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# Rethinking diaspora remittances in the post-Mugabe era in Zimbabwe

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## Abstract

Based on a qualitative study of Zimbabwean migrants based in South Africa, who regularly remitted goods and money to Zimbabwe between 2010 and 2020, this paper suggests that at a local level, remittances alleviated poverty with very limited if any transformation of the political economy at the national level. Such remittances promoted consumerism without sustainable investment that can structurally transform the economy. In addition, the dependence on remittances entrenches the culture of migration at the local level, which also contributes to or promotes ethno-tribal fissiparity. In rethinking diaspora remittances in the post-Mugabe era, it is advanced that the seemingly intractable economic and political quagmire in Zimbabwe must be resolved to inspire confidence in the diaspora to pull remittances together for a national socio-economic cause and not local-level band-aid accomplishments which remittances currently do.

**Keywords:** Diaspora, Migration, Remittances, Zimbabwe

## Introduction

There is a long history of migration between South Africa and Zimbabwe and particularly from the latter to the former (see e.g. Crush et al., 2005). This has led to transnational lives which must be maintained by remittances from South Africa to Zimbabwe. For instance, in 2011, total remittance flows from South Africa to Zimbabwe totalled approximately R 5.1–6.8 billion (Von Burgsdorff, 2012). Similar patterns and projections are suggested by FinMark Trust (2017). In addition, Zimbabweans who have migrated to other countries in Africa and beyond have continued to send remittances to Zimbabwe to support their families and communities (Moyo & Nicolau, 2016; Tevera & Chikanda, 2009; Von Burgsdorff, 2012). As a result, there is a considerable archive of research that has focused on remittances and their developmental impact on households and communities in Zimbabwe (see. e.g. Maphosa, 2005, 2007, 2009; Tevera & Chikanda, 2009; Von Burgsdorff, 2012; FinMark Trust, 2017; Cotterill, 2019). For example, research in the Southern districts of Zimbabwe shows that remittances were used for among others, starting small enterprises, consumption, buying livestock, and building of houses (Maphosa, 2005, 2007, 2009; Ncube & Gomez, 2015).

All this suggests that remittances have played and continue to play an essential role in the development of households and communities. What remains unknown however is the extent to which a stable political and economic climate in Zimbabwe could support increased and successful diasporic engagement in terms of enhancing remittance flows and their development impact beyond family and community level. This raises the question of what political and economic changes are needed in Zimbabwe to increase diasporic engagement and remittance flows? This is particularly pertinent if the actual and potential impacts of remittances are viewed within the context of the goals of the Transitional Stabilisation Programme (TSP) in Zimbabwe. The TSP focuses on among others, the stabilisation of macro-economic conditions as well as stimulating economic growth and reforming policies and institutions to grow the economy (Transitional Stabilisation Programme: Reforms Agenda, 2018). Within this context, discussion of the development impact of the diaspora and remittances in Zimbabwe, therefore, become an important point of conversation in terms of problematising and rethinking the role of socio-economic and political stability on harnessing the development impact of remittances. This is more so the case in Zimbabwe after the ouster of Robert Mugabe in 2017 as the President and his replacement by Emmerson Mnangagwa led to optimism that there would be a credible political dispensation that would enhance diaspora engagement and harness the development impact of remittances.

Although the study started and refers to the period before Robert Mugabe was ousted as the president of Zimbabwe, the emphasis in this paper is on the post-Robert Mugabe era, for the simple reason that many people are cautiously hopeful that conditions will prevail, which would allow them to send remittances for purposes of development. It is assumed that such would also contribute to the community and national development and reconstruction of the country after Robert Mugabe's predatory politics and politics of disorder. To carry this argument forward, this introduction is followed by a discussion of the theoretical foundations of the paper. Then, there is a brief discussion of the context around migration from Zimbabwean to South Africa and beyond. The section after this considers the migration-remittance-development nexus debate and then a discussion of the methodological approach adopted in this paper. There is then a consideration of the empirical cases, centred around the views of Zimbabweans who were interviewed in this research. The conclusion reflects on the role of the Zimbabwean diaspora in the development of their country and asserts that for the development potential of remittances to be fully realised there is a need for a stable political climate to prevail in Zimbabwe.

### **Some theoretical considerations**

Transnationalism or transnational social formations are "sustained ties of persons, networks and organisations across the borders across multiple nation states ranging from little to highly institutionalised forms" (Faist, 2000, 189). These entail "a whole gamut of economic, political and social initiatives ranging from informal import-export businesses to the rise of binational professionals, to the campaigns of home country politicians among their expatriates" (Portes et al., 1999: 271–218). This suggests that transnational formations are not limited to the transfer of remittances because they also include tourism, trade, transportation, telecommunication and transfers of donations, which are referred to as the 5Ts (Orozco, 2013). The point being made here is that

transnationalism is broad. This can be shown by research on transnational solidarity which analyses the supportive relationship migrants have or establish with their country of origin (Gould, 2007). For instance, Takeda (2015) examined the transnational response of the Japanese diaspora to the Great East Japan Earthquake in 2011.

