Our blacks love us!” As if we were pets.

Not everything they brought was bad. They brought education – only a little and only for a few. Most of their schools taught our children how to be gardeners and domestic servants. They thought this was all we could be. They brought medicine and it saved some lives. But, for us, there were not many doctors and there was only a little medicine. Many of our babies and children still died. We were poor and needed support from our children when we grew old. There was no reason to have smaller families – and no way to have fewer
Let's Sit Down and Talk About This

Colonial Period

babies, even if we had wanted to. So we still had many births but not quite so many deaths. Our population began to grow.

By 1950, there were nearly 3 million of us. Nearly 2 million lived in the land they called "native reserves" - less than one third of the country, mostly in the lowest rainfall areas. The reserves were home to nearly seven times as many people as before colonisation. Too much bush had to be cleared in this overcrowded land. Not enough trees were left and so there was not enough rain. Too many cattle fed on the grass and too many fires burned it. The ground was bare and hard and the rain ran off the surface. The fields could not be rested and the earth grew barren.

We were determined. Some of our children got places in schools that provided a proper education. Some of these became teachers and taught more of our children. This gave us confidence; we began to press for change. In the 1930’s, the ANC was formed. We held some strikes and boycotts. In 1959, ANC was banned and NDP was formed. Joshua Nkomo became leader of NDP. When it was banned, he formed ZAPU. When they banned ZAPU also, we just ignored them. ZAPU continued to speak for us.

In 1963, Ndabaningi Sithole broke from ZAPU and formed ZANU. We did not understand our leaders’ quarrel. Each of us chose whichever leader was most familiar. The leaders of the two factions belonged to different tribes, so support for the two parties formed along largely tribal lines. The colonists were happy; they wanted us to be divided. They spread rumours to fuel the idea of tribal divisions.

Across Africa, people demanded change and many gained independence, based on majority rule. The colonists in Southern Rhodesia resisted. Determined to continue their minority white rule, they made a unilateral declaration of independence from Britain in 1965. The same year, they changed the land allocation again. Nearly half the land was designated for whites only (2% of the population). Boundaries were redrawn to put all the best land in the area for whites. Those of us whose land was re-designated for whites were evicted by the army. Some were loaded into trucks; others were forced to walk for many days.

Britain imposed sanctions but this had no effect. The illegal government just routed imports and exports through apartheid South Africa.

**Liberation War**

In 1962, as oppression from the colonials grew, we despaired of a negotiated settlement. Perhaps if we had understood how much of what the whites did was driven by fear, we might have found a way to reach them. But how could we have guessed? We are gentle people; they had nothing to fear from us. How could we have seen their fear, when it showed itself as anger – even cruelty?

So the liberation war began. And then they were more afraid. Their response was ruthless. They massacred civilians for no worse crime than living in an area where there were guerrillas; this was their way of cutting off support for our fighters. They imprisoned and tortured many people. They set up concentration camps, which they called “protected villages”. They said they were to protect us from guerrilla attacks. When we would not move to these camps, they kidnapped our children to make us move. The CCJP reported that the colonial forces killed at least 20,000 of our people – probably two or even four
times that number – and they kidnapped 20,000 of our children. Many of our children were not seen again.

Some of our people had joined the colonial armed forces. The pay and the treatment were better than in most of our jobs. Then, when the liberation war began, they were set to fighting against us. Some absconded, but some stayed on; they became the enemy. And so we were beaten and betrayed by our own people in the colonial forces.

The East and West were having a war of their own (a “cold” one). They both wanted to control Africa. The West would do no more than apply sanctions against colonial regimes. The East saw their opportunity and supported the armed wings of the liberation movements. The East was also divided, with hostility between Russia and China. ZANLA was armed and trained by the Chinese. ZIPRA was armed and trained by the Russians. This deepened divisions between our liberation groups. At first, both ZANLA and ZIPRA were based in Zambia but tensions grew. In 1972, ZANLA established a base in Mozambique. After independence, we were to pay the price for these divisions.

Some of us crossed the border to join the fighters when we were very young. Some of us were still children. We left our families and faced trials we could not have imagined. But it was never the intention that children should fight. We came on our own and the fighters could not take us home safely. So the fighters set up schools for us in the camps and we did not fight. As the war got worse, things did not always go as planned. Some of us fought. Sometimes, fighters even took children and brought them back for training. But that was not how it was meant to be.

A few of us who joined the struggle were sent to the East for training. Most of us who went East were trained to be disciplined soldiers. We went back and trained more fighters. But some of us were trained in security and counter intimidation. The East trained us as they trained their own secret police. They taught us to trust no-one. They taught us to kill and to torture without question. Their methods were brutal. They told us to select those who had nothing to lose and train them the same way.

All of us in the camps learned to fear the camp security officers.

A woman straps her baby to her back with a soiled cloth. Her tears fall silently as she picks up a hoe and begins to dig her own grave. The comrades stand in the hot sun and watch as the hole slowly grows bigger. Then Munashe looks away. The camp security officer lifts an automatic rifle, his eyes fixed on Munashe.

“I think she has dug deep enough for two.” He tears the hoe from the woman’s hands and flings it at Munashe’s feet. “Get it over with!” he snarls. The baby is crying. Munashe’s eyes meet those of the woman. What is she supposed to have done?

“I can’t do it!” Munashe cries out. The officer screams at him; still he cannot move.

“Can’t he use a gun?” pleads the base commander. The camp security officer fires a burst into the air. The deafening sound echoes in Munashe’s ears. Now the rifle is trained on him. He picks up the hoe. He cries out again as he strikes the woman. Then the hoe comes down again and again and again and Munashe is splattered all over with dark blood and he is shouting that he wishes somebody had killed him because he cannot live with this memory.
We went into battle on foot, hunted and exhausted. The colonial forces came with convoys of trucks and air support. Some of our own people betrayed us. They were sell outs. The camps had hardened us what had to be done.

Those of us living in the rural areas helped our fighters. Many of them were disciplined and polite. They were careful so that we would not be found out. But some of them were harsh and careless. They frightened us. And they were quick to judge suspected sell outs.

Our children carried messages from our fighters and took them the supplies we gathered. They were proud to be helping in our struggle for freedom. It was better than watching the goats. But children talk freely and our fighters heard them.

“Listen carefully, now, vazukuru. We have to talk to Mhike the policeman or he will become suspicious. We have told him nothing about our gallant fighters – but do not tell them you saw us talking to him – they might not understand.”

Girasiya does not know what frightens the mothers. Maybe she thinks the fighters might be cross. “Gogo, give me sweets, or I will tell the fighters you were talking to Mhike”. And Gogo gives her sweets! Ee, she will do this again. Gogo knows she is learning bad ways but she does not dare correct her.

Taonei goes to Baba Tonderai. “Give me money or I will tell.” But Baba Tonderai teaches him manners instead. Taonei is upset and he tells.

The fighters come; there is shouting. Baba Tonderai is tied to a tree and they shoot him.

Maiwe! They were just children; they did not know.

**Reaching a Settlement**

In 1978, South Africa cut supplies and support for the illegal government. The colonial forces continued to fight and their atrocities increased. Even so, fuel shortages put Smith under pressure to negotiate. He tried to appease us with Zimbabwe Rhodesia, a half-baked compromise. It increased black representation but kept substantial power for the whites and excluded ZANU-PF and PF-ZAPU. This did not satisfy us. We wanted genuine majority rule.

All party talks were finally held. There was a lot of tension but each side was encouraged to talk by their own friends. South Africa was pressing the colonials to talk. The Frontline States were pressing ZANU-PF and PF-ZAPU to talk. Finally, they agreed.

The Lancaster House agreement was signed in December 1979. The agreement included a commitment from Western nations to provide funds for the state to purchase all white owned land. It also included some white seats in parliament but these were to expire in April 1987.
The First Decade after Independence

Our first general election was held in February 1980. ZANU-PF won a big majority and PF-ZAPU won most of the remaining seats that were not reserved for whites. Independence was formally granted on 18 April 1980, with Canaan Banana as our first President and Robert Mugabe as our first Prime Minister. At last, we were free!

Reconciliation

The liberation war had taken a terrible toll on our people. Many had died or lost members of their families. Many more had suffered daily abuse and humiliation at the hands of the colonials. Families had been separated during the war and some of our kidnapped children never found their way home. Our fighters were haunted by the violence they had endured and the violence they had done. Some mujibhas and chimbwidos had learned bad ways. Others were tormented by the memory of the harm they had done when they were too young to know.

But Zimbabweans have courage and most of us healed. Our families and communities were there; we gave each other strength. Despite all we had been through, we were still generous and forgiving. We did not seek to punish the whites but instead offered reconciliation. We asked only for things to be put right: for all the people to be treated with dignity and respect; to have access to education, health care and opportunities; for the land to be distributed fairly.

The whites were surprised when we forgave them. Some did not believe it; they thought it was pretence. They left, or kept apart from us; a few even made trouble for us. But many warmed to us. They were sorry for what they had done; they wanted to put things right. They joined with us to build the new Zimbabwe.

Achievements

For most of us, this was the decade of hope. Our founding government embraced us in triumph and we embraced them. We worked together to put things right. We considered ideas from East and West but we also had ideas of our own. And we made our own decisions and our own plans. We were playing our own drum. See what we achieved (here are many statistics, but eee – they are so good!)

Education

Universal primary school enrolment was achieved in just three years (having been less than 40% before independence). Compared to levels before independence, secondary school enrolment increased more than ten times and the University of Zimbabwe grew to four times its size. Several new colleges were established. Primary education was free and, although there were fees for secondary education, most of us could afford them. There were major advances in vocational, apprenticeship and agricultural training.

Zivai is a teacher. She has completed the fast track, two-term course for primary school teachers that was introduced after independence. She can teach for now but she must soon
have proper qualifications. So, while she teaches, she is completing her teacher training through correspondence and classes in the school holidays.

When Zivai was a child, there was no school in her area. She was sent to stay with relatives so she could go to school. And then it was as if she was always a visitor – even when she was home for the school holidays. She felt alone.

Now, the people in Zivai’s village are building a school. They had help from the government for the plans and the few materials that they could not make – but they are doing everything else themselves. All around Zimbabwe, schools are being built in this way. And, while the school is being built, classes have already started. Each morning, Zivai settles under the trees with the children and they begin their lessons. Her heart lifts. All the children are learning – and they are at home where they belong.

Zivai’s cousin teaches at a school that runs classes in shifts, so that twice as many children can be taught in one building. Teachers and children from the morning classes are still coming out as she goes in with the afternoon shift. She enjoys the excited greetings and chatter. And, in the evening, there are adult education classes. It is such a busy school!

Jabulani is an electrician. He works steadily, with quiet concentration. It is satisfying work. He has always worked well – even before independence, when he got no thanks and was not allowed qualifications. But now he has qualified, using the new fast track process. Jabulani still had to pass all the examinations but, because he could prove he had experience, he did not have to serve an apprenticeship. Now he is paid proper rates and he can train new apprentices. All kinds of tradesmen have qualified in the same way.

**Health**

Free health care for minimum wage earners was introduced. Existing hospitals and clinics were expanded and new ones were built. Nutritional, water and sanitation programmes were launched. Infant immunisations increased from less than 25% before independence to 67%. Life expectancy increased from 55 before independence to 62. Child malnutrition and infant mortality were halved. Child malnutrition became the lowest in sub-Saharan Africa.

There was also work on family planning. By the end of the first decade, we had achieved the highest rate of contraceptive use in sub-Saharan Africa. This was still not enough – our population was still growing fast – but we were making progress.

Natsai is one of nearly ten thousand village health workers that have been trained since independence. She looks after her own village and two others. A lot of her work is preventive medicine. She discusses things like nutrition and hygiene with people in her community. She helps with health checks for pregnant mothers. And she can treat many illnesses and injuries. Now some things which could kill children, like diarrhoea, are no longer so dangerous. All the people in her village are proud that she is one of their own.

Lindiwe is a nurse who runs a clinic. She is confident and capable. Before independence, she was only trusted to do simple things like checking pulses and fetching bedpans. Now, her skills are used properly. All Lindiwe’s staff are nurses or paramedics. They can treat most problems without needing a doctor to help them. Just one doctor is enough to provide support for Lindiwe’s clinic and four others. If they have a problem that needs the
doctor, they can transfer the patient or call him if it is an emergency – but they don’t need him very often. They enjoy their responsible jobs.

**Land Reform**

Progress with land redistribution was limited by the conditions of the Lancaster House agreement. Despite these difficulties, over 70,000 families were resettled by 1990.

Land redistribution alone could not be enough. At Independence, our population was around 6 million. There were too many people to support with traditional farming methods. We needed to increase yields and protect and restore the land. Resettled families were given establishment grants and credit facilities. Use of fertilizers and irrigation increased. Land conservation and land regeneration schemes were introduced. The GMB, which before had only served the commercial farms, was expanded to distribute inputs and collect harvests for all farmers. The GMB introduced prices which favoured our peasant farmers.

Results were good. Yields and outputs increased so much that, by 1986, our communal and resettled farmers produced around two thirds of the marketed maize and cotton (compared with below 10% before independence). As peasant outputs grew, the commercial farms were encouraged to diversify into cash crops for export.

**Economy**

Our economy faced many challenges, including a drop in demand for mineral exports, droughts, unfair trade terms and dumping by wealthy nations. Even so, on average, each of us produced 4.3% more every year. This was faster growth than most developed nations achieved. We were catching up with them.

All this development cost more than we could pay in taxes. So the government borrowed money from the banks. Foreign countries also lent money to Zimbabwe. Some of it was spent by the government; some of it was spent by NGOs and private businesses. Altogether, we borrowed a lot of money. So it was important that all this investment helped us to produce and earn more. We needed to keep producing more so that the repayments would get easier.\(^1\)

They said we couldn’t do it. They said we were backward and lazy and would let things fall apart. They said we would destroy our country. But they were wrong – look what we built! We could be proud. We laughed together, spreading luck. We were playing our own drum.

