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Zimbabwe: People's Development Agenda in 2009

Introduction

For many Zimbabweans, life in the last few years has been nasty, brutish and sometimes short, but there is now a flicker of light at the end of a dark and long tunnel. Things started really falling apart in 2008 with the unprecedented cholera outbreak that claimed more than 4 000 lives and infected over 100 000 others. Zimbabwe stood at the edge of a precipice with health centres and schools closed, shops displaying empty shelves, acute shortages of food and other basic essentials, and rampant politically-motivated violence and human rights violations. Then in February 2009 a coalition government (dubbed the Inclusive Government (IG)) was formed, consummating a Global Political Agreement (GPA) signed in September 2008 by the Zimbabwe African National Union-Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF) and the two Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) formations. The Afrobarometer Round 4 survey on which this bulletin is based was conducted in May 2009, three months after the installation of the IG. Below we present the findings.

The Afrobarometer

The Afrobarometer is a comparative series of public attitude surveys on democracy, governance, markets and living conditions. The survey is based on a randomly selected national probability sample of 1200 respondents representing a cross-section of adult Zimbabweans aged 18 years or older. A sample of this size yields a margin of error of ± 3 percent at a 95 percent confidence level. All interviews are conducted face-to-face by trained fieldworkers in the language of the respondent's choice. Fieldwork for the Afrobarometer Round 4 survey in Zimbabwe was undertaken between May 9 and 23, 2009.

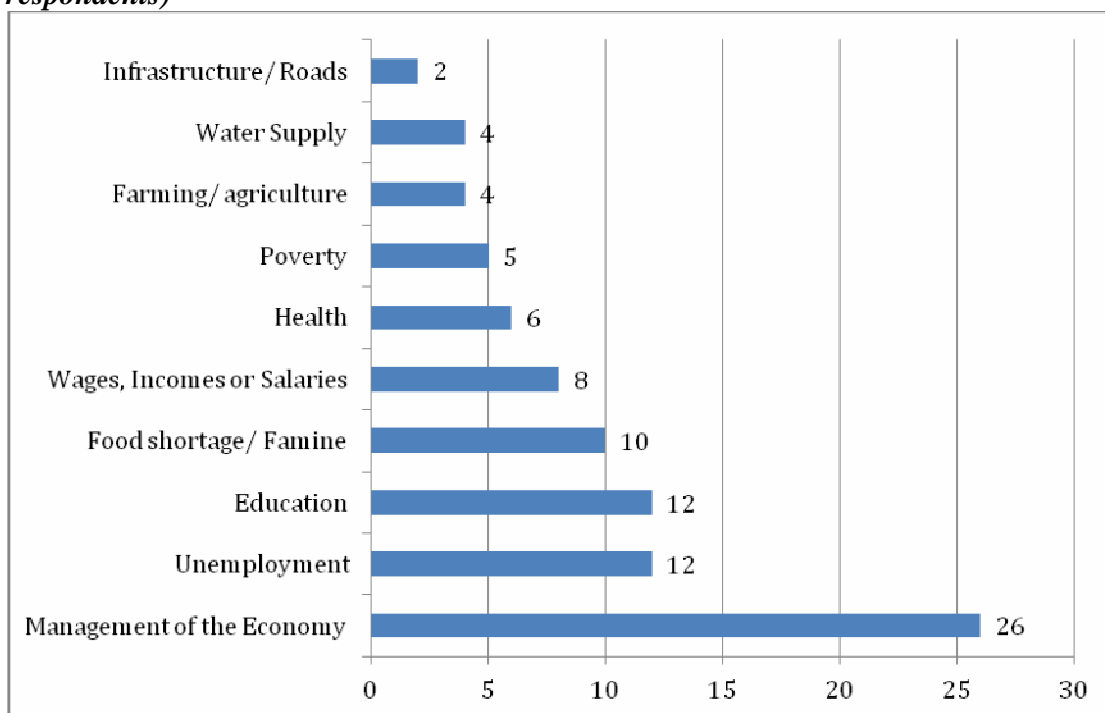
Most Important Problem: First Responses Only

Among other things, the May 2009 survey sought to find out what the people felt were the "most important problems facing this country that government should address." Respondents could give up to three responses in their own words; no options were read out to them. We assume that people would first give their most important problem (MIP) before offering a second or third response. The various open-ended answers were post-coded by the interviewer and ranked in order of importance. The results amount to a

people’s development agenda. Figure 1 below presents the hierarchy of problems based on first responses.