Similarly, studies by Orozco and Burgess (2011) also examined the transnational humanitarian networks of Haitian migrants to assist their country of origin when it was hit by disasters. There are also studies on transnationalism focusing on families in terms of how living in more than one country has altered the meaning of family and familyhood. This is predicated on that some biological parents no longer raise their children, but immediate family members like grandparents, aunts, and uncles assume the role of biological parents which complicated the meaning of family (Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2013). Studies on transnationalism also include political transnationalism or transnationalism as a site of political engagement (Bauböck, 2003; Bauböck & Faist, 2010). The focus of political transnationalism is on how and to what extent migrants used transnational networks to contribute to democratic transitions in their home countries (Tshimpaka, 2020). Nonetheless, the existence of transnationalism is disputed by some scholars. A case in point is Waldinger (2015) who argues that the existence of transnational ties is over-exaggerated because the contacts that migrants may have with their country of origin weaken and break over time. Likewise, Waldinger and Fitzgerald (2004:1177) assert that “what immigration scholars describe as transnationalism is usually its opposite: highly particularistic attachments antithetical to those by-products of globalization”.

Furthermore, Kivisto (2001:571), also argues that the “relationship between transnationalism and assimilation ought to be seen in the same light as the relationship between assimilation and ethnic pluralism and multiculturalism”.

Notwithstanding, globalisation and migration have led to people living in more than one country at the same time and this has been made possible by transnational networks or social formations, which suggests that transnationalism as a new and unique phenomenon exists. It is a mechanism through which people maintain ties with their countries of origin (see e.g. Tshimpaka, 2020; Takeda, 2015; Orozco, 2013; Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2013; Orozco & Burgess, 2011; Bauböck & Faist 2010; Vertovec, 2001, 2009; Bauböck, 2003; Faist, 2000; Portes et al., 1999; Nina & Georges, 1998; Nina, 1997, 1999). This paper also demonstrates that transnational networks existed between Zimbabwean migrants based in South Africa and their country of origin and this was maintained by remittances. To this extent, the notion of transnationalism allows one to analyse and/or problematise the role that a nation-state like Zimbabwe can play in enhancing the development potential of remittances.

However, the debate on the development impact of remittances is not settled, because the said effects are arguably ambiguous, as they are dependent on whether remittances have been used for either consumption or investment (Kumar et al., 2018). Consequently, there are generally two schools of thought around the migration-remittances-development nexus and these are the developmentalist and pessimistic perspectives (Keeley, 1989; Chimhowu et al., 2005; Sander & Maimbo, 2005; Omer and Koury, 2005; Kapur, 2005). The former asserts that migration has developmental impacts, whereas the latter contends that remittances do not lead to development, but inequality and a

consumerist propensity among its recipients, among other effects. The development impact of remittances occurs through the provision of capital to households, and this capital could be used for savings as well as investments (Catrinescu et al., 2009) and this can indirectly impact the economy of the country (Baldé, 2011). Some authors have equated the development impact of remittances on the receiving country to that of foreign direct investment, in terms of the fact that such remittances inject much-needed financial resources, which can boost the economy (Barajas et al., 2009). However, Kumar et al. (2018) state that the “effects of remittances on growth can be unique for each country given the differences in terms of income, population, infrastructure, among other things” (Kumar et al., 2018:97). For example, a study of 100 countries, on the development impact of remittances, showed that those countries with a poorly developed financial system used remittances as “an alternative form of liquidity to boost investment and growth” (Giuliano and Ruiz-Arranz, 2009, cited in Kumar et al., 2018:97).

Another study of 109 countries between 1975 and 2007, on the connection between remittances and financial development, established a “positive and significant association between financial development and remittances viz. economic development” (Aggarwal et al., 2011, cited in Kumar et al., 2018:97). A study of Guyana showed a positive correlation between remittances and economic growth, “but the association between financial development and growth was not statistically significant” (Kumar, 2013 cited in Kumar et al., 2018:97). In some cases, the efficient use and ultimately the developmental impact of remittances relate to the existence of a well-organised financial sector (Kumar et al., 2018). In this regard, the developmental impacts of remittances are not only contingent on many factors, but are also complex, and this is shown by the case of Kyrgyzstan and Macedonia. Although both countries receive significant amounts of remittances, “such remittances support economic growth for Kyrgyzstan, whereas economic growth appears to propel remittances for Macedonia” (Kumar et al., 2018: 95), suggesting “remittance-led growth hypothesis for Kyrgyzstan and growth-led remittance hypothesis for Macedonia” (Kumar et al., 2018: 117).