**Conflict**

The integration of our war-worn fighters into the new Zimbabwe’s armed forces was an achievement. Our war heroes could be proud of the discipline they showed. Even so, it was perhaps inevitable that there would be some conflict. The political differences that had developed during the liberation struggle had not been resolved. Our two liberation armies had been trained by different countries, each working in their separate ways.

At Entumbane, where former ZANLA and ZIPRA guerrillas were based together, tension became violence. More than 300 people died and some ex-ZIPRAs went back to the bush.

\(^1\) By 1989, Zimbabwe owed US$2.4 billion to foreign countries. Repayments came to 24% of export earnings.
The response from the government was ruthless. For those of us in Matabeleland, that first decade was not hopeful. It was a decade of grief and of anger.

Each response deepened divisions. The State of Emergency was renewed and the armed forces engaged the dissidents. Arms caches were discovered in Matabeleland. ZIPRA high commanders were arrested and ZAPU leaders were expelled from cabinet. Many more ex-ZIPRAs went back to the bush. There were curfews, detentions and searches across Matabeleland.

And then, in 1983, Gukurahundi was unleashed. The Fifth Brigade, trained by the North Koreans, targeted civilians. Fires lit dark Matabele nights as they burnt villages. Cries of women and young girls filled the night air as their bodies were violated. Here, a young mother is forced to watch while her children's throats are cut; there, an old woman is beaten and raped. Even the dead were allowed no peace. Abandoned mines became mass graves.

As if this horror was not enough, in the run up to the 1985 elections, there was more. A food embargo was imposed in Matabeleland South for two months. ZANU-PF youths rampaged, leaving scores dead and 2,000 people homeless. ZAPU officials were detained and some disappeared permanently.

Finally, the Unity Accord was signed by Joshua Nkomo and Robert Mugabe in December 1987. An amnesty was announced and 122 dissidents surrendered. These were all that were left of perhaps 500 dissidents; the rest had been killed or had left the country. There was also an amnesty for all members of the armed forces who committed offences before the Unity Accord. For those of us who had still not even recovered the bodies of our dead, this was hard to accept.

Government figures claimed that the dissidents had been responsible for over 340 deaths and 200 rapes, as well as abductions, mutilations and robberies. The CCJP reported 2,000 confirmed deaths from Gukurahundi and said the total deaths were probably three or four times that number. The CCJP also confirmed nearly 700 homesteads burned, at least 10,000 people detained and at least 7,000 people raped, tortured or beaten.

All this was done because of two clashes at Entumbane and some banditry from the first few fighters who went back to the bush. How could it happen?

The government said they were trying to prevent war. Perhaps it was true. There was reason to fear war. The apartheid regime in South Africa wanted us to fail and conspired to increase the divisions between us. Their agents, disguised as dissidents, attacked Inkomo Army Barracks, ZANU-PF headquarters and Thornhill Air Base. More agents spread lies and rumours to fuel mistrust. They armed and trained around a hundred dissidents. Mozambique and Angola were already torn apart by civil wars that had been fomented and armed by South Africa. It was a stark warning of how dangerous they could be.

But why did the government think that this nightmare was the way to prevent war? This was how the East had trained them. They taught control through fear. That is how they ran their own countries. They said: “Dissent will spread if it is not crushed. The people will follow whoever they fear the most.”
These big men from the East thought only about control. They did not understand people’s hearts – certainly not Zimbabwean hearts. Fear can sometimes produce unwilling obedience – but it cannot make people follow in their hearts. Perhaps if we had spoken, all of us together, we might have been able to find a better way to end the conflict – a way to heal divisions and make true peace. But we did not speak.

Many of us who were not living in the affected areas did not believe reports of atrocities. We thought they were lies put out by those who wanted to see us fail. We did not see the violence. We did not want to believe it. This was our Zimbabwe, the Zimbabwe that we had suffered for in all the long years of the struggle. How could our Zimbabwe be doing such things?

There were some of us among the ex-combatants who knew what was happening but believed it was necessary to prevent war. This was how we had been trained. We had steeled ourselves to do what had to be done in the liberation struggle and we had won freedom. We believed that had been justified, so we had to believe Gukurahundi was justified also, to prevent war.

Those of us in Matabeleland saw the violence; we knew it was true and it was not justified. Our hearts were heavy with grief and that grief turned into a dark bitterness. We might have been ready to talk of peace before the killing began, but as our people died, our hearts hardened. We did not believe it was done to prevent war. We believed that ZANU-PF was using the excuse to destroy ZAPU. Perhaps that was true. The ZANU-PF leaders believed in Socialism. It promised a society that was fair for all - and who does not want that? But they were playing the drum of the East. Those big men of the East did not believe in people. They thought that people would only be fair if they were forced. They did not tolerate opposition. The drum of the East was not our drum.

Only the CCJP spoke. But at first they spoke privately, only to the Prime Minister. They did not tell the people what they knew, for fear of escalating tensions. Only much later, ten years after the Unity Accord, did the CCJP publish their report, “Breaking the Silence”. Then even those of us who had not believed knew it was true. We knew it was true, but we did not know how to speak of this terrible thing.

They said we couldn’t do it; they said we would let things fall apart. They were wrong. We played our own drum and we built so much in that first decade. But some of us were playing the drum of the East. The horror of Gukurahundi lay across all we had achieved like a dark stain. The taste of success was sour. The drum of the East was not our drum.

**Governance**

We were not prepared for corruption. We did not have a system of checks and balances to prevent it. We did not see how easily corruption could take hold.

The hyenas were waiting. Corrupt businessmen - from the former colonial regime and from foreign countries - befriended our politicians. They offered flattery, hospitality and gifts. Look at arms dealer John Bredenkamp. He channelled money and arms to ZANLA during the liberation struggle. At the same time, he was busy “sanctions busting” to supply arms to the colonial regime. He did not care about us, only himself. Those who were responsible for
party finances during the struggle would have done whatever was necessary to raise money. And Bredenkamp and his kind would have taught them how.

The hyenas were waiting. All of us had suffered so much humiliation during the long years of colonial rule. Now we were free and we wanted respect. Most of us still played our own drum. We sought to gain respect by building something we could be proud of. But some of us had learned to play the drum of the colonials; we had learned their desire to call everything mine, mine, mine. We thought money would bring us respect. Some of us thought that getting money was more important than how we got it. But the drum of the colonials was not our drum.

Yes, the hyenas were waiting. Even so, it seemed that there was not much corruption in that first decade. Perhaps most of us, ordinary people and even the government, were too busy building our new Zimbabwe to be easily diverted by temptation.

But the seeds of corruption were sown. Patronage spread quickly. Zidco was a serious concern. The first farms bought by the state were allocated to ministers. There were also two corruption scandals: the Paweni case and Willowvale.

Here is Guchu, a fitter at a factory. He hears there is a vacancy in the Finance department. His wife’s nephew, Hofisi, has just qualified as an accountant. Guchu calls Hofisi: “Come quickly. Get your application in before the post is filled.” There will be a big party if Hofisi gets the job! Guchu is a good man; he looks after his relatives.

But here is Mambara, the general manager. He has a vacancy for a foreman. Muza and Shava are well qualified; Chimbadzo, his cousin, is not. He gives the job to Chimbadzo.

Many of us in positions of authority – at all levels and in all walks of life – gave jobs to relatives. Those of us in the position of Muza and Shava could see that it was wrong. Those of us in the position of Mambara could not. But this was patronage. We abused our authority and it was not right. Some of the relatives who got jobs worked hard. But some did not – and they were protected. The hyenas were waiting.

Zidco is the umbrella for ZANU-PF businesses. Perhaps Zidco was set up for honest reasons, so that ZANU-PF would not depend so much on donations. But much of Zidco’s business came from government contracts and ZANU-PF led the government. So ZANU-PF was awarding contracts, funded by our money, to itself. The hyenas were waiting.

When ministers allocated the first farms to themselves, perhaps they thought: It is only a few farms and we are getting many more for our people. We have suffered for our people and now we are building the new Zimbabwe. We have earned this reward. But they were playing the drum of the colonials. They would learn to play it well.

Paweni, a businessman, was convicted of inflating charges for transporting relief food in the 1982-1984 droughts. A cabinet minister was implicated in court testimony. In response, ZANU-PF published a Leadership Code. Mostly, it was a good code but it did not recognise the dangers of gifts and patronage. Cynics among us did not believe that the ZANU-PF leaders were sincere. Perhaps they were not – but perhaps some of them were.

In the 1988 Willowvale scandal, some ministers abused their privileges to help associates bypass the waiting list for cars. Many of the people who received these cars sold them on
for big profits. Some of the ministers involved may have been corrupt from the start. Others may just have been foolish.

Here is Mufundo, a businessman. He befriends Mutonga, who is a minister. “You know, Mutonga, I have been so long on the waiting list for a car. Ee, why can’t they make enough cars?” Mutonga wants to help his friend — and perhaps impress him, too. “I can pull some strings. Leave it with me.” Soon the car is delivered. “Eee, Mutonga, thank you, thank you. Please accept this gift.” Perhaps Mutonga does not even realise he has just taken a bribe. Mufundo will soon be asking for more favours — and there will be bigger gifts.

When the inquiry asked Maurice Nyagumbo how many cars he had been prepared to obtain, he replied: “I would have helped anyone who asked. I wish I had known better”. He said he had received nothing in return. Perhaps it was true. Nyagumbo had been well respected and he could not bear the shame. He took his own life.

And there was probably more corruption than this. People in high places can hide what they are doing. But, if corruption had been very bad, wouldn’t we have seen more signs of it? Later on, when corruption spread, we could see the signs everywhere. And, if there had been a lot of corruption, could we have achieved so much?

But the hyenas were watching. They were waiting.

\textit{Constitution}

When the protection for the white seats in parliament expired in 1987, they were abolished. At the same time, the offices of President and Prime Minster were consolidated into one executive Presidency.

There were many small changes to the constitution in the first decade. Taken together, they increased the powers of the government and Presidency. They reduced the independence of the judiciary.

\textit{Opposition}

Zimbabwe had its second General Election in 1985, during the terrible time of Gukurahundi. Those of us in Matabeleland did not lose our courage. We voted for PF-ZAPU in all of our seats. ZANU-PF retained its majority, but we had shown that fear cannot make people follow with their hearts.

After the unity agreement which merged PF-ZAPU into ZANU-PF in 1987, the government had no significant opposition in parliament.

We did not try to build an opposition. Most of us did not think we needed to. Those of us who had not seen or believed Gukurahundi were happy with what the government had achieved. Even those of us in the trade unions were happy; the government had introduced minimum wages and other social reforms. Those of us who had suffered Gukurahundi were not happy but we did not think we had a choice.

And sometimes when we spoke, we were heard. The press and students protested about the Willowvale scandal. A public inquiry was held and ministers lost their jobs. When the government proposed a one-party state, many of us objected: students, trade unionists and even ZANU-PF members and MPs. The government dropped their plans. We were heard.
The First Five Years of ESAP

Zimbabwe had done well in the first decade. We had borrowed money for development and, to continue this work, we needed to borrow more – but not too much. And we needed to keep producing more, so we could make the repayments.

Yes, said the World Bank and the IMF, you have done well. But we have a plan that will help you do much better. It is called economic liberalisation. We use it everywhere so we know it is good. In fact, we are so sure it is the best thing for you that we will not lend any more money unless you agree to follow this plan.

So the government agreed. ESAP was the plan for implementing economic liberalisation in Zimbabwe. It was launched in 1990.

The World Bank said that Zimbabwe would have to borrow a lot of money to finance the restructuring. It seemed like far too much. How would we repay it? Don’t worry, they said. Your economy will improve so much that you will be able to repay it easily.

The World Bank said that ESAP would help our industry to modernise. We would be able to export more. Then we could import more agricultural equipment for our farmers, to increase yields and help the land. We could import more engineering equipment to develop even more industry. And all this would generate even more exports, so things would just keep getting better. And, while our economy grew, inflation would reduce. All Zimbabweans would benefit. What a bright future was in store for us!

But ESAP was a disaster. It did the opposite of what was promised. Exports crashed and, for the first time, were less than imports. Debt repayments ate up nearly a third of the money earned by exports. Manufacturing output dropped by 40%. Unemployment and inflation increased. Wages fell to less than they had been before 1970. There was no money to help those of us who were farming in the communal lands.

Let’s look at how ESAP did this. When we are finished, we may wonder how those clever men from the West, with their degrees and smart suits and big salaries, ever came up with this plan. Gogo might say they had been educated so much that there was no room left in their heads for common sense.

We may also wonder how the government agreed to the plan. They did not consider that they were taking directions from people who would not be walking with us on our journey. They did not check that the path was safe.

And we let them lead us down this path. We, too, did not check it was safe.

Education

To comply with ESAP, the government cut spending on education, introduced fees for primary schools and increased fees for secondary schools. The government provided relief

---

2 The IMF and the World Bank are actually separate bodies but that is not important. When it comes to economic liberalisation, they think and speak as one. It does not matter if we confuse the two.

3 ESAP stands for Economic Structural Adjustment Programme

4 There are more detailed figures in the appendix.
for those of us who could not afford fees but the relief did not cover all expenses. We still had to pay for some things. Some of us could no longer afford to send our children to school.

This business with the fees and the relief was crazy. It takes work to administer a relief system: there are forms to complete, decisions to be made, payments to be sent and records to be kept. All this work costs money. Since most of us were poor, there were nearly as many applications for relief as there were people paying fees. So, the total cost of relief and administration was more than the money raised through fees.

And the spending cuts damaged our education system. There was less money for equipment and books. Teachers’ salaries dropped and they struggled. Some found other jobs.

My mother goes collecting all forms of plastic in the wind to sell.

After school I stand by the beer hall exit selling loose cigarettes to people who can afford them one at a time.
The stench of beer urine and belching mouths makes me sneeze.
But today I mingle with drunks like I’m playing with my classmates at school break.

