Alex Bertrand
Interstate 35 High Schools
Truro, IA
Zimbabwe, Factor 15

Building a Prosperous Foundation for Zimbabwe

The nation of Zimbabwe is landlocked within southern Africa, lying within the latitudes 15 and 23S, and the longitudes 25 and 43E. The geography is primarily elevated, with the majority of the land on a high plateau, with a total area of 390,580km squared. The climate is primarily tropical with a brief dry season and a brief cool period from May to September.

Since officially being recognized as independent in 1980, Zimbabwe has gone through massive government and economic changes. In recent years, much of the agricultural, societal, and international functions of this nation have broken down to the point where they are practically non existent. A combination of hyperinflation, land reforms, and population stagnation, and other issues has caused massive poverty and has rendered Zimbabwe almost entirely dependent on food aid. Particularly, bad international relations have exacerbated already prominent problems by limiting foreign trade and aid, along with restricting further economic growth. In short, much of the overview and outlook for Zimbabwe looks to be a disaster. However, despite these major dilemmas, hope remains for the nation of Zimbabwe. The issues at hand can roughly be divided into three categories: international trade, economy, and local market access. On the basis of this organization, there can be a platform with which to develop strategies and solutions to major problems that will improve these three attributes. By tackling these international trade issues, market access problems, and economic development roadblocks, it could become feasible for increased access to markets both local and worldwide, increased capital investments to reduce poverty and stimulate growth, and further allowance of importation of international aid where it is needed. These resolves could provide a sustainable future of food security for Zimbabwe. If Zimbabwe see improvement in its markets, international relations, and its economy, then it is feasible for Zimbabwe to not only achieve stability and food security but also to become a growing, prosperous nation.

However, it is imperative to define exactly the current conditions and lifestyle for an average Zimbabwean that have resulted from these problems. Let us consider the average nuclear farm family in Zimbabwe. The average farm family will typically consist of a wife, husband, and two children (though more traditional families may have up to five children or more.) They will have access to basic public education, (75% of Zimbabweans are literate, a rarity compared to other countries in Africa) but health care is inadequate and lacking. Most will make a living off of small-scale farms, producing food crops such as maize. Many will struggle as there is limited access to irrigation in dry areas. Travel will be difficult with much of the country's roads in continuous decay. A series of droughts have seriously decreased crop yields. Deforestation and crop erosion have further dampened agricultural production.

Zimbabwe's current issues trace back to past crises. Several economic and governmental problems destroyed employment and production within the past decade. Beginning in the early 2000s, the government enacted land reform programs in an attempt to redistribute farm ownership, 70% of which were owned by the country's white minority, to native black families. Unfortunately, the results were disastrous, destroying much of the country's dualistic agricultural sector due to the fact that many of the new farmers were inexperienced in farming the land they were given. This was simultaneous with a series of low harvests. From 2001 to 2009 also came a staggering period of hyperinflation along with a sharp decline in tourism as a result of the economic crisis and lack of maintaining infrastructure.

The results of these events are mortifying. Poverty has jumped significantly from 25% in 1990 to 63% in 2003. This is even more concentrated in the north region of Matabeleland and the southeast portions of Manicaland and Masvingo, all of which have poverty rates of 70% or higher. Social and public services are barely operating. Infrastructure has grinded to a halt completely, with over 40% of the road network in decay. Freight traffic has been cut in half, effectively isolating communication and trade from more rural markets. Agricultural production has faced a steep decline with both large-scale cash crop producers and small-scale food crop producers. Approximately 3 million people (20 % of the total population) have migrated since 1990; this has been exacerbated by an HIV/AIDS prevalence rate of 18.1%. This lack of human resources has put further strain on agriculture and commerce.

However, many factors have begun to turn around for Zimbabwe, particularly within international relations and trade, a good starting discussion point for the three main issues. Zimbabwe's economic development has been somewhat road blocked by lack of access to foreign markets due to troubled relations on an international level. These roadblocks resulted from European responses to what they saw as a poor human rights record in Zimbabwe. On February 18, 2002, the European Union enacted restrictive measures on Zimbabwe. A ban and freeze on assets of 130 of Zimbabwe's ruling elite was taken into effect. In addition, all aid to Zimbabwe was cut off with the exceptions of education, health, and human rights.