The pessimist view of the migration-remittance-development-nexus asserts that remittances do not lead to development but consumption (Brown, 2006; Lipton, 1982). The result may be that although “remittances, which can be similar to welfare benefits, change the economic incentive structure and therefore the economic behaviour of the receivers”, the development impact of this or the significance on economic elements, such as economic growth, remains unclear (Kumar et al., 2018: 96). A case in point is that the consumerist propensity, which remittances generate, may promote and nurture a moral hazard in that both the individual recipients of remittances and the government may become too dependent on these as a source of income and other socio-economic developmental needs and neglect their own initiatives to develop the country (Chami et al., 2005; Grabel, 2009). These schools of thought around the developmental impact or otherwise of remittances are discussed in this paper to provide an analytical frame at two levels. The first is to examine the impact of remittances at the household level by the migrants who are remitting from South Africa to Zimbabwe. Therefore, questions relating to the type and nature of development that has been possible at the household level because of remittances are answered. Second and assuming that an efficient economic system is a prerequisite for development, this paper briefly comments on the role that

the diaspora through among others, remittances can play in the development of Zimbabwe in the post-Robert Mugabe era and particularly in the light of the TSP as briefly described in the preceding sections.

### **Zimbabwean migration context and background**

In the recent past, Zimbabwe has experienced two significant waves of migration in which its citizens have moved to countries in the Southern African Development Community (SADC) region, other regions in Africa, and beyond. The first was soon after independence in 1980 when white people emigrated because of the new political dispensation. The second is the most recent, which was precipitated by economic and political problems, which have afflicted the country (Crush & Tevera, 2010; Moyo, 2018; Tevera & Zinyama, 2002). This second wave of migration is of interest in this paper because it led to a significant number of Zimbabweans exiting the country to seek economic recourse (Crush & Tevera, 2010) leading to the emergence of transnational networks maintained by among others, remittances. This second wave of migration was triggered by economic and political factors such as the introduction of the Economic Structural Adjustment Programme (ESAP), which crippled the economy leading to declining standards of living which necessitated migration (Tevera & Zinyama, 2002). ESAP was introduced in 1990 in response to the stagnation of the Zimbabwean economy. This stagnation was predicated on the socialist economic ideology of the 1980s. Cases in point to validate this include the fact in the 1980s, high public spending and labour protectionism which was an integral part of socialist political and economic ideology led to industrial production inefficiencies (see Grant & Palmiere, 2003). An additional aspect is that the economy was over-protected from domestic and international competition, which militated against economic growth (Bjurek & Durevall, 2000). For example, it has been estimated that about 80% of all goods produced in Zimbabwe were manufactured or processed by three or fewer companies which stifled the growth of the economy (Kovacic, 1992).

There was, therefore, the perception that a shift from the socialist economic orthodoxy to market liberalisation could trigger economic revival and growth (see e.g. Sachikonye, 1997, 1999). The characteristic features of ESAP included among others, trade liberalisation, public service, monetary and fiscal reforms, budget-deficit reductions, reduced government interference in sectors such as labour, investment, and pricing mechanisms (Sachikonye, 1999). The reforms premised on ESAP led to the dramatic contraction of the economy, and this accelerated in the early 2000s (Brett, 2005; Dhemba, 1999; Sachikonye, 1999). It resulted in “high level of foreign borrowing”, contributed to “domestic recession”, “higher import costs” and a reduction in wages (Sachikonye, 1999:11). So severe was the economic downturn, because of ESAP, that it generated disenchantment with the government such that opposition politics grew (Brett, 2005; Kamete, 2006). As a result of growing opposition, the government invoked predatory politics and the “political economy of disorder” to retain power (Chabal and Daloz, 1999, cited in Brett, 2005:91). This manifested in *inter alia*, payouts to War Veterans to gain their support and the violent land reform programme, which was intended to pacify the restive population (Fontein, 2009). But this weakened the economy even further (Fontein, 2009; Raftopoulos, 2006). The shattered economy was characterised by that “GDP fell by about 26 percent between 2000 and 2002” (Economist Intelligence Unit, 2003 cited

in Brett, 2005:94) and “inflation was more than 600 percent by the beginning of 2004” (Brett, 2005:94). The point is that as the Zimbabwean government was facing mounting opposition, it implemented “increasingly contradictory attempts to satisfy the demands of a growing number of stakeholders with very contradictory needs” which further weakened and paralysed the economy (Brett, 2005:95). For instance, in 2008, inflation was around 231 million and economic growth reached its lowest figure of – 14.8% (Kanyenze et al., 2011) and this was accompanied by either retrenchments or the closure of industries or both. Such conditions forced many people to migrate to countries like South Africa, among others (Crush & Tevera, 2010; Moyo, 2018). As a result, there are a significant number of Zimbabwean migrants in South Africa, estimated to be around 1.5 million (International Organisation for Migration (IOM) (2016a). Thus, although the exact number of Zimbabwean migrants in South Africa is unknown, there is the general acceptance that they constitute the largest proportion of migrants from the African continent (Crush & Tevera, 2010). This necessarily means that there is a significant transfer of remittances between South Africa and Zimbabwe, and it is, therefore, necessary to engage in a discussion that rethinks the role that can be played by the Zimbabwean state to enhance the remittances channel flow and its attendant effects in the context of socio-economic development.