I live in two worlds that collide every time mother cries about my unpaid school fees.

**Health and Welfare**

To comply with ESAP, the government cut spending on health and introduced fees. The story was the same as for education: less than one in ten of us could afford to pay the fees. The government provided relief, but it was not enough. And, of course, the administration of fees and relief made the health system more expensive to run.

With the spending cuts, our health services declined. The national drug fund was reduced to a third of its previous value. There were severe drug shortages. Drugs and equipment had to be bought privately at much higher prices. Health services for mothers and babies declined. Rural clinics approached collapse.
Our doctors and nurses saw their patients suffer and die because they did not have the drugs or equipment to treat them, or because the patients could not pay. They spoke of “ESAP deaths”. Some could not bear it; they moved to the private sector or left the country. Soon our health system was short of doctors and nurses, as well. The rich did not have to worry. They could afford private health care – and that was where our doctors and nurses had gone.

Worst of all was AIDS. By 1995, 29% of Zimbabweans were infected. There was not enough money to provide proper treatment.

Economy

Trade Liberalisation

To develop Zimbabwe, we need to import engineering and agricultural equipment. These imports must be paid for with the forex that we earn from exports. And we don’t export so much that we can afford to waste our forex on unnecessary things.

So Zimbabwe had exchange control to make sure that forex was allocated to people who were importing things that we needed. We also had higher import duties on things we did not need so much, to discourage people from importing them.

Now, said the IMF, if Zimbabwe’s industry is going to modernise, it must compete in the world market. But your exchange control and duties are protecting your industry from competition. Do you buy your local goods because they are better than imported goods? No. You buy them because they are all you can get. If you had the choice of local or imported, your industries would have to modernise to stay in business. So, they said, you must remove exchange control and reduce import duties. This is trade liberalisation.

The IMF believed in the free market. And the market is useful. It runs itself and it allows us to use our own initiative. But the market does not think. It just follows money like ants follow sugar. So, sometimes, we need to put up barriers to stop it going where it is not safe for it to go. Our import controls were such a barrier. In Zimbabwe, most of us were poor. The few wealthy people had more money than the rest of us put together. And when controls were removed, the market just followed the money.

Khumalo has an engineering business, making agricultural equipment. He imports some specialist components and the rest of his inputs are local. It is hard work. After inputs have been bought, it takes time to make and sell equipment; he is always short of cash. Profits are only OK. So when the textile industry is liberalised, he decides to try a new sideline in retail. He imports luxury fabrics to sell. His wife runs the shop. No sooner has he bought new stocks than they are sold and eee, look at the profits! These rich people will pay anything for fancy fabrics. Who wants cotton when they can have silk? Before long, Khumalo has a big shop and has closed the engineering business. He is importing much more than he ever did before and none of it is useful.

Trade liberalisation is good for Khumalo – he is making lots of money. It is also good for the rich people – they can show off their imported clothes. It is not so good for some others. The engineering workers have lost their jobs. The farmers have lost their source of cheap,
locally produced equipment. Khumalo’s former suppliers and the local fabric manufacturers have lost business and have had to lay off some of their workers.

Many businesses found it was easier to make money by importing luxuries than by making useful things. We earned less forex, too, because some of the industries that closed had produced goods for export. And, as unemployment rose, wages fell.

**Foreign Loans**

ESAP did not just waste our forex – it got us to borrow money to waste!

Here is Unyanzvi, a farmer. He borrows $1000 for seed and fertilizer from the bank. He sells his crop for $1500, pays the bank $1000 plus $50 interest, and has $450 left for himself. He has made a good investment.

In the same way, foreign loans were a good investment for Zimbabwe in the first decade.

But imagine if, next year, the bank says to Unyanzvi: Go ahead and buy your seed. But give the money you borrow for fertilizer to our good friends Market. They will get you better fertilizer. And imagine Unyanzvi is foolish and agrees, even though he does not know the Market people. And the Market people spend his money on beer! Now Unyanzvi has no fertilizer, so he gets a poor crop which only fetches $900 – but he still has to pay $1050 to the bank that gave him such bad advice.

Ee, no bank could do that. No customers would agree.

But the World Bank and IMF did that. And we agreed. Some of our loans were spent on development. This was our seed. But liberalisation allowed people to import more than we exported – and we had to borrow money from the IMF to cover the difference. Liberalisation let the market decide what to import – and the market bought some useless things. It might as well have been beer. So our crop of industry and exports was poor. And we still had to pay back the loans with interest – in forex.

Perhaps we would have been better off if we had never borrowed the money. Perhaps we were foolish to agree.

**Foreign Investment**

Tenderai is a farmer. He does not have money for seed. He sells his land to Maraini, who agrees to employ him as a worker for $400 a year. Tenderai earns less than he could have if he had kept his land and borrowed money. But now he does not have to worry about losing money if the rains are bad. He is content. But after a few years, Maraini hires his cousin to work the land and he tells Tenderai to leave.

Maraini helped Tenderai to begin with – but later did him harm.

ESAP allowed foreign investors to invest in businesses in Zimbabwe. And, like Maraini, these investors could do things that were good for us – but they could also do us harm. Foreign investors take their profits back out of Zimbabwe in forex. They might help us to export more and then we might not lose when they take out their profits. But what if they buy our resources, like our mines and our land? And what if they run businesses that are not useful and do not earn any forex?
Let’s Sit Down and Talk About This  The First Five Years of ESAP

So perhaps we should think of foreign investment like a loan. Then we might only allow foreign investment that is good for us. And we might limit foreign investment so that we can afford to buy things back if investors start doing things that are not good for us.

Now, as it turned out, we did not get much foreign investment. But there was some. Today, over half a million hectares of our land is owned by other countries. And, later on, we would see more foreign investment that did us harm – this time, from the East.

**Budget Deficit**

The World Bank was worried that the government was spending so much more than we could pay in taxes that their debt was growing each year. The debt could soon be more than we could afford to repay. The World Bank was right to worry but perhaps their advice on what to do about it was bad.

They wanted big spending cuts. But most cuts were harmful and cost more than they saved (remember the fees and relief for health and education). So the overspending did not even go down – it increased. And we suffered from the cuts.

And there was wasteful spending that was not cut, including the cabinet and foreign trade missions. But the government did not cut this spending and the World Bank did not insist.

And, of course, economic growth was just as important as spending cuts – because growth makes debt easier to repay. But economic liberalisation slowed down our growth, which made our debt worse.  

**Inflation**

ESAP said that the government had to remove subsidies and price controls. This caused inflation to rise to nearly 30%. This does not sound much to us today but it is a lot.

Perhaps it was right to lift price controls. Price controls can cause black market trading. But lifting them so suddenly was unwise.

As for subsidies … The wealthy nations subsidise their farmers so much that we cannot get fair prices for our grain. The world price of maize can be reduced as much as 40% by subsidised maize from the US and the EU. Why should we remove our subsidies?

**Arguments about ESAP**

When ESAP began to hurt us, we started arguing about it.

Some said that it did not matter what was imported or what foreign investors did. Any business creates wealth and, sooner or later, people will use that wealth to start new, useful businesses.

Perhaps it is true. And perhaps foreign investors would help to build new industries. They might bring expertise and technology, so these new businesses could be modern and competitive. Perhaps the recovered Zimbabwe would provide a good life for all.

---

5 More information on overspending is in the appendix
But were we rich enough that we could afford to wait for useful businesses to appear? How long would it take? How much would people suffer in the meantime?

And perhaps foreign investors and the wealthy would get a lot of influence on the government. Would they press the government to provide things for the poor, like free health and education? We do not know.

The wealthy nations lending us money argued for liberalisation. Some wealthy people in Zimbabwe did, too. And they seemed sincere in their arguments. But they stood to gain from liberalisation. The wealthy nations got the chance to sell us their goods and buy a stake in our resources. Wealthy Zimbabweans got the freedom to import what they wanted and make money how they wanted. Did they believe that liberalisation was best for Zimbabwe because they wanted it to be true?

**Food Security**

The World Bank decided that the government should sell off our grain reserves to provide money to pay for the restructuring. Ee, were they mad? Aiwa, said the government. Our grain reserves are more precious than gold.

Well, said the World Bank, it is up to you. If you won’t sell the grain reserves, then you must make more spending cuts.

Finally, in 1991, the government agreed to sell off half our grain reserves and close 25% of GMB depots. The grain was sold at a loss, because that year’s harvests had been good and the US and EU had been dumping subsidised grain.

We all know what happened after that. The 1991-2 season suffered a terrible drought. It happened right across Southern Africa and it was the worst drought in living memory. The government had to import 2.5 million tons of grain. They had to pay high prices, because of the shortages caused by the drought. Never mind, said the World Bank, we can lend you the money! And the GMB struggled to distribute the grain because so many depots had been closed.

After this, the government stood up to the World Bank – at least on this one point. They restocked the grain reserves, re-opened depots and expanded the GMB. The Bank objected but finally they agreed.

**Governance**

They said we couldn’t do it; they said we would let things fall apart. We had shown them they were wrong. We had built so much in our first decade. But now everything we had built was turning to dust. We began to doubt ourselves. Despair entered our hearts.

The spread of corruption began in the civil service. Spending cuts and retrenchment left the civil service short-staffed. The restructuring increased their workload. There was no time for checking that everything was done right. And patronage had put some hyenas in senior positions. Corrupt businessmen offered bribes to bypass regulations. Some officials were tempted. At first, they were reported. In 1991, 26 people were prosecuted for receiving over Z$230 million in bribes.

But things got worse. Civil service backlogs grew. There was a waiting list for everything.
Here is Maposa. He has lost his job. His uncle has lent him a little money to start a business as a carpenter. But the waiting list for a permit is 12 months. “I cannot wait that long. I have to eat. I will give you ten percent of the fee if you can put me to the top of the list.”

Munzara is the clerk. “My children go to school with empty stomachs. It would not be so wrong to take the money; it is only work I would be doing sometime anyway. And my boss cannot complain; he has been up to no good.” He takes the money. Then another customer comes in and Munzara takes the next step. He says: “If you can give me ten percent, I can put you to the top of the list.”

We did not report it when we were asked for bribes. Perhaps we felt we could do nothing about it; perhaps we understood that times were hard for the clerks. Some of us could pay; perhaps we were glad to go to the top of the list. When we paid these little bribes, we did not think we were doing anything wrong.

By 1993, it was no longer possible to have any application processed without paying chegumi at each step of the way.

Now nobody in the civil service could report anyone for anything; they all had something to hide. The hyenas were laughing; for them it was luck. They moved on to the funds. The looting of the War Victims Compensation Fund began in 1993 and continued for four years. It was not just the civil service who did this. Nearly 80 of the people involved were prominent citizens; others were ordinary people with connections. And, in 1994, the fund for retraining retrenched soldiers was looted by the staff of seven private colleges and the ex-soldiers themselves.

In 1995, bribery reached the Cabinet. They overrode the Government Tender Board and gave the Harare International Airport contract to AHT, even though their price was Z$300 million higher than the others. It was alleged that US$1 million had been paid in bribes.

Bad management in the World Bank made corruption easy. There may even have been corrupt officials in the World Bank itself. Dzingai Mutumbuka, a Minister of Education until he was kicked out because of his involvement in Willowvale, resurfaced as the World Bank Sector Manager for Africa Region.

So perhaps corruption was partly due to ESAP, too. Perhaps it caused the chaos, temptation and despair that opened the door. But we had already planted the seeds: it was patronage that put protected people in jobs they had not earned. And as corruption spread, many of us took part. We were playing the drum of the colonials. It was not our drum.

Land Reform

The government changed the law to speed up land reform. Now, whenever commercial farmers sold their land, they had to offer it to the government first. Also, they could only ask the government to pay a fair market price.

But the costs of restructuring left little money to buy land. Land conservation schemes were forgotten. And as corruption spread, the hyenas turned their hungry eyes to the land. Some land was still allocated to those of us who needed it. But some of it went to the hyenas.
Those of us who were living in the communal lands wanted to know where our land had gone. There were leaks to the press. There were complaints. Finally, the government published a list of all the tenants of state owned commercial farms. There were cabinet ministers, top ranking military officers and senior civil servants. They were weekend farmers; they did not work the land. And there were white commercial farmers. Some of these people were paying as little as one fifth of the commercial rates for the leases.

Now we knew where our land had gone. But it made no difference. The land stayed idle, or made profits for the white farmers. And we stayed in the communal lands. This was not land reform.

Perhaps ESAP even caused suffering in the communal lands. Perhaps it diverted money away from land reform. But we suffered even more because of corruption.

**Opposition**

ESAP was destroying what we had achieved and we blamed the government. Perhaps the West gave us bad advice but they did not understand our situation. Their countries were rich but we were poor and our industries were small. It was the government that did not check that the path was safe. They were playing the drum of the West. It was not our drum.

But we let them lead us down this path. We, too, did not check it was safe. We, too, played the drum of the West – until it began to hurt us. Then we protested – but we offered only anger. We marched and demonstrated against ESAP. Some of us became so angry that we rioted. There was rumbling in the trade unions. In all of this, we were just challenging decisions that affected us. We were not looking for solutions.

In the 1995 parliamentary elections, ZANU-PF won almost every seat but hardly any of us voted. There were a few small opposition parties but most of us did not believe they had anything to offer. We were not happy with the government but we did not have anyone else we wanted to vote for.
The Second Five Years of ESAP

ESAP

At the end of the first five years of ESAP, anyone could see it was not working. For every single good thing it had been supposed to do, it did the opposite. We were not alone in our predicament. By that time, several studies of economic liberalisation in African and Asian states had been made. All these studies showed the damage it had done.

So, of course, the World Bank apologised. They went to the government. They said: We are sorry we pressed you to follow this plan. We have made a bad mistake. Let’s talk together and see how we can put it right.