At the top of the agenda is management of the economy, mentioned by a quarter (26%) of the adult population, no doubt reflecting the parlous state of the economy, which is yet to recover from the ravages of mismanagement in the last decade. Economic management has dethroned food shortages/famine, which was ranked as the most burning issue in a Round 3 Afrobarometer survey conducted in October 2005. Unemployment and education were each a distant second, tied at 12% each, and food shortages/famine was not far behind, mentioned by one in ten respondents. With the country’s unemployment at an unprecedented 94% and most schools having been closed for a long time, these findings were perhaps to be expected.

Figure 1: Top-Ten Most Important Problems - First Responses Only (percentage of respondents)



Question: In your opinion, what are the most important problems facing this country that government should address?

At the time of the survey, the Government had abandoned the local currency in favour of the United States dollar and the South African rand, but these currencies were hard to come by. Most employers could pay only meagre allowances (US\$100 for all civil servants at the time) and many employees lamented their inadequacy. It was therefore not surprising that wages/incomes/salaries were ranked fifth, mentioned by 8% of the people. Following closely in the top ten were health, poverty/destitution, farming/agriculture, water supply and infrastructure, e.g. roads.

It may be noted that all the ten MIPs in Figure 1 are either economic or social sector problems and none is in the governance domain. Though at root the problems besetting

Zimbabwe are arguably governance related, people are subordinating political problems to the bread-and-butter issues. In other words, economic and welfare imperatives loom much larger as immediate problems than political concerns which, though mentioned, are relegated lower in the hierarchy, certainly outside the top ten most important problems on the popular development agenda.

Are the above-mentioned MIPs felt evenly across the various socio-economic and demographic groups? For instance, do the urban and rural residents have the same hierarchy of problems? Are there gender and generational differences? What about spatially and across party affiliations? Cross tabulations confirm that economic management is unchallenged as the most pressing problem buffeting all demographic groups. It consistently sits atop the hierarchy. But the rank order for the rest of the perceived problems changes thereafter depending on demographics.

Men and women, though sharing more or less the same problems, do not order them in exactly the same way. For instance, unemployment, which is a burning issue for 15% of the men and occupies the number two position, is relegated to fourth place among women (10%). For women, education is mentioned by 12% and is third on the ladder of problems where it is tied with food shortages/famine. Unemployment then follows, mentioned by 10%, wages/incomes/salaries (9%), health (6%), poverty/destitution (5%) and water supply (5%). After the economy and unemployment, males lament the state of education which is the most pressing problem for 12% of them; other problems are food shortages/famine (8%), wages/salaries/income (7%) and health (6%).

The urban and rural populations also have different rank orders. For urbanites, unemployment is understandably a clear number two problem, mentioned by 15%. But joblessness occupies fourth position among the rural folk with just 11% mentioning it. People in the urban areas traditionally rely on jobs as the source of income and livelihood unlike rural folk who largely depend on subsistence agriculture and other sidelines. For urban dwellers, other pressing problems are education (10%), wages/incomes/salaries (8%) and water supply (7%); among rural people the other MIPs are education (13%); food shortages/famine (11%), unemployment (11%) and wages/income/salaries (5%). Poverty/destitution, sixth on the problem hierarchy among rural people, lies outside the top ten MIPs among townsfolk, suggesting that the rural population was more devastated by the humanitarian crisis than their urban counterparts.

Age also has a bearing on which problems are the most pressing. For instance, after economic management, which is the undisputed MIP for all three age groups (youth aged 18-30 years, middle aged (30-50 years) and old (50+)), unemployment comes second among youth, bothering 15% of them. But this problem is third in the pecking order among the middle aged (13% mention it as their MIP) and is a distant eighth among the old. This finding clearly illustrates that unemployment is felt most keenly among the youngest adults and is less worrisome among the old who are either retired or facing retirement.

Other important variables that affect the distribution of MIPs are education, party affiliation and province. Though almost the same problems are mentioned by all of these demographic groups, the relative hierarchical importance of each problem is again

different. For instance, education is mentioned as the number two problem by all educational categories, but its pervasiveness increases with education. Further, ‘poor people’s problems’ like destitution/poverty and food shortages/famine are third and fourth respectively among respondents with no education but are ranked at the bottom of the ladder among the more educated.

Importantly, the perception of development problems in Zimbabwe is also sensitive to party affiliation. For instance, unemployment is a burning problem for 14% of partisans belonging to Morgan Tsvangirai’s Movement for Democratic Change (MDC-T), where it occupies second position, but is pegged fourth in the ZANU-PF pecking order, mentioned by 8% of the party’s supporters. Food shortage is in third position on the MDC-T ladder and is highlighted by 10% (this problem is second among ZANU-PF people with 18% mentioning it), followed by wages/incomes/salaries. Significantly, the issues of democracy and political rights enter the top ten list of problems – albeit at the bottom – cited by supporters of MDC-T. Such political concerns are not among the top ten MIPs of ZANU-PF sympathisers. Overall, however, we find that the two major parties actually share nine of a total of eleven top problems appearing on their lists, indicating bipartisan perception of most serious problems they face.