### **Migration, the diaspora, remittances, and development**

In Africa, there are several countries in which diaspora engagement has led or is poised to develop and/or reconstruct their countries of origin. A case in point is that of Somalia. This country has an estimated diaspora population of about 1, 5 million, whose projected remittances amount to between \$1.3 and \$2billion per year (Hammond, 2012). A study of the role of Somali diasporas based in Dubai, London, Minneapolis, Nairobi, Oslo, and Toronto established that they promoted the provision of public services like education, healthcare, public infrastructure, and the development of private enterprises. In areas such as the north of the country, the diaspora played a role in developing and reconstructing the country after the war, whereas in those parts of the country which were unstable, the diaspora provided humanitarian assistance. Most significantly, both the young and old Somalis regularly travelled to Somalia, even if it was for shorter periods, to impart technical and leadership skills as well as financial support (Hammond, 2012).

Further, a 2018 report, based on the study of Somalis in Sweden, suggests that these diasporas played a significant role in sectors such as health, education, livelihoods, gender equality, and human rights, among others (Kleist, 2018). The important point that this report emphasises is that over and above external development support provided by the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA) to Somalia; the Somalis in Sweden were involved in the Somalia Diaspora Programme (SDP) as well as the Swedish-Somali Business Programme (SSBP), which were “diaspora support programmes that offer co-funding for diaspora activities both administered by the civil society platform Forum Syd” (Kleist, 2018: v). From the example of Somalia, two issues emerge. The first is that the diaspora can engage in the development and reconstruction of their country of origin as individuals and collectives and the indication is that generally this has assisted Somalia to recover.



In Ethiopia, the diaspora based in Washington in the USA has also contributed to the development of their country through among others, investments and starting up new businesses (Chacko & Price, 2009). More recently, the government of Ethiopia started engaging the diaspora so that they could contribute to the development of the country (Jemaneh, 2016). In Zimbabwe, debates on the role of the diaspora in the development of the country have gained momentum. This is aptly demonstrated by that, in 2016, the Zimbabwean government launched the National Diaspora Directorate, to engage and mobilize Zimbabweans based in other countries to contribute to the development of the country through remittances and investments, among other contributions (IOM, 2016b). Indeed, this is based on the recognition that remittances could revive the Zimbabwean economy and particularly starting at the family-level development needs (Nyakanyanga, 2017). This paper is, therefore, a modest attempt at contributing to these debates, but with a focus on the Zimbabwean diaspora based in South Africa.

### **Methodological considerations**

This paper is based on a qualitative study (in-depth interviews) of 21 Zimbabwean migrants based in South Africa which was carried out between 2009 and 2020. Given that the number of Zimbabwean migrants is unknown, this researcher used the snowball sampling technique to select respondents for this study. The snowball sampling technique led to the selection of Zimbabwean migrants who were professionals such as teachers and nurses and those who were self-employed, in terms of owning and operating small informal enterprises. To be included in the sample, the migrants should have been in South Africa for a period of at least six months and regularly sent remittances to Zimbabwe. This sample size was considered sufficient because the goal was not representativity but a selection of cases which, through an “orientation towards the in-depth multi-aspect and holistic investigation of one or a small number of instances” (Iosifides 2011:202) and “a holistic description through an iterative process” (Easton, 2010:119), responded to the focus of the paper. Indeed, Creswell and Plano Clark (2011) suggest that in qualitative research, it is less about numbers and more about cases which can assist to illuminate the focus of research. Out of the 21 respondents, 5 were women and 16 were men. All the migrants were between the ages of 25 and 55 years of age, and all had post-secondary school qualifications.

Before conducting the interviews, a consent form was used which explained the voluntary participation of the respondents as well as other ethical considerations related to among others, anonymity and confidentiality of the data collected. The English language was used to conduct the interviews, 3 of which took place in the workplace and 19 at the places of residence. On average the interviews lasted between 1 and 3 h. The Zimbabwean migrants were asked questions on socio-economic development variables like savings, asset accumulation, health, nutrition, education, and quality of life as well as their perceptions of the actual and potential role of remittances in development, especially after the fall of Robert Mugabe as president of Zimbabwe. Hence, the rationale for employing in-depth interviews was the need to understand the views and/or perceptions of the Zimbabweans concerning the role or efficacy of the diaspora in the socio-economic development of Zimbabwe through remittances in the light of the post-Mugabe era and vis-à-vis economic and political stability.

### Zimbabwean migrants in South Africa: on remittances and development

A study of Zimbabwean migrant teachers based in South Africa by Moyo and Nicolau (2016), established that these professionals frequently remitted cash and goods to Zimbabwe on periods ranging from monthly to bi-annually. This study also established that such professionals had acquired a variety of assets ranging from cars to houses. This is consistent with the findings of this paper in that all the respondents stated that because of migrating to and working in South Africa, they had “managed to acquire assets like houses”.<sup>1</sup> In particular, the migrants had managed to buy houses in urban areas such as Bulawayo. This is the context within which one respondent stated that “I have been able to build a big and beautiful house in my hometown because of the remittances that I frequently send home and I doubt if I could ever have done this had I stayed in Zimbabwe”.<sup>2</sup> Some had bought residential stands and were in the process of constructing houses. In addition to this, some stated that they had built “modern”<sup>3</sup> houses in rural areas. It was also established that some migrants have managed to invest in and/or start businesses, especially in rural areas. This confirms similar findings on this, in the Western parts of Zimbabwe by Maphosa (2005, 2007, 2009) and Ncube and Gomez (2015). In particular, three respondents stated that they had opened some retail shops in Zimbabwe.