Well, no ... they did not. In 1995, they did their own study of ESAP in Zimbabwe. They declared that progress was “highly satisfactory”. This is the highest rating the World Bank can give. We do not know what achievement was most satisfactory. Was it the children who could no longer go to school? Or the people who died because they could not get medical treatment? Was it the people who could no longer afford bread? Or the farmers with their barren land? But maybe these things were as nothing compared to the heart-warming sight of the wealthy wearing such nice silk.

Perhaps the government hoped that a few more loans might turn things around. They continued with ESAP. In 1998, they finally had a little rebellion. They introduced a 100% import tariff on luxury goods, to reduce these imports. The IMF was not happy.

Economy

The economy continued to get worse. But at least we could still feed ourselves. Zimbabwe was still a net exporter of food in 1999.

Lenders were holding back money while they demanded more spending cuts. So we were borrowing less than the debt repayments and our debt went down a little. But our exports went down a lot so the debt got harder to pay. By 1998, our debt repayments were 38% of our exports. Only Brazil and Burundi have ever had to face higher repayments than that.

Perhaps it would have been better if the government had said: Forget your loans. We will just stop making repayments until we have found a way to fix this mess.

ESAP was still part of the reason for the collapse of our economy but now there were bigger problems. Corruption was doing a lot of damage. And there was a new disaster.

When it was discovered that the War Victims Compensation Fund had been looted, the war veterans protested. The government had to do something. The government could ignore our starving war veterans when they were out of sight but they could not ignore them in public. It would have spoiled their liberation credentials. So they committed to give every war veteran a one-off payment of Z$50,000 and a monthly pension.

There was one small problem. The government did not have the money. They tried to raise the money with more sales tax and a wage levy. We could not pay. We went on strike all over the country. Some of us rioted. The government abandoned the taxes. What to do? They had a bright idea. We will just print the money!
So, in 1998, a huge amount of new money appeared. But there were not any new things to spend all this extra money on. So a lot of money was being spent on the little there was to buy. Inflation soared. Then the taxes that the government had received before the price rises were not enough to pay for things after the rises. So they printed more money, and inflation went up again. And this cycle has continued ever since. As inflation spiralled, our economy went into recession.

**Governance**

The hyenas were feasting. Our failing economy caused the chaos that fed corruption. Corruption grew, and wrecked our economy even more. It was a circle we could not break.

Chegumi spread to the private sector. By the late 90’s, it was impossible to do business of any kind without paying bribes.

A string of corruption scandals implicated government officials, senior military officers, judges and known ZANU-PF insiders.

Roger Boka, a ZANU-PF insider, illegally moved US$21 million outside Zimbabwe, embezzled another Z$500 million and forged Z$1.2 billion in CSC bills. The Government Tender Board was bypassed in the tenders for Hwange Thermal Power Plant and two cellular telephone networks. Bribery at Cabinet level was suspected. The Air Zimbabwe Chief Executive defrauded Air Zimbabwe of US$50,000. And there were all sorts of stories about money from diamonds in the DRC going into the pockets of ministers and ZANU-PF officials.

Many funds were looted, including housing funds, the DDF water programme fund, the Social Dimension Fund (which was supposed to provide assistance to retrenched workers) and the National Social Security Authority. Looters included top officials. The looting was callous. The big men who got their money and their mansions and their boreholes to water their lawns caused a lot of suffering. Many of us lost all our savings in the looting of the housing funds. More than 50,000 of our communities in the rural areas did not get badly needed boreholes because of the looting of the DDF water fund.

Few senior people involved in the scandals (and no members of the government) were charged.

By 1999, even The Herald protested, saying: “The looting of public resources has become so frequent and widespread ... we are surprised when a fund is not looted ... Corrupt individuals in this country have been treated with kid gloves for too long ... If higher officials are involved in corrupt activities, they cannot stop their juniors ... those in high office, who should be setting the moral example, are corrupt.”

Here is a senior politician who has been corrupt from the start. He suffered under the colonials. He was angry – but he was also envious of their wealth. One day, he thought, it will be my turn. I will be important and powerful. If there is something I want, I will just take it. And there are others like him – in business and in politics.

But here is another senior politician. He, too, suffered under the colonials – but he resolved to build a better future for all Zimbabweans. When he joined the government, he worked hard and lived modestly. But the hyenas are stealthy. When he saw corruption around him, he turned a blind eye. He knew those people were protected. If he spoke, he would lose his
job and he would no longer be able to do good work for his people. And it did not end there. The corrupt do not like to work alongside honest people; it makes them nervous. Soon he found he had to take his cut or go. He went along with it. Now he is no longer doing good work. But he has got used to his comforts; he cannot let them go. He does not even know when the change in him came. He only knows that it happened.

And here is a businessman who knows the value of hard work. He built his business honestly. But the hyenas got him, too. As corruption spread, he found he had to offer bribes just to stay in business. Then he began to take bribes when he was offered them; it was only money he would have to pay out in other bribes. And somewhere along the way he acquired a taste for more.

The hyenas got us in many ways. Some of us were just ordinary people. Our children were hungry. We did what we had to do to survive.

But at least we had created a new industry. Commissions of Inquiry were doing well.

The Commission of Inquiry
appointed to probe
the Commission of Inquiry
set to investigate
the Commission of Inquiry
that recommended the establishment
of the Commission of Inquiry
whose Commissioner died
before presenting a report
was last night disbanded
to make way
for a downsized
Commission of Inquiry
led by the Chief Justice
to make an inquiry
into the same.

**Land Reform**

Those of us in the communal lands no longer believed promises of land reform. We had found out what was happening to our land. We began to protest.

At first, we invaded land that had been leased to white farmers. Then we invaded land that had been allocated to big men who did not farm the land. Our invasions were peaceful. We just went onto the land and stayed there. The police and the army came and drove us away. But people were beginning to notice and perhaps the government was embarrassed.

The government decided to do something. They created a fast track resettlement programme. They said they were going to resettle 160,000 families under the village based model. They were also going to create 51,000 black commercial farmers.

The government needed money for this plan. They went to the British but they refused. They said the land would not go to the people who needed it. They even said: “We do not accept that Britain has a special responsibility to meet the costs of land purchase in
Zimbabwe. We are a new Government ... without links to former colonial interests.” All of us were angry. They could have found a way to check that the land went to farmers. They were breaking the Lancaster House agreement and using corruption as an excuse.

Next, the government went to the World Bank but they did not want to help. So they threatened to seize the land without compensation. At first, this seemed to work. In 1999, the government, World Bank and CFU agreed a plan to resettle 77,000 families on 1 million hectares by 2001. The World Bank, of course, said they would only lend the money if the government would remove the 100% tariff on luxury goods. The price for resettling us was to waste more precious forex on useless things.

But then the World Bank and the IMF changed their minds. They decided that they would not lend the money until the government made more spending cuts. They were right to complain about government spending; by this time, it was out of control. But they were holding all of us in the communal lands to ransom. Did they come and look at our land? Did they see how we were living? Look at our worn land. Even hares and mice cannot survive.

**Health**

“Use condoms! Condoms! Condoms for safe sex!” On radio and television, we were reminded again and again. There were posters and stickers everywhere. And condoms were issued free, all over the country. Hospitals, NGOs, social welfare organisations ... even beerhalls.

At first, most of us ignored these warnings. But we buried so many of our dead. Finally, we began to learn. In 1988, our AIDS infection rate began to drop – a first for Africa. So we were still leading Africa for something.

Occasional sex without protection with a prostitute keeps the body on its toes to the cemetery.

Occasional sex with a prostitute using condoms keeps the mind anxious.

You never know about stretched rubber.

**Constitution**

We needed to stop the corruption that was destroying our country. But if the people who watch over government business – government contracts, government finances, the RBZ and elections – are appointed by the government, how can they control them? If they complain, they will just be sacked – and replaced by people who will not complain. And if our judges are controlled by the government, how can the courts make sure the government does as it should?
We needed independent regulators to provide a system of checks and balances. But our constitution did not allow for such regulators.

By 1997, it seemed that we all wanted constitutional change. It was not just people who were opposed to the government that wanted this – ZANU-PF wanted it as well. Many different civic groups joined together to create the National Constitutional Assembly. The ZANU-PF national conference adopted a resolution calling for constitutional change.

Even Parliament recommended constitutional changes to create checks and balances. They called for a constitutional commission, composed of independent legal experts, to draft a new constitution.

Instead, the President appointed a large Constitutional Commission that was dominated by cabinet ministers, top government officials and political appointees. The government was not listening to us. And the Constitutional Commission did not listen to us, either.

**Opposition**

As ESAP continued to hurt us and corruption spread, our protests got more determined. Those of us in the unions began holding strikes. There was even action from farm workers. Some of these strikes got results. They did not get much, but it was something.

And then, of course, our strikes against the taxes to fund the war veterans’ compensation succeeded. Even employers supported these strikes. This gave us confidence. Some of us began to call for a workers’ party.

In February 1999, the ZCTU, the NCA and other civic groups agreed a Declaration which called for a new opposition party, MDC. The Declaration talked about meeting people’s basic needs and entrenching human rights in the constitution.

The ZCTU leadership, including Morgan Tsvangirai, worked out the details for MDC. They published the MDC manifesto in August 1999. The manifesto did not talk so much about human rights. It talked about economic growth and about working with international financial institutions.
Restructuring in the Third Decade

Land Reform

Perhaps the government never meant to seize the land. Perhaps they just made the threat to get funds. If compensation for the white farmers had been the only problem, they could have done it. But money was also needed for inputs and equipment for resettled farmers. We could not afford low yields in the resettled land. Perhaps if they had had a little more time, they could have persuaded the lenders to release the loans.

But they did not have time. The war veterans began invading white commercial farms. The government could not tell them to wait. If they had said “Wait”, we would have heard “No”. Too many promises had been made about land reform. Too few promises had been kept. We would not have believed them.

Well, perhaps they could have said something. They could have said: “We are getting the money to support resettled farmers. In the meantime, we will give you the land that has been allocated to the big men who are not farming it, and to the white farmers who are paying next to nothing for the leases because they are putting money in our pockets.” If they had said that, we would have believed them. We would have taken the land we were given and waited for the rest. But they were not going to say that.

So they let the dogs loose. The police refused to act against the invaders.

The invasions were violent. We did not care; we were hungry for land. Some of our war veterans were angry that violence was being done in their names. They left the War Veterans Association and formed their own Zimbabwe Liberators Platform. We did not care; we were hungry for land.

Around two hundred commercial farmers were black and some of the farms that were seized belonged to them. But this was not about race. It was about land. Many commercial farmers, both black and white, had bought their land since independence. But the land would not have been available to buy if it had not been stolen in the first place.

We were hungry for land – but the hyenas were there.

The Minister without Portfolio is being driven to Masvingo in his new Mercedes Benz. He is drinking champagne with his latest mistress. “Look at the revolution! The fields are red like the blood of our fighters. Soon they will bear abundant grain to feed our people. Do you know how many farms I have? Five! And I am acquiring others. I can get you one ... your size”. They pass people drinking and dancing in the fields. “I think we will have to repossess this farm and give it to someone who will use it profitably.” He opens the partition to the driver. “Mhofu, book this farm for repossessing.” The driver makes a note. “And, Mhofu, do you know who is the owner of this farm?” Mhofu smiles. He looks round when he has straightened his face. “It is yours, chef.”

The big men raced around the country in their Mercedes Benzes, grabbing the best farms. Even when land was allocated to us, sometimes we did not keep it. Thousands our families were driven off the new land by soldiers and militias, to make way for big men. We complained. Land audits became the new industry. When enough audits had been done and leaked to the press, the President ordered top officials with multiple farms to surrender
them. The President did not say that the big men should not take farms; he only said they should not have more than one each. We do not know if any of them surrendered farms.

But some of the land went to those of us who needed it. Around 60% of the land went to farmers from the communal lands. We worked hard on our new land. Some small commercial farms were allocated to teachers, small store owners and others who farmed the land. We brought skills and connections which helped our communities.

We struggled on our new land. When the white farmers were driven out, they took their farm machinery with them. More than US$100 million worth of equipment left the country. The government had no money and no forex to buy new equipment. We still had to farm with our hoes as we always had. When irrigation equipment broke down, we could not get parts to repair it. Our hybrid maize does not grow true in the second season; we need new seed each year. But the GMB did not distribute seed to many of us. So some of us had to plant hybrid maize from the year before and got very poor crops.

We were determined. We found a little money and we bought some cattle. Some of us even found enough money to buy equipment. The marketing boards were not working so we built our own local supply systems. New businesses grew up around our resettlement areas. When the rains were good, some of us could feed ourselves and even keep something for storage and sales. When the rains were bad, we could not.

All of Zimbabwe suffered because there was no support for our resettlement. By 2003, Zimbabwe’s maize production had dropped to one tenth of what it had been before resettlement. Other crops were not as bad, but nearly so. Seed and stock feed production both declined. Our national cattle herd dropped to one fifth of what it had been.

Our agricultural research stations had been among the best in Africa. Now they approached collapse. Some of them had been funded by the commercial farms and most of them were gone. Others had been funded by the government. But the government had no money.

The government finally got some tractors. They got them by taking money from the tobacco export earnings that were set aside for inputs for the tobacco farmers’ next season. But most of these tractors went to the big men who did not use them. And now some tobacco farmers could not get inputs, so they could not produce and we lost more forex.

And the communal lands were still crowded. Nearly 250,000 people had worked on the farms that were seized. Most of us were not resettled. With our families, we came to over a million people. Some of us were able to stay around the farms we had worked but many of us were driven into the communal lands.

And now even the good land was dying. Our yields were low and we had to clear more land to survive. Too many trees were lost. So the droughts got worse and our yields got worse and we cleared more land. Soon the whole of Zimbabwe did not have rain. In the rural areas, nothing grew. In the towns, there were water shortages.