A disaggregation of the people’s development agenda for the country’s ten provinces – again focusing on each province’s top ten list of first mentioned MIPs – reveals a total of 18 problems that vary in intensity and dispersion (see Table 1). Four problems – namely the economy, unemployment, food shortages/famine, and education – are ubiquitous problems in all ten provinces, though they occupy different positions on the provincial rank orders. For instance, while unemployment is ranked number 2 in five provinces (Harare (14%), Bulawayo (17%), Midlands (17%), Mashonaland Central (12%) and Matabeleland South (18%)), it is relegated to sixth position in Mashonaland West and is fifth in Manicaland. Wages/salaries/income is mentioned in nine provinces, but in predominantly rural Mashonaland East the problem does not feature in its top ten, while health is inexplicably outside the top ten problems in Mashonaland Central.

Table 1: Zimbabwe: Top Ten Most Important Problems, by Province (2009)

Most important problems - 1st response only	Province or region									
	Harare	Bulawayo	Mid Lands	Masvingo	Mash East	Mash West	Mash Central	Mat South	Mat North	Manicaland
Management of economy	23 (1)	19 (1)	32 (1)	16 (2)	24 (1)	32 (1)	24 (1)	29 (1)	33 (1)	26 (1)
Unemployment	14 (2)	17 (2)	17 (2)	12 (4)	11 (3)	7 (6)	12 (2)	18 (2)	10 (4)	8 (5)
Education	9 (4)	15 (3)	7 (4)	13 (3)	17 (2)	13 (2)	7 (5)	14 (3)	14 (3)	14 (2)
Food shortage/famine	9 (4)	3 (10)	10 (3)	10 (5)	8 (6)	11 (3)	11 (4)	10 (4)	15 (2)	10 (4)
Wages, incomes and salaries	7 (6)	8 (4)	7 (5)	25 (1)		7 (6)	6 (7)	4 (8)	3 (8)	10 (3)
Health	5 (7)	8 (4)	4 (6)	6 (7)	9 (5)	10 (4)		4 (8)	4 (7)	4 (9)
Poverty/destitution			4 (6)	9 (6)	3 (9)	2 (9)	12 (2)		7 (5)	7 (6)
Water supply	10 (3)		2 (10)	6 (7)	4 (7)	2 (9)		8 (5)	6 (6)	6 (7)
Farming/agriculture			4 (6)		11 (4)	7 (5)	7 (5)	7 (6)	1 (10)	5 (8)
Electricity		8 (4)			2 (8)	2 (8)				
Corruption	4 (8)	4 (8)								
Electricity	4 (9)	4 (8)				2 (9)				
Rates and taxes	4 (9)									
Infrastructure		6 (7)	3 (9)				5 (8)		1 (10)	3 (10)
Loans/credit				2 (9)						
Transportation					4 (7)	2 (9)	4 (9)		1 (10)	
Drought					2 (10)					
Political instability/ethnic tensions						2 (9)	4 (9)			
Democracy/political rights						3 (8)			3 (9)	

Note: Cell entries are percentages of respondents (rank order of responses are in brackets)

Poverty is mentioned in eight provinces, but does not appear among the top MIPs in the two urban provinces of Harare and Bulawayo. Water supply, fingered as largely culpable for the cholera epidemic in late 2008, is in the top ten in seven provinces, but its position in the hierarchy varies from third in Harare (the epicentre of the cholera outbreak) to tenth in Midlands and Mashonaland West. Other problems are felt in one or two provinces only: loans/credit in Masvingo (mentioned by 2% and 8th position); and drought in Mashonaland East (2% and 10th position).

A distinctive political problem is mentioned in two other provinces, e.g. political instability/ethnic tensions in Mashonaland West (2% and 10th position) and Mashonaland Central (4% and 9th position). Both these provinces suffered intensive political violence

and intimidation in the second round of the presidential election between April and June 2008, a factor that probably accounts for the importance of this issue in these areas.

Notably, land does not appear on the radar in any province except Mashonaland Central, and even there only 1% mentions it. It is hardly mentioned at all in the other nine provinces. This is surprising in light of the fact that in some domestic and regional political circles, the ‘land question’ is dubbed the ‘mother’ of all Zimbabwe’s problems. Land is also recognised in the GPA as being “at the core of the contestation in Zimbabwe.”