An interesting example was that of a man who declared that he had opened a thriving shop selling a variety of goods in Lupane, which is a growing town, about 176 km, along the Bulawayo-Victoria Falls road. Some of the goods which were sold in his shop were bought in South Africa and then transported to Zimbabwe for resale. He indicated that, in his shop, he had employed four people who assisted in the daily running of the shop.<sup>4</sup> On the strength of this, the man asserted that the remittances had resulted in development in the form of investing in the shop itself as well as employing salaried people, which in turn allowed them to cater to their families. A related example is that of a female respondent who also elaborated that because of remittances, she had been “able to open a small beauty shop in her hometown of Bulawayo and this generated extra income”. She hopes to expand this business when she eventually returns to Zimbabwe to retire.<sup>5</sup> As Baldé (2011) has argued, this could indirectly impact the economy. But the current research did not engage in an analysis of how this could happen, but a possible connection, that the opening up of small businesses, as a result of remittances in Zimbabwe, could trigger some positive impacts on the economy can be made. Notwithstanding, this deserves further investigation for it to be validated. In addition, what can be seen in the case of remittances from South Africa being used to build a shop and/or small business and actually ploughing in money is similar to the injection of capital which can revitalise the economy, as argued in a different context, by Barajas et al. (2009). For an economy, like that of Zimbabwe, it can be estimated that this can have

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<sup>1</sup> Interview with a Zimbabwean migrant worker in Johannesburg, January 2020.

<sup>2</sup> Interview with a Zimbabwean migrant worker in Johannesburg, August 2016.

<sup>3</sup> Interview with a Zimbabwean migrant worker in Johannesburg, August 2016.

<sup>4</sup> Interview with a Zimbabwean migrant worker (who owns a retail shop in Lupane, Zimbabwe), Johannesburg December 2020.

<sup>5</sup> Interview, with a migrant worker, Johannesburg, April 2014.



positive impacts in terms of triggering economic growth, even though it may be at a local level, like the small town of Lupane, in Zimbabwe.

Further, three men, one in his mid-thirties, another in his early forties, and the third one in his late forties stated that they had bought a significant herd of livestock, which were domesticated in their rural areas. They considered buying livestock as an investment because they stated that, when they return to Zimbabwe, they will live in rural than urban areas. From the point of view of these respondents, remitting cash and kind to Zimbabwe had led to development in the form of investing in or starting small businesses, buying livestock as well as acquiring a variety of assets, such as houses in urban and rural areas.<sup>6</sup> A related aspect to this was that of savings. All Zimbabweans who were interviewed in this study and especially those who had family in Zimbabwe were worried about the issue of savings. They explained that they had money in South Africa, which ranged between R80,000 and R250,000,<sup>7</sup> which they hesitated to save or invest in Zimbabwe because they considered the economy to be volatile and “savings could be wiped out like what happened in the period around 2006–2008”.<sup>8</sup> This raises questions about the implications of economic and political stability on the developmental impacts of remittances in a country like Zimbabwe.

Respondents also commented on issues of nutrition and health. They stated that, as a result of their working in South Africa and sending money and goods to Zimbabwe, the health and nutrition of their families who live in Zimbabwe had significantly improved. Concerning nutrition, one woman declared that “my children have access to nutritious food because I either send such food or send both the nutritious food and money” because I can now afford it, which is radically different from the time when I was in Zimbabwe.<sup>9</sup> This resonated with the sentiments of all the respondents who emphasised that the remittances in cash and kind had improved the nutrition of their family members. A man added that he also “was in a position to send his family members to a private hospital in Zimbabwe, in case they were sick”, which meant that he had made his family access better health facilities, something which was impossible when they were working in Zimbabwe.<sup>10</sup> One of the female respondents stated that the remittances that she sent to Zimbabwe “allowed her sickly mother medical treatment and care”<sup>11</sup> which was not possible at the time when she worked in Zimbabwe. From the point of view of the respondents, working in South Africa had led to social development at the level of a family, in that access to health and nutrition had improved, both qualitatively and quantitatively.

Linked to this was the aspect of quality of education. This is because the respondents shared that the quality of education of their children had improved in many ways. One of these was that “I have been able to send my children to a private school, where I believe the quality of education and access to resources is better”.<sup>12</sup> The qualitative improvement in the education of children (based in Zimbabwe) of Zimbabwean migrants in South

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<sup>6</sup> Interviews with 3 Zimbabwean migrant workers, Johannesburg, August 2018.

<sup>7</sup> A general conversion of this translates between 4000 and 15,000 US dollars.