A woman stands in a clearing. She can smell a storm in the air. Far away, lightning stabs the darkened sky. There is a long, low grumble of thunder. She waits. Then it comes. There is a great crack of thunder and the rain comes down in fat drops. She lifts her arms and laughs. The rain lashes at her face and hair. It soaks her clothes to her skin. She opens her mouth and drinks it in. It is raining.
Then someone is shaking her. Amai, wake up, wake up. The taps are coughing. Get the containers. We are going to have water.

**Governance**

Corruption got even worse. Scandals were everywhere. Money for AIDS treatment went missing; GMB maize was diverted to the black market; forex reserved for agriculture inputs was stolen.

The worst problem was the illegal transfer of forex out of Zimbabwe. It made Zimbabwe poorer every year. In 2003, the President launched a crackdown. He appointed Gideon Gono as manager of RBZ. Gono was supposed to stop the theft of forex and make sure that it was only used for things we needed. The President said that nobody involved in financial crimes would be immune – even if they were prominent businessmen or his own relatives.

At first, this crackdown looked promising. Some senior ZANU-PF insiders were arrested. They included a member of the ZANU-PF central committee, the Minister of Agriculture and a former deputy finance minister, as well as some senior bankers. There was even an investigation into Zidco and some people thought it might end Mnangagwa’s career. But the charges and investigation came to nothing. Several of the people who were charged escaped to Britain. And yet Britain condemns corruption in Zimbabwe loudest of all.

There were rumours that the crackdown was just a power struggle in ZANU-PF. Perhaps it was true; perhaps it was not. We do not know. We know that, after this crackdown, no more corruption charges were brought against senior people. We also know that none of the top men were ever charged.

Our leaders have not been charged with corruption. But they have grown rich while we have grown poor. They could not have got so rich on their official salaries. They try to explain their wealth with vague talk of gifts and business.

These days, the government gives and receives gifts in exchange for influence and does not even try to hide it. They openly allocate farms to insiders. They award lavish allowances, farms and multiple luxury cars to senior judges. It seems as though bribery has become so normal that they do not even think they are doing anything wrong. ZANU-PF gave the President a luxury mansion. He was asked how ZANU-PF could have paid for this mansion without corruption. He explained that it had been built with gifts from friendly nations such as Serbia, Malaysia and China. He spoke as though he did not know that accepting such large gifts, especially from countries that are buying up Zimbabwe’s resources, is the same as taking bribes.

But they were playing the drum of the colonials. It was not our drum.

**Restructuring**

Everywhere there was evidence of the damage that economic liberalisation had done, all over Africa and Asia. A Christian Aid study was so detailed that the truth of what they said could not be denied. They estimated that trade liberalisation alone had cost sub-Saharan Africa over US$270 billion since 1985. This was more than the total debt of these countries.

This information did not help Zimbabwe. The wealthy G8 nations agreed to write off US$40 billion of debt for poor countries. But this was only a fraction of what was owed and only
countries with good governance would qualify. Some lending nations also said they would tie any future loans to good governance, not liberalisation. Good governance is supposed to mean a government that is not corrupt. So, of course, Zimbabwe does not qualify. And the World Bank and the IMF paid no attention. They continued to insist that economic liberalisation was a good plan.

The government continued to try to pay off our debt, even though it was pointless. Sometimes they paid nothing but other times they paid a lot. In twelve months from May 2007, debt repayments ate up nearly three quarters of the money we had earned from exports. How can we do anything to help our farmers and our industries, or even feed our people, if we are pouring away this much money for no reason?

The government abandoned ESAP and they tried to put things back the way they were. But, by then, the damage had been done. Corruption was everywhere and this was not fixed. And they kept printing money for government spending so inflation continued to spiral. So nothing else they did could work. Most of the things they did just made it worse.

They set a fixed exchange rate for the Zimbabwe dollar. This just increased corruption. Inflation continued and, soon, the big men with money could buy forex for much less than it was worth. Some sold it on the black market for big profits. Others moved it illegally outside Zimbabwe.

They introduced price controls for basic items. It just turned into legalised looting. The army forced the shops to sell their products at a loss. This did not help most of us. Those with money quickly cleared the shelves of goods and sold them on the black market for big profits.

The government turned their backs on the West and launched their “Look East” policy. The East did not attach conditions to funding. But the East was not interested in lending money; they knew we could not manage the repayments. They were only interested in buying our resources. They bought mining concessions and infrastructure. This gave them influence and made Zimbabwe poorer. They also sold us poor quality goods that they could not get anyone else to buy. So they got back a lot of the money they paid for our resources. And we got rubbish in return. Of course, they also brought gifts.

Economy

Our economy went into free fall. Inflation became madness. Sometimes, we had to carry money in sacks to buy bread. Then the government would bring out new notes or slash zeros off our currency and we could carry our money again, for a few months. Our employers began to pay us partly in groceries. The groceries were worth more than the money.

While the President is once again flying East, Mxolisi is flying West – over a fence and into a yard. He is being chased by a policeman. He almost gets away, but a prostitute tells the policeman which way he has gone. She is angry with Mxolisi because he paid for her services with counterfeit money. When she complained, he retorted: “You don’t like my money? Do you think that the money the state prints is any better?”

The official economy was not working, so we made our own parallel economy. Now we trade in black market goods; we pay and receive chegumi. Some of us, especially in the civil
service, do not even earn enough to pay for transport to work. We go to work anyway – to do business in the parallel economy. And forex is no longer just for imports; we trade in it at home because it is stable currency.

Many of us left Zimbabwe in search of work. Those of us with good qualifications left first. We could get work permits and good jobs in other countries. As things got worse, others among us left, too. We went to neighbouring countries and we did the work that no-one else wanted or we traded in the streets. Our neighbours welcomed us at first but soon there were so many of them that they began to get angry. In South Africa, there was terrible violence. Today, around a third of all Zimbabweans are living in other countries. And we all send money home.

Some of us who stayed in Zimbabwe made trips across our borders to sell whatever we could make. We used to laugh when the Zambians came to Zimbabwe to sell things. Now it was our turn. And the welcome went away when there were too many of us.

Tsitsi has gone to Botswana to sell doilies in the villages. The Tswana are polite, happy people. She used to enjoy her visits. But now, things have changed.

“Get out, go!”

“Get out of here, you mokwerewere.”

Then she sees an old woman outside her house. The old woman does not chase her away. She kneels and greets her in broken Setswana. But now a young woman rushes over to the old mother. She is speaking fast and loudly. Tsitsi cannot understand her but she knows what she is saying. She gets up and walks away.

The old woman rebukes her child. “Serwalo, where are your manners?”

“But Nkuku, haven’t you heard what they are saying on the radio? These people are thieves. They cost Botswana money that could be used for other things.”

“It’s not in vain that our people say don’t laugh at one who is fallen. We are kind people, my child. Don’t let them say otherwise when they leave.”

Serwalo turns to apologise to the Zimbabwean. Then she thinks better of calling her back. She recognises the pride in the way she walks with her back so straight.

Today, our farmers produce less than a third of all the food we need. And we no longer have the money to import enough food. Now, for the first time, we depend on charity. Much of the food aid that comes in is GM grain which threatens our local maize with contamination. Some relief food is diverted for sale on the black market. The government and aid agencies even fight their political battles with our food.

A man is rummaging through a bin. From somewhere in the mess, he fishes out a bone. A dog appears from nowhere and snatches the bone away. The man gives chase but his tattered shorts fall to his knees and he stops to pull them up. Then he shrugs his shoulders and turns back to the bin to rummage again.

Sovereignty has replaced sadza in Zimbabwe. And sovereignty provides a very light diet.
My pot is an old paint container
I do not know
who bought it
I do not know
whose house it decorated
I picked up the empty tin
in Cemetery Lane.
My lamp, a paraffin lamp
is an empty 280ml bottle
labelled 40 per cent alcohol
I do not know
who drank the alcohol
I picked up the bottle in a trash bin.
My cup
is an old jam tin
I do not know who enjoyed the sweetness
I found the tin
in a storm-water drain.
My plate is a motor car hub-cap cover
I do not know
whose car it belonged to
I found a boy wheeling it, playing with it.
My house is built
from plastic over cardboard
I found the plastic being blown by the wind.
It's simple
I pick up my life
as I go.

Health and Education

Our education system collapsed. Our teachers could not manage on their wages and many found other work or left Zimbabwe. Some state schools have closed because they have no staff. The future for the rest of them is uncertain; the teachers are demanding to be paid in forex. But, even now, some of our teachers have not given up.

Many years have passed since we last saw young Zivai, full of hope, teaching children under the trees while the school was being built. Since then, she has married and moved to town. She is still a teacher but her school is closed. So, once again, she is teaching the children outside. Hope has been replaced by determination. Her salary has stopped coming but the parents give her what they can. And this year she is lucky. Her sister brought her some seed from South Africa. She planted it on the waste land behind her house and tended it well. It managed to grow, despite the drought. Now she has maize for her family and for the children, too!

The University of Zimbabwe got so short of money they could not feed the students. We came to study anyway. At first, we cooked in our rooms on primus stoves. But then we could not even stay in the halls of residence. The drains got blocked with sewage because
there was not enough water to flush them out. So we found other places to stay. Sometimes, we even teach ourselves. Most of our lecturers can only teach for two days a week because they have to do other work to survive. They give us assignments and reading lists for when they are not here. But now the University is not taking any new students. We worry that soon it will close completely.

Our health services also collapsed.

A woman has been hit by a car. Some kind people have brought her to the hospital and called her relatives. They wait three hours for someone to see her. Then they are told they have to pay for a blood test and an X-ray. Two hours later, a doctor comes. He says that she has internal injuries but there is nothing they can do. They do not even have anything for the pain. If she has more money, she can have a bed until the morning.

Now some of our state hospitals have closed because they have no staff. But some hospitals, especially mission hospitals, get some supplies from donations.

Siphiwe works in a mission hospital. She is paid in whatever goods the hospital can scrounge and somehow she manages. The hospital wards are so crowded that they are beginning to look like a combi full of workers from the high density suburbs. She is exhausted but she will not be defeated. While other Zimbabwean health workers are washing dishes in South Africa, Siphiwe is saving lives.

AIDS has made orphans of more than a million of our children. There was a time when no child in Zimbabwe was truly an orphan. Even if both parents died, there would still be family to take them. Every child had a home where they belonged. But our extended families have been broken up by so many things: the liberation war, the migration to the towns, political violence and now AIDS. Most of our AIDS orphans still have family. Often they are with grandparents because all the younger adults in the family are gone. But some of our children have no one. We have shelters for some of them but some grow up on the streets. Maiwe! They are all alone.

At least more of us were learning about safe sex. The AIDS infection rate continued to drop. It had peaked at 29% in 1995-7. By 2007, it had dropped to 15%.

**Housing**

Every year, there were more of us. Every year, more of us came from the rural areas to the towns because we could not survive on the land. There were not enough houses and the government had no money to build more. But Zimbabweans have initiative and we found solutions. We have over a thousand housing co-operatives. Some of us were able to work with them to build something. Some of us had houses and we built extensions and sheds behind them. We rented them to people who had nowhere to live.

But the government did not like our shacks and sheds and extensions. They said they were dirty. On 25 May 2005, Africa Day, Murambatsvina began. 20,000 street vendors were arrested. This happened in all the towns. Our vending sites were destroyed and our goods were taken. Some of us had licences and paid rent for our sites but we were not spared.

And then they came with bulldozers. Some of us were given a little warning before they tore down our homes. Some of us were not. They took their bulldozers and destroyed our
homes and everything we had in them. They told us to “go back where you came from”. Some of us had families in the rural areas. We had to sell what little we had to pay for bus fares home. Some of us had no one. We were driven out of the towns and left to find somewhere to go.

Amnesty International estimated that 700,000 of us lost our homes or our livelihoods in Murambatsvina. The people in the rural areas suffered, too. There was no room for us.

Why did this thing happen? Some say the government was trying to remove opposition supporters from the urban areas. How would this have helped? Opposition support in the urban areas was high. Removing us was never going to be enough. But driving us into the rural areas increased opposition support there.

If the reason was not political, what could it have been?

Murambatsvina reminds us of something that happened before. During the liberation war, some of us fled the violence and squatted on waste land in the towns. The colonials denied that we were refugees. They said we were “lazy” and “looking for handouts”. They brought their batons and their guns and they drove us out. They told us to “go back where you came from”.

The government was playing the drum of the colonials. Were they embarrassed by our poverty? Were they ashamed to see our suffering beside their great wealth? Had they gone so far away from us, in their mansions and their imported suits, that they no longer saw us as their own people? Did they think they could be somebody by treating others as if they were nobody? The drum of the colonials was not our drum.
Politics in the Third Decade

First Party Congress of MDC

The first MDC party congress was in January 2000. Morgan Tsvangirai was elected as party President. MDC was to be the party of the open hand. An open hand hides nothing. An open hand offers peace. An open hand is not the raised fist of ZANU-PF.

Many of us were happy and hopeful. MDC promised to end corruption and violence. We could see they were sincere. And MDC already had a lot of support. They had been formed by the trade unions and so many civic groups. They would have a real chance in an election.

Some of us were cautious. MDC had their roots in the trade unions, so they thought about things that matter to people in the towns. They cared about the economy, which was good. But for those of us in the rural areas, it was not the most important thing. The most important thing for us was our land. MDC did not say much about the land and what they said was vague. We saw pictures of white farmers signing cheques for MDC. We were worried. Would MDC give our land back to the white farmers? We thought they were playing the drum of the colonials. It was not our drum.

Even some of us in the towns were worried. MDC got a lot of money from Britain and America. The Western media praised them. And the MDC economic secretary, Eddie Cross, said: “We in industry believe that the only way to make a significant impact is to comply fully with the IMF conditions.” The IMF conditions are still economic liberalisation. Had they not learned from our experience of ESAP? Many MDC supporters did not agree with Cross. But Cross and the wealthy conservatives who supported him had a lot of influence in MDC. And they were playing the drum of the West. It was not our drum.

MDC promised to end corruption and violence and we were glad. But some of us were worried about other things MDC might do. Some of us even thought it would be safer to stay with ZANU-PF and try to fix the corruption there.