Zimbabwe's traditionally close ties to the United Kingdom were severely strained during the country's attempts at land reform. Accusations that the U.K. was responsible for many of Zimbabwe's problems and that it reneged on promises to provide money for land reform also ensued. Although private ties between the two nations remain, official relations are still damaged.

However, Zimbabwe has made gains in foreign policy elsewhere. France, Germany, Canada, and all nations in Scandinavia share moral and philosophical affinities with Zimbabwe and have given much aid. Portugal and Greece also have links to Zimbabwe due to many of the whites in Zimbabwe being of Portuguese and Greek descent. The government of Zimbabwe also enacted a "Look East" policy that has led to closer ties with Eastern Asian nations such as China and Malaysia.

Zimbabwe's poor international image also led to near-disaster in 2008. Following the nation's elections in which Robert Mugabe was elected as Zimbabwe's president, the United States attempted to pass economic and trade sanctions on Zimbabwe for what it felt was violence and corruption within the election, particularly among Mugabe's supporters. The sanctions attempted were: an arms embargo, appointment of a United Nations mediator, and travel and financial restrictions on Mugabe and 13 government and military officials. Further turmoil was averted when the resolution was vetoed by both Russia and China, who felt the measure represented over-interference in Zimbabwe's domestic and political issues.

Improving international relations and trade policies represent the first step in leading Zimbabwe on the path to food security. To start, developed industrial nations have policies that effectively nullify the effects of foreign aid. An example would be agricultural surpluses that are shed to foreign countries in the form of aid. These surpluses damage and discourage agricultural production. Improving Zimbabwe's trade with foreign nations should involve promoting fairness so industrial and agricultural countries can export and import goods among another.

The second issue, market access, also represents a troublesome burden on the road to gaining food security in Zimbabwe. The current tariff system blatantly biases certain products over others, keeping developing nations from accessing and doing business within international markets. Tariffs on imports of industrial products into developed nations average around 3%, but for textiles, this jumps to 8%. For agricultural products imported into developed countries, the tariff rate skyrockets to 27%. Tariffs on imports into most developing countries are substantially higher as well.

Another bias in trade is tariff peaks. Tariff peaks involve an economic trick called escalation, in which tariffs on processed goods are much higher than those on primary, basic goods. The United States and Canada practice this in textiles, with the European Union and Japan also practicing tariff peaks with food products. These policies are detrimental to Zimbabwe and other countries like it because they discourage production on processed goods that have more stable value and force them to stay with basic products that have more rickety prices. For example, 90% of cocoa beans are grown in developing countries. Less than 4% of chocolate, the final product of these beans, are manufactured in the aforementioned nations. This is because cocoa beans, a basic product, have much lower tariffs placed upon them by developed nations than would chocolate, a processed good. While processes goods have more value attached to them, basic food products typically sway and shift in price, making tariff peaks all the more damaging.

However, tariffs are not the only problem with market access. Trade barriers between developing and developed nations in the economic sector of services also hinder growth. In an effort to spur development, Zimbabwe and other countries are attempting to expand into the service sector, which is the sector that includes such businesses and services as medicine and insurance. But trade barriers increase transaction costs in developing nations switching to service industries. They also cause heavy inefficiencies in trade infrastructure.

On top of all this, the benefits that developing countries receive from the access to the markets of industrialized nations are typically distributed disproportionately and unevenly. Many exports enjoy quotas designed to help them export in less wealthy nations, but as liberalization of market access increases, these exporters often now have to compete with the exporters of more developed countries, and oftentimes go out of business altogether,

Obviously, market access remains a crucial and vital part of Zimbabwe's quest for food security. The discriminatory trade and tariff policies, along with the roadblocks to expanding service industries, hinder further participation in markets that have the potential to make Zimbabwe a major member of the world economy. In order to create a solid platform for this foothold, a good start would be ending discriminatory trade tariffs and promoting fair trade based upon flat, simple tariffs that do not change based upon whether the country is developing or not, and do not change should the exported item be volatile in price. In addition, removing harmful trade barriers and improving relations with the United Kingdom and the European Union would give Zimbabwe great strides towards gaining influence and recognition within the international community. With this, Zimbabwe could fight for policies and laws to help it and other nations with food insecurity.