<sup>8</sup> Interview, with a migrant worker, Johannesburg, April 2017.

<sup>9</sup> Interview, with a migrant worker, Johannesburg, April 2017.

<sup>10</sup> Interview, with a migrant worker, Johannesburg, August 2009.

<sup>11</sup> Interview, with a migrant worker, Johannesburg, December 2013.

<sup>12</sup> Interview, with a migrant worker, Johannesburg, January 2015.

Africa has been confirmed by other studies. For instance, a study of the impact of remittances on the families based in Zimbabwe of Zimbabwean migrant teachers in South Africa established that “access to and affordability of extra and private tuition (which meant that their children had good teaching–learning contact), affordability of extra textbooks and other equipment used by primary and secondary school-going children and sending children to private schools” had occurred (Moyo & Nicolau, 2016:2513). All this amplifies the point that remittances do positively impact and lead to social development, especially at the family level. Indeed, the people interviewed did not suggest that remittances had a developmental impact at the national level, which means that remittances have not succeeded in structurally transforming the Zimbabwean economy. The remittances remained a kind of band-aid solution or what Kumar and et al., (2018: 96) refer to as a “welfare benefit” at the family level, with the result that the impact of remittances on economic growth remains conjectural. Put differently, Zimbabwe remains less developed despite the significant remittances sent to the country. The fact that many Zimbabweans continue to migrate to other countries suggests that socio-economic development continues to be elusive. Seen thus, the fact that Zimbabwean migrants choose to exit the country and exist in a transnational space maintained by remittances to family in Zimbabwe is symptomatic of persistent bad governance and a nation-state that has failed to meet the needs of its people. Perhaps the state has not taken seriously the need to transform the economy and industrially develop the country because they know that remittances take care of citizens. The government affords to hide behind the socio-economic development impact of remittances at the family and household levels and thus does nothing to develop the country because it knows that people will migrate to and find recourse in other countries to support their families and thus keep the country going. This amplifies the proposition that remittances may strengthen a moral hazard in terms of over-dependence on remittances and the total abandonment by people receiving remittances and their nation-state to implement alternative strategies of socio-economic development (Chami et al., 2005; Grabel, 2009). If remittances allowed socio-economic development at the individual level, the government was therefore left unaccountable for its failures to develop the country and keep its end of the social contract. This is because people managed to fill in the gap left by the government through remittances.

Furthermore, discussions with respondents in the wake of the Corona Virus Diseases (COVID-19) revealed that the closure of borders that limited the physical transportation of goods like groceries from South Africa to Zimbabwe led to many Zimbabwean diasporas in South Africa resorting to the use of online platforms such as Malaicha.com. This platform “allowed Zimbabweans to buy groceries online and recipients collected them in Zimbabwe”.<sup>13</sup> In other words, Malaicha.com does not involve the physical transportation of goods across the border, because they have shops in many Zimbabwean cities. All that the Zimbabwean diaspora need to do is register and buy goods online and the Zimbabwean recipients collect their goods. As a result, the COVID-19 pandemic could have stopped the physical transportation of goods cross the Zimbabwe-South

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<sup>13</sup> Interview, with a migrant worker, Johannesburg, January 2015.

Africa border, but it did not stop the transfer of remittances, such as goods during both the South Africa and Zimbabwean COVID-19-induced lockdowns. In the case of cities like Bulawayo in Zimbabwe, this explains why “Malaicha.com grocery and/or goods collection points there were long queues of people collecting groceries and other types of goods”.<sup>14</sup> Thus, while it is indeed accepted that the COVID-19 pandemic led to a reduction in financial remittances to Sub-Saharan countries (Adegoke, 2020), the corollary is that there was an increase in the remittance of goods through online platforms like Malaicha.com, in the case of the South Africa-Zimbabwe remittance corridor. However, such remittances were useful at the level of the individual household and family in terms of the provision of food without the required economic transformation of the economy as argued in the preceding section. The same also applies to the access to private education and health care to the extent that remittances allowed people to access or “consume” private education and health, but this did not lead to the transformation of the *status quo*. There are no private schools or hospitals which were built, but people used remittances to access expensive services, and this should not be seen as transformative. This resonates with the consumerist thesis propounded by the pessimist view of the migration-remittance-development-nexus (see e.g. Brown, 2006; Lipton, 1982). The fact that Zimbabweans still managed to send remittances to Zimbabwe during the COVID-19 pandemic is neither extraordinary nor an achievement, because it further validates the observation made in the preceding parts of this paper that remittances were a type of band-aid solution because the Malaicha.com medium assisted migrants to remit food and related groceries which were consumed and that did not necessarily transform the economy.