Constitutional referendum

In February 2000, there was a referendum on the proposed new constitution. The proposed constitution was not what we had asked for. It increased the powers of the President. It did not provide checks and balances to prevent corruption. We voted against it.

Most of us who voted were in the towns. Many of us who lived on the land were busy with our own problems. Perhaps we did not think the constitution mattered much to us, although in fact it did.

MDC had campaigned against the proposed constitution. Those of us who supported MDC said it was a victory for our party. But some of us who voted against the constitution were ZANU-PF supporters. We wanted to end corruption, too. Even so, the referendum was a warning to the government that many of us could vote against them.
Elections in 2000, 2002 and 2005

Elections

The long struggle for power between ZANU-PF and MDC began. The government suppressed the independent media. And they started a campaign of violence against MDC. Sometimes MDC responded with violence.

ZANU-PF won in each election. In the 2000 parliamentary election, MDC got nearly as many votes as ZANU-PF. In the presidential election and the 2005 parliamentary election, ZANU-PF got more votes. But the increase in the ZANU-PF votes was almost exactly the same as the increase in the total number of voters. Some of us suspected that the extra votes were from dead people.

In each election, there were reports of ballot tampering as well as the violence. Each time SADC observers investigated but they did not find evidence that these problems were enough to change the result. SADC approved the results. They recorded the issues that were reported and made some improvements. For example, transparent ballot boxes were introduced in 2005 to prevent ballot stuffing. But MDC and Western nations were not satisfied. Each time, they declared the election had been stolen.

Violence from ZANU-PF

There was violence from the start. And in 2001, the government set up Border Gezi Training Centre. They said they were training our young people for national service. They did not say what this national service would be. Some say that 50,000 of our young people were taken for training. They say they were sent to do beatings, torture and even killings. Perhaps it was true.

Some NGOs reported that more than 20,000 of our people were affected by the violence in these elections. Some of us were beaten. Some of our homes were burned. More than a hundred of our people died. Militias ordered us to attend political meetings. They shouted slogans at us. They watched us to make sure we shouted back with the required enthusiasm. As the food situation got worse, even our food became a weapon.

The government still had not learned that fear cannot make people follow in their hearts.

Was the government still playing the drum of the East? They still would not tolerate opposition. Or were they playing the drum of the colonials? They were using violence to stay in power. They were protecting the wealth they had stolen from us. And perhaps, like the colonials, they were afraid. We do not know what drum they were playing but it was someone else’s drum. It was not our drum.

Tichaona hides in the hozi. The men are attacking his father with machetes. His father struggles and then he falls. Tichaona’s tears flow like rivers. Then they drag his mother from the hut. Two hold her down while a third thrusts his manhood into her. Each man takes his turn. Tichaona feels helpless and guilty as he flees. He walks in a pit of fear until he reaches the road to Harare.

Now Tichaona reaches his uncle’s house. His uncle is a big man. The house is large and full of wonderful things. Tichaona cannot ask his question. But his uncle seems to know.
“Did your mother tell you what happened to our parents? Your grandparents?” He sighs. He is remembering another frightened boy – the boy that he once was. “They were killed before our very eyes, Tichaona. They were on the people’s side, the fighters’ side. They taught us to do what was right.” His eyes fill with tears and his voice trails away.

He wipes his eyes and speaks harshly. “The whites killed them, but they did not win. Our people won. I belong to the winning side, Tichaona, the one our parents died for. This is my reward.” He spreads his arms. He falls silent again.

Then, gently, he presses a big brown envelope into Tichaona’s hand.

“Tichaona, take this. Use it to get far away from here ... away from this madness.”

Those of us who supported MDC kept our courage. We were determined. The MDC leaders had courage, too. They were threatened, harassed and beaten. Tsvangirai’s motorcade was attacked by ZANU-PF youths but he escaped. He said that they were trying to kill him. He was also charged with treason twice but the charges came to nothing.

Give me
a chisel and a hammer.
I want to cut
on granite
the names of heroes
not buried at Heroes Acre
but interred in shrines
of the people’s minds.
Men and women
who passed on
at scenes
of specified accidents,
names missing
in classified notices,
unspoken effigies
on silenced lips.

**Violence in MDC**

MDC was supposed to be the party that opposed violence. But sometimes Tsvangirai said different things. Even in his first year as leader, he made threats. He spoke about violence from ZANU-PF and he said: “MDC will no longer sit back... We shall take this violence to their doorstep.” Afterwards, MDC officials tried to say this was not what he meant. Then he threatened violence if Mugabe refused to step down before the 2002 elections. He told a crowd of 20,000 supporters that if Mugabe refused to go peacefully, then he would be removed violently. And sometimes, MDC leaders would make statements that seemed to condone violence from their supporters. They would say: “The people will take to the streets. There will be violence. We will not tell them to do so, but we cannot stop them.” Perhaps they were even trying to encourage violence, without admitting it.

And there was some violence from MDC supporters. It was nothing like the violence from ZANU-PF, but it happened.
And then, in 2006, Ncube told us there was organised violence in MDC. He said MDC secretly sent four members to Serbia for training in mass action. The Serbians told them to recruit people who had nothing to lose. They recruited 24 youths and trained them. Ncube said people in Tsvangirai’s office sent these youths to beat and torture MDC members who disagreed. Other MDC members and NGOs also reported organised violence in MDC.

We do not know what drum they were playing, but it was not our drum.

Gutsa is talking with his friends. These days, every discussion turns to politics. He is worried about all this talk of violence from MDC.

“Nothing has happened, Gutsa. It is mostly just a few beatings inside MDC.”

“Muchena, we criticise ZANU-PF for using violence to stop dissent within the party. Why do you not worry when it happens in MDC? And Ncube also said they were trying to start some kind of mass action. What does that mean?”

“OK, violence inside MDC is bad. But we are not in a position to complain. And what if MDC uses violence against ZANU-PF? I don’t want to be a part of it myself but, if some people want to try it and they see them off, I will not complain.”

“Do you think it would end there? So far, violence is only coming from the military and ZANU-PF militias. How can anything improve if all of us start fighting each other?”

**MDC and Democracy**

Those of us who supported MDC were bitterly disappointed by the election results. The constitutional referendum had raised our hopes so much. Many of us had suffered from the violence. We knew there had been ballot tampering. It was perhaps inevitable that most of us would dismiss results as rigged and look no further. But perhaps it was unwise.

Perhaps the ballot tampering and violence were enough to change the results – but perhaps they were not. Many people suffered in the violence – but did it make them change their votes? In the 1985 elections, Gukurahundi raged. The people refused to be intimidated and PF-ZAPU won all the seats in Matabeleland. Why would people have lost their courage now, when they had a real chance for change? And if intimidation did not change the vote, could ballot rigging alone have been enough? It surely cost MDC some seats, but would MDC have won if there had been no tampering? Perhaps – but perhaps not. We do not know.

MDC got good results in the towns. MDC offered hope to many of us there. ZANU-PF got good results in the rural areas. Many of us in the rural areas were worried about what MDC would do with our land.

“Muchena, if MDC want to win the next election, they should listen to the voters. My brother’s family voted ZANU-PF. He was allocated a bit of land. They are struggling, but at least it is better than it was in Gutu. They are afraid that MDC will give their land back to the white farmers. Those same white farmers that made us walk all the way from Mvuma to Gutu when they took our land. And if MDC will not listen when my family votes, and give some guarantees for the resettled farmers, they will vote ZANU-PF again.”

MDC was supposed to be the party that believed in democracy. But sometimes Tsvangirai said different things. Often, before the Presidential election, Tsvangirai said that if he did
not win, it would be because the election was rigged. He said he would look to the West for assistance if this happened. He did not say what he would expect the West to do.

“He could at least wait until after the election before he complains. And what does he want them to do? Does he want them to install him by force? Is he asking to be anointed as President?”

“Gutsa, you worry too much. He is only saying that we all know that ZANU-PF rigs the vote.”

In 2006, Tsvangirai visited Zambia with his team. He was soon deported. Zambia said: “We felt that some of the discussions he had would be better discussed in Zimbabwe rather than in Zambia.” The Herald claimed that Tsvangirai had met secretly with Freedom House, which is supposed to have links with the CIA. MDC said: “We are entitled to meet whoever we want. There is no need for us to tell you the people we were meeting, but just know that we were on a mission to bring change in Zimbabwe.”

This news has got Gutsa and Muchena arguing again.

“It is nothing. The Herald is always seeing plots and conspiracies from MDC and the West.”

“But why won’t MDC say who they were meeting? And what is this secret ‘mission to bring change’ they are talking about? Ee, Muchena, this one is suspicious.”

“And what does it matter if they were plotting something? We want change, don’t we?”

“Muchena, our people died for the right to vote. Now I agree that the vote we have right now is not good. Perhaps we have to get four votes to every three for ZANU-PF, if we want to win. But any vote is better than nothing. MDC should go out and listen to people and make policies to get those votes. They cannot just throw away the ballot box. They will divide us if they try to do it.”

**The Split in the MDC**

Tension had been growing in MDC. At the end of 2005, the party split. At first we heard it was because of the boycott of the senate elections. There was a dispute about the national council vote and Tsvangirai’s decision. Then we heard it was about the violence in MDC. And some of the council said that Tsvangirai would not listen.

We had been hearing more and more about the violence. And we were not surprised to hear complaints about Tsvangirai’s leadership. For a long time, his speeches had not been so much about what MDC was trying to do. They were about Tsvangirai.

Tsvangirai had led MDC from the start. He had faced threats and harassment and violence. His supporters turned to him for guidance; the Western press praised him as a saviour. So many burdens were his. Perhaps sometimes he felt alone with his burdens. Perhaps that is why he began to think that the decisions, also, were his and his alone.

“What is the council complaining about? We need decisive leadership in this struggle.”

“Muchena, we supported MDC because it was the party of the open hand. But now it is becoming the party of Tsvangirai. It is all looking a bit too familiar.”
2008 Harmonised Elections

ZANU-PF and the two MDC factions began negotiations. Tensions were high. Tsvangirai received a beating that put him in hospital. But negotiations continued.

Late in 2007, they reached an agreement. They agreed to hold harmonised elections for the President, Parliament and the Senate. They agreed what they would do to make the elections free and fair. There would be free campaigning and equal access to the media. There would be no violence. Each voter would only vote in their own ward, to prevent tampering. Transparent ballot boxes would be used again. Votes would be counted and posted at polling stations to prevent rigging.

It did not go so well. The government caused many difficulties for the opposition parties. There were reports of rigging of the register of voters and postal votes. There was violence. Even so, this was the best election we had seen for many years. Perhaps it was as near to free and fair as could be achieved, considering the tensions. The violence was not as bad as before. For several weeks before the election, observers were present and things were fairly peaceful.

So we voted. Some of us still believed in ZANU-PF and voted for them gladly. Some of us still believed in MDC (one faction or another) and voted for them with hope in our hearts. Some of us were not happy with any of our choices. So we chose the party that we thought was least bad and we voted with heavy hearts. But we voted.

Then we waited. We waited for days. Independent observers reported the counts posted at polling stations. They added them up and made their predictions. They said nobody had won outright. But it was close. Still we waited.

Finally, the parliamentary results were announced. No party had won an overall majority. The official figures agreed with the independent observers. MDC-T and ZANU-PF demanded recounts. Again, we waited. There were reports of tampering. There were delays. But when the recounts were announced, the results had not changed.

Then we waited again. We waited for weeks. And the violence began. This violence was bad. Counts had been posted at polling stations to prevent rigging. But now we saw the consequence. ZANU-PF knew how each polling station area had voted. Whole communities were punished for voting MDC. And while this was happening, Tsvangirai was flying round the world, telling everyone he had won outright and appealing for unspecified help if the results did not confirm this.

At last, the Presidential results were announced. Nobody won. Tsvangirai had the most votes but he did not have the outright majority needed to win. The official result matched the figures from independent observers. MDC-T produced no evidence to justify their claim that Tsvangirai had won outright.

There had been so many rumours while we waited for the results. We heard that ZANU-PF was changing the counts. Perhaps it was true. But perhaps it was not. We heard that ZANU-PF was buying time to negotiate exit terms. Perhaps it was true. Perhaps it was not. If negotiations were offered, Tsvangirai did not take his chance.

We can only guess what our leaders in ZANU-PF and MDC were doing. But we know that no winner was declared and no transition was agreed. A run-off election for president was
declared. The arguing and the violence got worse. Some of the violence was MDC but most of it was ZANU-PF. Many of us were driven out of our areas so we could not vote. Our homes were burned. There were beatings and tortures and deaths.

Tsvangirai stayed hiding in South Africa for a long time. He said it was not safe to come home. Finally, he came. But he began to doubt that those of us who supported MDC could hold our courage. Now ZANU-PF knew how we were voting. Now they knew who to punish. And we did not know if they would go quietly if they lost. Would they punish us again?

Tsvangirai pulled out a few days before the run-off. SADC appealed for the election to be postponed. ZANU-PF held the election anyway. They declared a huge victory for Mugabe. But it was not accepted. SADC said the result was not representative of the will of the people. The AU said the run-off did not meet AU standards.

**After the Harmonised Elections**

Our political parties could not move forward without each other. They began to negotiate. Talks stalled while they argued about who had the best hotel rooms. Finally, they agreed a structure for a transitional government. They were going to work together to agree a new constitution. They were going to create conditions for free and fair elections under the new constitution.

But ZANU-PF was playing the drum of the East. And the East does not tolerate opposition. So they were not really talking. They were trying to secure their position. And MDC-T was playing the drum of the West. And the West sees politics as a battle for control. So they, too, were not really talking. They were trying to secure their position.

They could not agree the allocation of ministries. They could not agree the constitutional amendment to create the new government. MDC-T threatened to pull out; ZANU-PF threatened to go it alone. They seemed to reach a fragile agreement. Then cholera spread in our dirty water. Our cholera victims became bargaining chips. And as ZANU-PF came under greater pressure, there was more violence and the abductions began.