Economic development is the third and final major obstacle to food security in Zimbabwe. The country's economy has come a long way following the major collapses of the past twenty years. In recent years some recovery has been has been made, and results show that future recovery is not only a feasible possibility, but also very likely as well. Should it continue, food security could become a reality in Zimbabwe sooner than originally expected.

After hyperinflation ended in February of 2009, fiscal responsibility was restored to the government; this left potential for a major turnaround in the economy. Rebounds in post successive growths of 5, 7, and 8% in 2009 and 2010 showed a positive comeback from the years-long decline in Zimbabwe. Annual inflation was 5.4% in 2009, shrinking to 3.2 in 2010 and is projected to be 5.4% by the end of 2011.

Regardless, despite these advances work remains to be done. The hyperinflation period and economic collapse has more ore less done away with much of Zimbabwe's dualistic agricultural sector. Thankfully, there are untapped resources within the country. Zimbabwean soil is rich in many natural resources. Platinum, coal, iron ore, and gold are fairly common and provide endless opportunities for capital investment. Recently, the discovery of the Marange diamond fields in 2006 are believed to be among the richest in diamond deposits worldwide.

With hyperinflation over and Zimbabwe rich in mineral resources, a strong goal for Zimbabwe's businessmen and exports would be to invest in these natural resources. This would also be related to the trade issue, as ending the biased tariffs would provide further encouragement for economic investments. With most of the agricultural sector in shambles, minerals and metals provide endless possibilities for expanding and boosting Zimbabwe's economy.

Without a doubt, Zimbabwe's problems are complex and will take time to resolve. The numerous socioeconomic, political, and international issues are diverse and resolutions to these will take years to implement. A recovery will not happen overnight. Food security is not a pipe dream, however. Recovery is likely and already starting to show in a few key areas. The end of hyperinflation spells a good start, as well as the discovery of the Marange diamond fields and the numerous untapped natural resources on Zimbabwean soil. Further expansion is possible is tariff peaks and escalation are ended. In addition, improving relations with the U.K. and the EU would help Zimbabwe gain a greater say and influence on the world stage. The continued implementation of these resolutions, along with furthering the diversity and scale of Zimbabwe's economy and exports, will drive a powerful expansion. Furthermore, the role of world banks and food reserves should be reduced. Charity and aid should be used only for the purpose of helping people to help themselves. Should these solutions continue, along with the already existing works of world leaders and other private organizations, Zimbabwe can and will achieve food security.

Works Cited

International Fund for Agricultural Development. “Rural Poverty in Zimbabwe” 2011 http://www.ruralpovertyportal.org/web/guest/country/projects/tags/zimbabwe

International Fund for Agricultural Development “Promoting Market Access for the Rural Poor in Order to Achieve Millennium Development Goals” February 2003 http://www.ifad.org/gbdocs/gc/26/e/markets.pdf

Delegation of the European Union to the Republic of Zimbabwe “Zimbabwe and the EU” http://eeas.europa.eu/delegations/zimbabwe/eu_zimbabwe/index_en.htm

Every Culture “Culture of Zimbabwe” 2011 http://www.everyculture.com/To-Z/Zimbabwe.html

U.S. Department of State “Zimbabwe” 2010 http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/5479.htm

Macfarquahr, Neil. “2 Vetoes Quash U.N. Sanctions on Zimbabwe” The New York Times, July 12, 2008

International Monetary Fund “Improving Market Access: Toward Greater Coherence Between Aid and Trade” March 2002 http://www.imf.org/external/np/exr/ib/2002/032102.htm#i

Sibanda, Golden “Zimbabwe: Economic Recovery Hailed” The Herald, March 9, 2011