### Remittances and development in the post-Mugabe era

The issue of how the post-Mugabe government relates to the diaspora deserves commentary. This is because there is a feeling that the current Zimbabwean government does not seriously consider the needs and aspirations of the Zimbabwean diaspora. A case in point is of the failure of the government to make provision for the diaspora to cast their vote. Generally, the Constitution of the Republic of Zimbabwe declares the right of every citizen to vote. But, the fact that the government has failed to put in place measures that enforce this right has been interpreted by some Zimbabweans to indicate that the government is not very serious about engaging its diaspora in inclusive development efforts, which is contrary to pronouncements by President Emmerson Mnangagwa that his government is committed to rebuilding Zimbabwe, through the engagement of all stakeholders.<sup>15</sup> Ironically, engaging with all stakeholders in the so-called rebuilding of Zimbabwe and its economy is one of the objectives or pillars of the TSP. As a result, it can be suggested that some Zimbabwean diasporas find it problematic that the Zimbabwean government is keen on setting up structures that should harvest remittances through the setting up of the National Diaspora Directorate but fails to set a similar architecture to ensure that people exercise their constitutional right on the point of voting.

<sup>14</sup> Interview, with a migrant worker, Johannesburg, May 2020.

<sup>15</sup> Interview with a migrant worker, Johannesburg, January 2018.

This could be interpreted to suggest that some Zimbabwean diasporas have been wary of sending remittances to Zimbabwe or indeed making huge investments. Based on this, it remains to be seen if the National Diaspora Directorate will be successful in galvanising the diaspora to send remittances through formal channels, which could directly or indirectly contribute to the development of the country. In this sense, the political question comes to the fore in that the current government should first deal with fundamental issues relating to the respect for the constitutional rights of Zimbabwean citizens in the diaspora (such as diaspora voting), before it can start thinking of mobilising and harvesting remittances. Interview data suggest that if this is done, it could instil and grow confidence in many Zimbabwean diasporas that their country and government value them.

In this context, the related challenge in the post-Robert Mugabe era is that “as a diaspora, which was violently uprooted in Zimbabwe, we are not convinced that the current government is committed to a genuine transformation of the economy, let alone the political scene. I have read in the papers and other platforms, that corruption by those who must uproot it, is so rampant, such that to trust that there will be an economic transformation soon, is a bad dream”.<sup>16</sup> As a result, “I am cautious in the way that I remit to Zimbabwe. It is correct that I send some cash and goods to support my family and the rest I keep in South Africa. If the economy was stable or there was an honest and genuine effort by the government, I would be one of the first people to take my significant resources and invest in Zimbabwe”.<sup>17</sup> Some may argue that the diaspora needs to remit and invest their resources in Zimbabwe to solve the current problems such that the diasporic intervention is significant, and not for them to come in when the economy was fully functioning. This is a valid view, but it needs to be remembered notwithstanding, that based on the views of respondents in this study, the diaspora “needs a government which they can trust. A government, which they believe is genuine in its efforts, and that is the government, into whose economy they can release their remittances or even partner at a certain level”.<sup>18</sup>

Therefore, it is far from a contradiction to posit that the Zimbabwean diaspora in South Africa remit in cash and kind and at the same time state that they do not trust the government. But, rather this is an emphasis that the full potential of remittances has not been unleashed. Those interviewed have not remitted as much as they have and would like to release. The economic and political situation obtaining in Zimbabwe and efforts at addressing the same by the government have not fully convinced these Zimbabweans that they should remit all or a significant portion of, especially their money to the country. This could explain there are no organised and/or institutionalised transnational remittance-led responses to tackle national problems in Zimbabwe. One is yet to see the transnational humanitarian/economic networks of the Zimbabwean diaspora whose purpose is national socio-economic development like the examples in other parts of the world such as Ethiopia, Haiti, Japan, and Somalia among others.

This raises the question of what the current government needs to do, to increase the volume of remittances to Zimbabwe. Interview data seem to suggest that the starting

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<sup>16</sup> Interview, with a Zimbabwean migrant worker Johannesburg, December 2018.

<sup>17</sup> Interview, with a Zimbabwean migrant worker Johannesburg, December 2018.

<sup>18</sup> Interview, with a Zimbabwean migrant worker Johannesburg, December 2018.

point should be the resolution of the political and economic impasse in Zimbabwe. And this could start by addressing basic constitutional issues, such as creating necessary conditions for people in the diaspora to vote. This way, they (Zimbabwean diaspora) may feel that they are part of the country and may identify with all the nation-building projects including investing in their country and also channelling their remittances through formal means. In this regard, the example of Somalia and Ethiopia come to the fore in which the migrants from these countries who were based in European and other countries had formed consortia to develop their countries or regions economically and otherwise. Such diaspora projects targeted national sectors and issues such as among others health, education, livelihoods, gender equality, and human rights (Kleist, 2018).