We wanted solutions to our problems. Our leaders wanted control.

The neighbouring states were not happy. Zimbabwe’s problems were becoming their problems. The African states, the West and the UN all tried to apply pressure but progress was slow. Perhaps they had forgotten the lesson of the Lancaster House agreement. In that negotiation, each side was pressed to talk by their own friends. Now, in the negotiations between ZANU-PF and MDC-T, each side was being pressed to talk only by their enemies and so they would not listen. Their own friends were encouraging them to be stubborn.

Ten months after the election, SADC finally got our leaders to reach an agreement. Would they make it work? Could we hope, at last?

Muchena does not believe it. “ZANU-PF is not sincere. They are just trying to swallow MDC. What do they hope to achieve? Our economy has collapsed. Even the neighbouring states have had enough. They should have just gone when they lost the March election. The GNU will fail and they will be forced out, anyway.”
“They did not lose, they just came second,” says Chemhere, stubbornly. “And perhaps they were too afraid to go. You know my sekuru is a big man in ZANU-PF. He is sweating now. And we have seen this before.”

“What have we seen before, Chemhere? A string of other African tyrants?”

“You never stop, Muchena! We have seen it with the colonials. They were afraid. And as their position got weaker, their atrocities got worse. They killed more people after South Africa cut their supplies than in all the rest of the war. They even began killing us with poisoned T-shirts and exploding radios. They would not let go until they were given all kinds of guarantees.

“And when I look at my sekuru, I think that the big men in ZANU-PF are afraid, too. And as things got worse for them, so did the violence. They ran out of bullets so they killed with sticks and pipes. There were more rapes, tortures and burnings. And still they are making trouble. As long as they are afraid, they will not stop.”

“Listen to how a ZANU-PF supporter talks about his own party!” mocks Muchena. The others all laugh but Chemhere does not reply.

“And, anyway, Tsvangirai is not threatening them, Chemhere,” says Mandla. “He has said often that he is willing to negotiate a dignified exit for them.”

“And just as often he has threatened them with punishment,” says Chemhere. “After the March election, he kept saying that he would not negotiate exit terms until they acknowledged him as President. What was he thinking? If you were selling something and you wanted the buyer to give you a blank cheque, so you could put any price you liked, who would buy it? And perhaps they are afraid of more than punishment. I think that, for my sekuru, humiliation would be the worst thing. And MDC has already started crowing.”

Gutsa agrees. “That is true, Chemhere. MDC has no idea how to negotiate.”

“Ee, Gutsa. That is because Mugabe is asking Tsvangirai to give him a blank cheque!”

Gutsa sighs. “I just hope they make this GNU work. Otherwise, we are threatened with another election. How could they hold a peaceful election? And we cannot go through another one like the June run-off.”

“Botswana or the UN would bring in troops to make the election peaceful,” says Muchena.

“And how could troops be everywhere? And what would they do? Shoot people? How would they decide who to shoot?”

Mandla has a better idea.

“I hope they can work together,” says Mandla. “But if they cannot, then all the leaders are responsible and they should all go. Parliament is there. Parliament could say to the leaders: You cannot form a government, so we will do it. We were elected and we are here.”

Gutsa laughs. “Eee, Mandla, I like this idea! It is even possible. So the leaders should watch out. If they do not abide by their agreement, Parliament could just declare it void and amend the constitution to remove the offices of President and Prime Minister!”
Today

Our Leaders
They led us to freedom and we sang their praises. We branded them angels. We stuck wings on them and they found themselves flying. But they never were the angels that we thought they were. And when they made mistakes, when things began to go wrong, we tore their wings off. Suddenly they became, not just plucked angels falling down fast, but the very demons of hell.

Now that they have fallen, it is easy to believe that they were always devils. But perhaps they were only human. They led us to freedom. And when we achieved so much in that first decade, we did not do it alone. They led the way.

But they never were angels. They played the drum of the East and Gukurahundi raged. We looked away. They played the drum of the West and ESAP hurt us. We complained. They played the drum of the colonials and corruption spread. We tore their wings off and they fell. In their fear they clutched at anything they thought would save them. They abandoned us and finally they turned on us. And we fell with them.

Now MDC has offered us new leaders. They are promising to lead us to a better future. Some of us have already branded them angels. We have stuck wings on them and they have found themselves flying. But they are only human. Already they are showing signs that they should not be flying.

Perhaps we will leave them flying until they have gone too far. Then we will tear their wings off. As they fall, they will become the demons of hell. And we will fall with them.

Or perhaps we can bring them all back to earth: those in heaven and those in hell. Perhaps we can say: Let’s sit down and talk about this. Let’s find a way to put things right.

Ourselves
They said we couldn’t do it. They said we were backward and lazy and would let things fall apart. They said we would destroy our country.

We thought we had showed that they were wrong. We built so much in that first decade. But now our country lies in ruins. Some of us have begun to believe that they were right.

They were wrong.

When we were building our new Zimbabwe, we were playing our own drum. We listened to ideas from other nations but we also had our own ideas and made our own decisions. And we showed what we can do. It was when we played different drums – or stood by while our leaders did so – that harm was done.

They were wrong about us. And we were wrong to play drums that were not our own. Perhaps it is time to play our own drum again.

A Conversation
Gutsa and Muchena are talking with some other residents of their building. As usual, they are complaining about the situation in the country. Gutsa says:
“We keep expecting our leaders to solve our problems. But we may not like what they decide to do.”

“What do you mean, Gutsa?”

Gutsa raises a bottle to his mouth. He drinks slowly while he looks for the words to say what is in his mind. It is hot. Flies are buzzing round his face.

“We were united behind our liberation movements in the struggle for freedom. We thought that those who led us to freedom would lead us to where we wanted to go. But ZANU-PF leaders would not tolerate opposition and we did not think about that. And it caused trouble for us.

“Now MDC is leading us to freedom from ZANU-PF and some of us are hoping they will lead us to where we want to go. We are not thinking about some things MDC leaders are saying. And it may cause trouble for us, too.”

The others cannot see what is in Gutsa’s mind.

“Ee, Gutsa, you are always complaining about MDC – but still you vote for them. OK, so there are problems. But when you have been walking in the desert for days and finally you come to a water hole, you do not complain that it is full of dung. If we want to get out of the desert of ZANU-PF, we must drink from the water hole of MDC. Later, we can worry about the dung.”

The others laugh – even Chemhere, who is a ZANU-PF supporter. Gutsa does not mind. He takes another drink and waves away the flies.

“I am just thinking that we should take care. We should listen to what the leaders are saying – and speak if we are worried. And I think we need a better constitution, so we can be heard.”

“So what is your point, Gutsa? MDC has promised us a better constitution,” says Muchena.

“I am not so sure, Muchena. Everybody has been talking about checks and balances to prevent corruption and that is good. But there is not much talk about how to make sure all voices are heard. People are still thinking in the Western way. They are still thinking about a battle for control. If we think as Africans, perhaps we could make a better democracy.”

“That is true, Gutsa,” says Mandla. “And if we want all voices to be heard, then I think the winning party cannot have all the power. So perhaps it is a good thing that no party has control of Parliament now. Otherwise, they might not be willing to give up their power.”

Muchena scowls and finishes his beer. Then he speaks.

“You say all voices should be heard. Why? We have ZANU-PF now in the GNU and it is just trouble. When the transition is over, why should we ever listen to them again? They have had their chance and they destroyed our country.”

“We talk to Chemhere, don’t we?” says Mandla. “And sometimes he says things that are not completely crazy.”

“Ee, Chemhere is always crazy. And how can we talk properly with ZANU-PF until we have justice? My cousin was tortured by the ZANU-PF militias. My family’s village was burned.
We are sitting here with nothing because of the money they have stolen. People all over Zimbabwe have suffered and died. The people who have done this must be punished.”

Old Magudu has come out onto the porch. He speaks quietly.

“Forgiveness is hard, muzuku. But our people have long known that we must be able to forgive if we are to stay whole. This is our drum.” Old Magudu sits on the crate beside Muchena. “Muzuku, what do you want to do if someone steals your cow? Do you want to send him to prison? Is this a good solution?”

“No, sekuru. I don’t want him to go to prison. Then he would not be able to feed his family and I would still have no cow. I want him to give me another cow. And he must brew me beer so we can make friends.”

“Good, muzuku. But some problems are more difficult. Now suppose someone kills your daughter. This is a terrible thing. Do you want him to be hanged?”

“Sekuru, I would be bitter. At first, I might want him to be hanged. But it would not help. There would be no-one to look after his family – and my daughter would still be gone. In olden times, his daughter might have been willing to marry my son. She would have become a daughter to me. We would not do that today – but I see it would be better to find a way to put things right.”

“That is wise, muzuku. So now let us consider the problem of Zimbabwe. Perhaps we have seen this before. Perhaps that can help us to find out what to do.

“You are young. You do not remember how we suffered under the whites. Our people were killed and tortured and our homes were burned. We did not want to forgive them. Especially we did not want to forgive their leaders. But we forgave for the sake of our people, for the sake of our Zimbabwe, so that we could have peace. And it is good that we did so. If we had not forgiven their leaders, how would we have forgiven any of them? And some of them were sorry for what they had done. They worked with us to put things right.

“You do not want to forgive the ZANU-PF leaders. You want to punish them. If that is what you want, then you can do it. This is the justice of the West. And some of us have learned to do as they do. But what is this justice? Look into your heart, muzuku. When you ask for punishment, are you asking for revenge? And is this for Zimbabwe, or is it for you?”

Muchena considers this but it is a difficult thing. He shakes his head slowly. It is a shame there is no more beer. Finally, he speaks.

“Sekuru, perhaps it is true that what I want is revenge. And I think there are many other Zimbabweans who feel the same. But perhaps all of us are just thinking about our own pain. Perhaps it would not help Zimbabwe.

“If we take revenge against the leaders, where will we stop? Will we want revenge against everyone who was involved in violence? Even the children from Border Gezi? Will we want revenge against all of the big men? Chemhere’s sekuru, too? And, if the sekuru, then what about Chemhere? He has received money from his sekuru.”

Old Magudu chuckles. “And I see that all of you have been happy to drink his beer.”
“That is true, Sekuru! Ee, there is no good place for revenge to end. And if we seek revenge, is this what our children will learn? This would not help Zimbabwe. Our problems would still be there and we would be set against each other.”

“You are learning, muzukuru. This is not our justice.”

“But, Sekuru, I still cannot see it. We cannot pretend that these things never happened. Look at how the bitterness against the whites has come back.”

“Muzukuru, what you say is true. The whites did not understand our culture, so there was no reconciliation. That is not our way. Things must be put right. But we must all work together to find out how this can be done. Do we have the courage to do this?”

The younger ones are silent. They understand what Old Magudu is saying, but it is hard. Perhaps they can try. But the leaders who have done harm must try, too. Is that possible? Gutsa is hopeful. “Perhaps, if we begin reconciliation, it will also help our leaders to work together.”

Muchena cannot believe it.

"Ee, Gutsa! Do you earnestly think that the big men in ZANU-PF will genuinely attempt to put things right?"

“I think the GNU can work,” says Chemhere. “But, if it does not, then they might give up control in return for an amnesty. True, they would probably just go and live in their mansions and never apologise. But at least we could get on with fixing our problems. And as you said, it is not just the leaders who have done harm. Many of us have played a part, big or small.”

“That is true, Chemhere. And perhaps Gutsa is right that we could not go through another election. If they would just go, an amnesty might be a price worth paying. And the reconciliation would be for the rest of us.”

The others watch in amazement. Can Muchena and Chemhere really be agreeing? About politics? But then Muchena speaks again. He still has doubts.

“But would they go if they were given an amnesty?” he asks.

“I cannot imagine them handing the Presidency to MDC,” says Chemhere. “But I wouldn’t want that and neither should you. We all know that the President has too much power. Anyone in that job would not be good. Until we have a new constitution, a neutral administrator who has limited powers would be better. But would Tsvangirai agree?”

“If it was clear the people wanted it, then perhaps he would,” says Muchena. “Such a sacrifice would be the act of a great statesman. Perhaps he would see that.”

“Nhai, I think both ZANU-PF and MDC would need a way to reach such an agreement with dignity,” says Gutsa.

Muchena looks at Chemhere. Their eyes meet and he nods. Now they agree.

Now Mai Runyarararo comes out from the kitchen. She plants her feet firmly. They look up at her and they can see they are going to get a telling off.
“I have been hearing all this talking through the window,” she says. “Ee, you are all so wise. But what are you going to do about it?”

“Do?” asks Gutsa.

“Yes, my husband – do! You are always talking and having fine ideas but what do you do about them? What is the point of all these ideas if you do nothing?”

Mandla speaks. “Mai Ruru, you are right, as always. And you said it yourself – we are good at talking. So perhaps that is what we should do. We should talk.”

Mai Ruru just looks at him. She is lost for words. The residents laugh. Then Mandla continues.

“We have been making all these good suggestions. We have talked about what could be done if the GNU fails. We have talked about forgiving. But if we are to forgive, we must find understanding. MDC and ZANU-PF must be able to talk together for this. We have talked about the constitution. We have some ideas and we must make sense of them and find a way to make sure they are heard.

“Here, now, we are talking – ZANU-PF supporters and MDC supporters together. But we cannot do this alone. Perhaps we can talk with other people. Then they, too, can talk with others, until there are enough of us to be heard.”

“What if other people don’t agree?”

“Perhaps they won’t. Perhaps they will have better ideas. But if we talk, MDC and ZANU-PF supporters together, we will come up with something. It is better than just waiting for someone to fix things for us – and complaining when they don’t.”

The residents consider this. And they feel a small flame of hope. Perhaps they will try.

**Our Liberation Heroes**

We have heard so many political speeches about our heroic liberation. Most of them have been spoken by people who did not fight. Some of them have been spoken by people who were not even born then. And these speeches were supposed to justify the violence. We have become angry. Some of us have begun to show contempt for our liberation heroes.