People’s Development Agenda – All Responses

Does the popular development agenda change when all three responses are taken into account? Recall that respondents to the survey could offer up to three responses. Table 1 presents the new hierarchy of MIPs based on the total number of respondents who mentioned a problem as one of their top three. Note, however, that not everyone mentioned three issues: 2% did not offer a second answer, while 8% abstained from giving a third answer.

Table 2: Top-Ten Most Important Problems (2009), Share of All Respondents

Problem	Percentage of respondents who name the issue	Rank
Education	44	1
Management of Economy	43	2
Health	32	3
Food shortages	27	4
Unemployment	27	4
Wages, income and salaries	16	6
Farming/agriculture	14	7
Poverty/destitution	13	8
Water supply	12	9
Transportation	9	10

When all three responses are analysed, the hierarchy of problems changes, as shown in Table 2. Education, mentioned by 44 percent, supersedes economic management – albeit by a narrow margin - as the most serious perceived problem facing the country. This result has a simple interpretation. Especially in 2008, the education sector was seriously ravaged by both the economic crisis and rural-based political violence. Public service salaries were eroded by inflation to the point that schoolteachers could no longer afford the cost of daily travel to school. Many teachers left the country or simply stopped reporting for work. Moreover, all levels of education were adversely affected, from primary and secondary schools to state universities, most of which were either closed or barely operating for more than a year. Hardly any Zimbabwean family was left untouched by the collapse of the education sector.

Concerns about health also rise up the popular development agenda (from sixth to third place) once second and third responses are taken into account. Almost one-third of all Zimbabweans interviewed (32%) mention health as an important national problem. As

with education, the sector was afflicted by shortages of virtually everything needed to run a health service, particularly personnel, drugs and equipment. When cholera struck, a weakened public health infrastructure could hardly block the blows. The year 2008 saw the closure of the main hospitals in Harare and Bulawayo and of many smaller urban and rural clinics. A partial reopening of these facilities followed only after the installation of the power-sharing government in early 2009 but services had not improved much to significantly influence people's perceptions. With three MIPs factor in, we still find that people are most bothered by economic and social sector problems. Presumably, respondents felt that the GPA – and its offspring the IG – had 'solved' their political problems.

A Changing Development Agenda?

Table 3 presents comparisons of the people's perceptions of the most important problems in 2009 with two earlier Afrobarometer surveys in 2004 and 2005. The figures are for all three responses. The rapidity with which education collapsed is indicated by its rise in the MIP hierarchy from 5th and 7th place in 2004 and 2005 respectively, to first place in 2009. Management of the economy has doggedly claimed either number one or two position since 2004. Food shortages, number one in 2005, have also stubbornly remained in the top four since 2004. Health is another persistent problem that refuses to be cured and its seriousness has definitely escalated since 2005.

Table 3: Most Important Problem in 2004, 2005 and 2009

	Percentage of all responses		
	2004	2005	2009
Management of the Economy	40 (1)	45 (2)	43 (2)
Unemployment	31 (2)	35 (4)	27 (4)
Education	22 (5)	8 (7)	44 (1)
Food shortages/Famine	27 (3)	69 (1)	27 (4)
Wages, incomes and salaries	11 (8)	9 (6)	16 (6)
Health	25 (4)	8 (7)	32 (3)
Poverty/destitution	19 (6)	16 (5)	13 (8)
Farming/agriculture	-	-	14 (7)
Water supply	-	-	12 (9)
Infrastructure/Roads	-	-	8 (11)
Electricity	-	-	7 (12)
Transportation	13 (7)	39 (3)	9 (10)

Question: In your opinion, what are the most important problems facing this country that Government should address?

Note: Cell entries are proportion of all respondents mentioning a problem, followed by rank order in parentheses.

Conclusion

The evidence presented in this bulletin suggests that, in 2009, Zimbabweans think that the country faces a tall and intimidating development agenda. The mismanagement of the economy and the virtual collapse of education and health services are at the forefront of people's minds. The Inclusive Government formed in February gets a thumbs-up in terms of its performance in dealing with some of the problems compared to the previous regime (see Bulletin No. 1). The new government quickly introduced a raft of measures to

address the deeply rooted economic problems and is already being praised for it. Though the IG can take solace in the fact that 71% of the public praise it for managing the economy better than the former ZANU-PF government, it can not and should not rest on its laurels. The syndrome of problems is still daunting and it would be tragic if there were a relapse to the dark and hopeless days Zimbabweans have just escaped from.

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