Indeed, studies (see Kumar et al., 2018) have shown that the developmental impact of remittances is linked to a properly governed economic sector, suggesting that if the financial sector is properly run, it can attract the diaspora to invest significant amounts of money. In this light, one respondent declared that “there is simply no way, that I would take a huge amount of money into Zimbabwe at the moment. I must add that when Robert Mugabe was ousted from power, I had hopes of investing and saving money in Zimbabwe, but the events in the country in the last few months, have warned me not to take such a risk”.<sup>19</sup> The respondent added that the use of the Bond Notes, which were introduced in 2016, worsened the situation in that in practice, the Bond Note was unstable, “which was expected, because, as the name suggests, it is not a currency, which suggests that the Zimbabwean economy has fundamental structural and institutional problems, which need addressing”.<sup>20</sup> This has been compounded by that currently, there are “disturbing reports about either the shortage of cash in banks and also increasing inflation or both”.<sup>21</sup> Based on developments in other parts of Africa, a stable economy or where there is a genuine commitment by the government to address the economic and other problems can inspire the diaspora to mobilise their resources and remittances. The case of Somalia and Ethiopia has shown that the genuine efforts by the governments of the two countries have received a positive response from the diaspora, both in their individual and collective capacities to invest money and other resources to reconstruct their countries. This has materialised in the formation of organisations and fora, such as the case of Somalis in Sweden, who marshalled and continue to marshal resources and remittances to develop Somalia.

A study of Kyrgyzstan and Macedonia by Kumar et al. (2018) showed that in the former there was economic growth as a result of remittances and in the latter economic growth attracted remittances. These two scenarios are relevant to the case of Zimbabwe in two ways. First, if the economy is stable and the financial sector is efficient, remittances could inject in much-needed money, which could drive the economy. Second, if the economy is efficiently governed, such that it is stable, it could attract remittances, in that people will be confident to invest and save their diasporic earnings in Zimbabwe. In this lies the need for a stable political and economic climate to prevail in Zimbabwe for the full development potential of remittances to be realised. However, this discussion

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<sup>19</sup> Interview, with a migrant worker, Johannesburg, May 2020.

<sup>20</sup> Interview, with a migrant worker, Johannesburg, May 2020.

<sup>21</sup> Interview, with a migrant worker, Johannesburg, May 2020.

and examples are provided here with a full understanding that the development impact of remittances is not given and that this is not a paper based on econometric modelling of the impact of remittances, but a commentary based on the views of the Zimbabwean diaspora in South Africa.

Further and granted that these sentiments are not representative of all the Zimbabwean diaspora in South Africa, it assists to understand, why the economic and political problems in Zimbabwe may stall the full development potential of remittances. Notably, the country has formed the National Diaspora Directorate, but it remains to be seen if it will inspire many Zimbabweans in countries such as South Africa and beyond, to remit more than what they are currently doing, which is supporting the family to pay for school fees, buy food and open small shops. This brings into sharp focus the economic and political quagmire, in which Zimbabwe finds itself trapped. But such an imbroglio needs disentanglement, as a matter of urgency, to release the diaspora from the fear of remitting all their money to Zimbabwe or forming consortia for the same purpose.

## Conclusion

In the case of Zimbabwe, remittances have a developmental impact especially at the level of the family, in terms of meeting household demands and expenditure, and this has been established elsewhere in similar studies (see Maphosa, 2005, 2007, 2009; Tevera & Chikanda, 2009; Von Burgsdorff, 2012; Ncube & Gomez, 2015; Moyo & Nicolau, 2016). Additionally, remittances, especially financial injection, had allowed the Zimbabwean diaspora based in South Africa to open some small businesses. These local-level development impacts were possible largely because of the relatively higher purchasing power of their foreign currency. But the fact of socio-economic development at the local family and household level while laudable is not an achievement worth celebrating to the point of blinding us to the reality that this was not economically transformative. This is because, at a local level, remittances alleviated poverty with very limited if any transformation of the political economy at the national level. Such remittances promoted consumerism without sustainable investment that can structurally transform the economy. In addition, the dependence on remittances entrenches the culture of migration at the local level, which also contributes to or promotes ethno-tribal fissiparity.

In rethinking diaspora remittances in the post-Mugabe era in Zimbabwe, the objective was, therefore, to problematise, trouble, and unsettle the simplistic assumption that remittances had a transformative socio-economic effect in Zimbabwe. Doing so does not require econometric modelling, but the perceptions of some of the Zimbabwean migrants based in South Africa are sufficient as an indication of their perception and experience of migration and the development impact of remittances. More importantly, the respondents argued that the seemingly intractable economic and political situation in Zimbabwe is inhibiting the development potential of remittances. People were not willing either to heavily invest their remittances or collectively pull resources together and invest in tackling national issues related to among others, education, health, etc. We have evidence of diaspora in countries like Ethiopia and Somalis forming consortia to tackle national socio-economic development challenges in their country of origin through remittance-led projects. In the case of the Zimbabwean diaspora in South Africa, they were still waiting to see genuine, committed, and serious policy and political



reforms which can inspire confidence in such people to pull remittances together for a national socio-economic cause and not local-level band-aid accomplishments.

### Abbreviations

COVID-19	Corona Virus Diseases
ESAP	Economic Structural Adjustment Programme
IOM	International Organisation for Migration
SADC	Southern African Development Community
SDP	Somalia Diaspora Programme
SIDA	Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency
TSP	Transitional Stabilisation Programme
USA	United States of America

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