Perhaps it is time for us to remember the real liberation heroes.

Rupiza sits outside his house with his friends. They drink kachasu and talk. The children tug at his hand.

“Baba, tell us a story!”

“Sekuru, tell us a story!”

He laughs and begins a story. He tells stories full of wisdom from Sekuru and stories full of laughter from Gogo.

Rupiza fought in the liberation war. But he does not tell heroic stories from the struggle. If you ask him to tell you what the war was like, his eyes lose their shine. He is looking at a dark place. “We caused deaths,” he says and he turns away, so that you will not see the tears. He will not say more.
There is no virtue in violence. It is not because of violence that we praise our heroes. We praise them for their courage and their sacrifice. They had to carry the burden of violence because we could not find a better way.

Let us show them we have learned. Let us find a better way. That will be our gift to them.
Tomorrow

Mudhara is on his way to work. His job is hard and it pays little, but he is happy. Zimbabwe is recovering. It is only a few years since a government was elected under the new constitution. There is a long way to go but already progress is being made. Already Mudhara has a job.

Under the new constitution, no party has control. Responsibility is shared. And because it is no longer possible for any party to take control, voters do not just consider a candidate’s party. They consider honesty, wisdom and humility. Many independents are elected.

The government is regulated by independent bodies. If problems are found, the regulators can speak without fear of reprisal. The regulators have removed corruption in high office. And now corruption is being removed everywhere, although progress is slow and difficult.

Zimbabwe is friendly with other nations, but the people are playing their own drum. The ideas of East and West are heard and considered; their mistakes, too, are noticed and considered. Most important of all, the ideas of all Zimbabweans are heard and considered. And then Zimbabwe makes its own decisions and its own plans.

The government works together with the people. Of course there are some mistakes; Zimbabwe is creating a new model. When Parliament is in recess, MPs discuss problems with the people in their constituencies and come back with new ideas.

And the recovery is beginning. Agricultural yields are improving. Zimbabwe can feed its own people again. Farmers are working together to produce cash crops for export. Each year, as yields improve, more land can be set aside to regenerate. The bush is beginning to grow back on this land; there will be trees again. It will take many years but the rains will improve. The economy is slow but it is stable. There are still many people without jobs but at least they are fed and there are more jobs each year.

Then Mudhara feels a sharp pain. He wakes up. A rat is chewing at his toes. He kicks at the rat and crawls out of his shack. He has no job. He must get to some bins before the dogs.

Mudhara is not discouraged.

Already the people are talking. They are talking in their villages and their streets and their places of work. They are beginning to talk in their districts. Soon, they will talk with their councillors and their MPs. They will not worry if these councillors and MPs are big men who have done bad things. They are finding understanding. They know that, if they are patient, they will find a way to reach understanding even with big men. And then the councillors and the MPs will talk with the leaders. Soon, even the leaders will be talking.

Mudhara knows that the future he saw was only what he could see. He knows that all Zimbabweans have thoughts and ideas. The future that all Zimbabweans will build together will not be the one Mudhara saw. It will be something even better.

This is not a dream.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Society</strong></td>
<td>Outstanding achievements in health and education. Minimum wage introduced.</td>
<td>Health and education decline and get more expensive. Some denied school or treatment. ESAP deaths.</td>
<td>Health and education continue to decline. AIDS peaks at 29%</td>
<td>Total collapse of health and education. Housing crisis: shacks &amp; extensions. Murambatsvina displaces 700,000.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Food security</strong></td>
<td>Significant exporter of food</td>
<td>Crisis after grain reserves sold. Otherwise, net exporter of food.</td>
<td>Still net exporter of food but lower outputs.</td>
<td>Zimbabwe produces less than 1/3 of its food requirement.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Any of us that like this story can help to circulate it. Only a few copies have been printed because there is not much money, so anything we can do to make and distribute more copies will help.

For those of us who have access to the internet and a printer, the story is posted on the internet at the sites listed at the end of this section. The printed story can also be unstapled and photocopied. If those of us in the diaspora print and send home as many copies as we can, it will help. Most of us in Zimbabwe cannot to get to PCs, printers or photocopiers.

If some of us show that we want to talk, others among us will think about talking, too. If those of us who want to talk start wearing T-shirts saying “Let’s Sit Down and Talk About This”, people will see. There is no money to print T-shirts, but that does not matter. Zimbabweans have initiative; any shirt we have will do. It will not matter if the words are put on with laundry marker or felt tip pen or dye; cut out from coloured rags and sewn on; even drawn on again each morning with a charred stick from the fire.

And most of all, we can all start talking.

http://letssitdownandtalk.com/
http://www.thezimbabwean.co.uk/
http://www.kubatana.net/
AfDB  
Africa Development Bank. See appendix “More About ESAP”.

Aiwa  
No

Amai  
Mother

AU  
African Union

Baba  
Father

Budget deficit  
If the government spends more than they earn through taxes, levies and duties, the difference is the budget deficit. They must borrow money to cover the deficit.

CCJP  
Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace

CFU  
Commercial Farmers Union

Chegumi  
Ten percent (literally, tenth)

Chimbwido  
Girl who carried messages and supplies for the guerrillas

CIA  
Central Intelligence Agency. United States organisation, reputed to have been involved in many illegal covert operations around the world.

CIO  
Central Intelligence Organisation in Zimbabwe

CSC  
Cold Storage Commission

DDF  
District Development Fund. The DDF water programme was set up in 1981 when it was established that 60% of communal and resettlement people were using unprotected water sources.

Deficit  
Excess of spending over income

Ee [HL]  
Exclamation - contempt

Ee [L]  
Exclamation – admonition

Ee [LH]  
Yes

Eee  
Exclamation - pleased surprise

External Debt  
Money we owe to other countries

Forex  
Foreign Exchange

GDP  
Gross Domestic Product. The total value of all goods and services produced in a country in a given year. This is the total of all consumer, investment and government spending, plus the value of exports, minus the value of imports.

GMB  
Grain Marketing Board

GNU  
Government of National Unity. In this context, the unity government for Zimbabwe, with representation from MDC-T, ZANU-PF and MDC-M

Gogo  
Grandmother
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gukurahundi</td>
<td>Rain washing away the chaff. Code name used for the campaign of terror carried out by the Fifth Brigade.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Herald, The</td>
<td>Government controlled national newspaper in Zimbabwe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hozi</td>
<td>Hut for storing grain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IMF</td>
<td>International Monetary Fund. See appendix “More About ESAP”.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kachasu</td>
<td>Strong, home brewed beer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maiwe</td>
<td>Exclamation of sorrow</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MDC</td>
<td>Movement for Democratic Change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mujibha</td>
<td>Boy who carried messages and supplies for the guerrillas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Murambatsvina</td>
<td>Person with clean habits. Code name for the operation that demolished poor people’s homes and vending stalls in urban areas across the country.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Muzukuru</td>
<td>Grandchild</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NCA</td>
<td>National Constitutional Assembly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NDP</td>
<td>National Democratic Party</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NGO</td>
<td>Non Governmental Organisation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nhai</td>
<td>Indeed! or Not so? (depending on context)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RBZ</td>
<td>Reserve Bank of Zimbabwe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SADC</td>
<td>Southern African Development Community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sadza</td>
<td>Thick porridge made of maize meal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sekuru</td>
<td>Uncle, grandfather or respectful form of address for an older man</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support credits</td>
<td>Money lent by the IMF to finance the excess of imports over exports.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UDI</td>
<td>Unilateral Declaration of Independence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vazukuru</td>
<td>Grandchildren</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Willowvale</td>
<td>Vehicle assembly plant in Zimbabwe.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>World Bank</td>
<td>See appendix “More About ESAP” for details.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ZANLA</td>
<td>The armed wing of ZANU</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ZANU</td>
<td>Zimbabwe African Nationalist Union</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ZAPU</td>
<td>Zimbabwe African Peoples Union</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ZCTU</td>
<td>Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ZIPRA</td>
<td>The armed wing of ZAPU</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Some Figures

The World Bank said that US$3.5 billion would be required to finance the ESAP restructuring. They said our exports would increase so much that we would be able to repay US$1.9 billion of this by 1995. This is what they said ESAP would achieve:

- Growth would rise and reach 5% p.a. by 1995
- Exports would grow by 30% in real terms and Zimbabwe’s trade terms would improve.
- The budget deficit would shrink to 5% of GDP.
- Although debt would rise to US$4 billion by 1995, growth in exports would make it easier to repay. Debt repayments, as a percentage of exports, would reduce from 24% in 1990 to 18.5% by 1995.
- Inflation would be reduced to 10% by 1994.

ESAP did the opposite of what was promised – on every point:

- Growth averaged 1.2% in 1991-1995, well down on the 4.3% of previous decade.
- The real value of exports crashed. For the first time, exports were less than imports.
- The budget deficit rose slightly (9% 1991-4; 13% in 1995 – a drought year).
- By 1995, Zimbabwe’s external debt had risen to US$5 billion and debt repayments had risen to over 30% of exports. (Even so, the payments were still made regularly).
- Inflation rose to nearly 30%.

Manufacturing output dropped by 40% between 1991 and 1995. Around 55,000 private sector jobs were lost and 22,000 public service employees were retrenched. Average wages plummeted to pre-1970 levels.

Fiscal Policy

The World Bank wanted the government to cut spending because they believed the free market could do a better job of providing services. They also believed the budget deficit (excess of spending over money raised in taxes) was too high.

Zimbabwe’s budget deficit was indeed high. It averaged 8-9% of GDP in the first decade. By comparison, the 2008 budget deficit in the UK is 3.3% and the US 5% - both considered high.

There were cuts that could have been made that would not have been damaging. And growth was important for managing the debt. Perhaps debt could have been held at a manageable level if growth had continued at the levels of the first decade. With growth of 4.3%, our GDP would have been more than 20% larger by 1996. And this could have made the government debt (as a % of GDP) lower than Britain’s by 1996.

Our growth should have been at least as good as the first decade if ESAP had not been implemented. It was trade liberalisation and the costs of restructuring that did the damage. And much of the investment made in the first decade was long term – for example, education. So, in fact, growth in the 1990’s could well have been higher.
Footnote on Trade Liberalisation

The IMF did agree that not all our industries were ready for competition. They allowed Zimbabwe to liberalise industries gradually over a few years, starting with the healthiest industries like food and textiles. But even that was too much.

External Lenders

International Monetary Fund (IMF)

The IMF supports international trade. If a country imports more than it exports, the IMF can lend money to cover the difference. The IMF is controlled and financed by its 180 member nations but the richer nations, who contribute most of its funds, have the biggest say.

World Bank

The World Bank makes loans for development projects. It is controlled and financed in the same way as the IMF.

Africa Development Bank (AfDB)

The Africa Development Bank makes loans for development projects in Africa. The AfDB is controlled by its member states. It is nominally led by African states but, in practice, the wealthy nations who lend the most money inevitably have the biggest say.
Election Results

Constitutional referendum, Feb 2000:
55% against, 45% for the constitution. The vote was mainly urban.

Parliamentary elections, June 2000:
Vote share: 49% ZANU-PF; 47% MDC; 4% other parties
Seats: 63 ZANU-PF, 57 MDC.

Presidential election, March 2002
Mugabe 56%; Tsvangirai 42%.

Parliamentary elections, March 2005:
Vote share: 60% ZANU-PF; 40% MDC
Seats: 78 ZANU-PF, 41 MDC.

Parliamentary elections, March 2008:
Vote share: 46% ZANU-PF; 43% MDC-T; 11% others
Seats: 99 ZANU-PF, 97 MDC-T, 11 others

Presidential election, March 2000
Mugabe 43%; Tsvangirai 48%; Makoni 8% (Official)
Mugabe 43% ± 2%; Tsvangirai 49% ± 2%; Makoni 8% (Independent observers)

The independent observers’ figures were most uncertain in the rural areas, where ZANU-PF tended to have most support. So a final figure that gave Tsvangirai a count on the low side, but well within the observers’ error margin, was plausible.

Charles Mungoshi - *Waiting for the Rain*

Build there, the land is the Earth’s, there is enough for everyone. We couldn’t understand this desire of theirs to call everything mine, mine, mine. They took our hospitality for stupidity ... We had received them with food and they thanked us with guns.

Also the drums.

Alexander Kanengoni – *Echoing Silences*: Story, paraphrased, of Munashe in the camps.

Yvonne Vera - *Sorting it Out*: .. laughed, spreading luck.

Gugu Ndlovu - *Torn Posters*

Fires lit dark Matabele nights as they burnt villages. Cries of women and young girls filled the night air as their bodies were violated ... a young mother is forced to watch while her children's throats are cut ... an old woman is beaten and raped.

Julius Chingono - various

*A Young Boy’s Day* (poem)

*New Beginnings*: our worn land ... hares and mice cannot survive

*Occasional Sex* (poem)

*Commission of Inquiry* (poem)

*Sahwira’s Condoms*: “Use condoms! Condoms! Condoms for safe sex!” On radio and television, we were reminded again and again. There were posters and stickers everywhere. And condoms were issued free, all over the country. Hospitals, NGOs, social welfare organisations ... even beerhalls.

*Minister without Portfolio* (story, paraphrased)

*Kachasu – a Killer* (sovereignty stomachs)

*As I Go* (poem)

*Heroes* (poem)

Judy Maposa - *First Rain*: Story, paraphrased – dreaming of rain

Christopher Mlalazi - *Dancing with life*: Story, paraphrased – Mxolisi’s escapades

Gothatone Moeng - *Who Knows what Season Tomorrow Brings*

Story, paraphrased, about selling things in Botswana

Edward Chinhanhu – *These are the days of our lives*

Story – paraphrased extract about man rummaging in bin.

William Saidi - *The Winning Side*

Story, paraphrased, about big man whose nephew’s family is killed

Peter Ncube – *The First Lady’s Yellow Shoes*: Giving our leaders wings and tearing them off