



World Day of Prayer Country Background Information

Prepared by the WDP Committee of Zimbabwe

March 6, 2020

“Rise! Take Your Mat and Walk”

Geography

Zimbabwe means 'House of Stones' and it is located in Southern Africa. It is a landlocked country with an area of 390,757 square kilometers (150,872 square miles) that lies between the Limpopo River in the south and the mighty Zambezi River in the north. It is bordered by South Africa to the south, Botswana to the west and southwest, Zambia to the northwest, and Mozambique to the east and northeast. It is less than 200 meters of the Zambezi River which separates Zimbabwe from Namibia. The Zambezi River, which is the longest river in the country with 2,650 km, flows along the southern border with South Africa. The Inyanga and Udzi mountains stretch along Zimbabwe's eastern border with Mozambique.

Zimbabwe is in the savanna region. Its climate is markedly varied by altitude. The year is marked by four distinct seasons: winter, which is a cool to cold season (from mid-May to August), summer or dry season (from September to mid-November), the rainy season (from mid-November to March), and the spring season (April to mid-May).

Major tourist attractions include the Victoria Falls, which is considered one of the Seven Wonders of the World; Hwange National Park, a wildlife conservancy; the Great Zimbabwe Monument or ruins from which the country derives its name; the Eastern highlands; Matopos or Matobo Hills; and Gonarezhou National Park.

Population

The country has an estimated population of about 16 million people. According to the latest Census Report (2012), Zimbabwe's population stood at 12 million. The same report puts the male population in the country at 6,280,539 whilst the total female population was 6,780,700. The young population is more than 50 percent among both males and females.

Zimbabwe has 16 official languages: English, Shona, Ndebele, Xhosa, Tswana, Chewa, Chibarwe, Kalanga, Sign Language, Sotho, Tonga, Kaisan, Nambia, Ndaou, Shanganiand Venda. English, Shona and Ndebele are the most widely used. Shona is spoken by 70% of the Zimbabwe population, while Ndebele by 20%. Both are Bantu languages. English is considered first language by only 2% of the population.

Political History

Pre-Colonization

The country has a rich pre-colonial history that shows that it was a force to be reckoned with in terms of civilization. A history can be learned from the human settlement at the plateau between the rivers Zambezi and Limpopo in southeast Africa. The grassland for cattle, the elephants for ivory trade, and a seam of gold demonstrated the signs of trade before 1000 A.D.

The 'stone houses' that survived this period are supposedly the dwellings of chieftains. From the 100 hilltop ruins, the largest stone structure that survived, and can still be visited today, is the Great Zimbabwe. Great Zimbabwe was considered the capital of the Zimbabwe Empire that lasted from 1220 to 1450.

In the 15th century, Great Zimbabwe was eclipsed by two other kingdoms, one to the south at Khami (near the modern Bulawayo) and one to the north, near Mount Darwin. The ruler was Munhumutapa, who met the first Europeans to arrive in the region for trade in the early 16th century – the Portugueses.

British Colonization

The British occupation was led by Cecil John Rhodes with his gold mining companies in the 1890s, and it lasted until the independence in 1980. The territory was administered by Rhode's British South Africa Company with the consent of the British government, until it became a self-governing crown colony in 1923.

During colonization, there was a systematic purge of the indigenous population in order to dispossess them of their land and rich natural resources.

The British named the country Rhodesia (in honor of Rhodes). Although at some point during the Federation of Rhodesia, Zambia and Nyasaland, it was named Southern Rhodesia.

First Chimurenga

The Independence of Zimbabwe came at a huge price, as thousands upon thousands of lives perished when people rose up against the colonizers. Chimurenga, a Shona word for revolutionary struggle, refers to the Ndbele and Shona insurrection against the rule of British South Africa Company over their territory (1896-1897). They lost the battle but not the desire to overrule the colonizers.

Nationalism

Resistance to colonial rule continued until mass nationalism began to take shape in the 1960s. Between 1960 and 1979, the most active political movements included the Zimbabwe African People's Union (ZAPU) and the Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU). The most influential nationalists during this period included Joshua Nkomo, Herbert Chitepo, Josiah Chinamano, Ndabaningi Sithole, Robert Mugabe, Josiah Tongogara, Joseph Msika, J. Z. Moyo and more.

The major political parties, Zimbabwe African People's Union – Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF) and ZAPU, with their respective military wings (*Zimbabwe African National Liberation Army - ZANLA*) and Zimbabwe People's Revolutionary Army (*ZIPRA*), fought the settler colonial regime of Ian Smith from neighboring countries—Mozambique and Zambia—to attain majority rule.

Independence

A year before Independence in 1979, then Prime Minister Ian Douglas Smith formed a unity government with Bishop Abel Muzorewa, leader of the United African National Council, and the country was christened Zimbabwe-Rhodesia.

Majority rule deliberations at the Lancaster House Conference in London, the British capital, among the warring parties (mainly ZANU, ZAPU and the Rhodesian government), signed an agreement that paved the way for cessation of hostilities and also gave room to hold the first democratic elections in February 1980. The Independence of Zimbabwe was celebrated on April 18, 1980.

The Zimbabwe African National Union party emerged victorious and its leader Prime Minister Robert Mugabe became the first democratically elected leader of an independent Zimbabwe. Canaan Banana became the first president. Joshua Nkomo, whose party was the second largest, became the country's first minister of Home Affairs.

There was euphoria with the liberation among the society and institutions, including churches. The new development policies addressed poverty, demobilization, disarmament and reintegration.

Post-Independence Conflict

There were post-independence disturbances in the Midlands and Matabeleland regions, which were documented by the Catholic Commission for Peace and Justice (Gukurahundi period). The Report is available online.

Zimbabwe African People's Union – Patriotic Front and Zimbabwe African People's Union signed a Unity Accord on December 22, 1987 to end the conflict. The two major parties united to govern. The post of prime minister was abolished, and President Robert Mugabe became the new head of state and government, deputized by Vice Presidents Simon Muzenda and Joshua Nkomo.

The one-party state solution was followed by opposition, and new parties emerged. The little implementation of the Unity Accord towards peace and reconciliation deepened discontentment among the citizens. The economic structural adjustment program contributed to the deterioration of the living standards.

Land Reform Program

Land access defined by race (White/European & Black/African) has been a key component of political and economic tensions in the country. In 2000, Zimbabwe embarked on a land reform

program with the aim of ensuring that historical imbalances in land access, resource and wealth allocation were redressed. This saw the majority of the indigenous population empowered through land ownership.

The land reform program was rejected by international actors. The British government and its Western allies imposed economic sanctions on Zimbabwe. The Congress of United States of America passed the Zimbabwe Democracy and Economic Recovery Act of 2001 (ZDERA) which imposed economic sanctions on Zimbabwe.

Global Political Agreement

Early 2000s saw political and economic upheaval over increased military presence in politics, national polarization, contested national elections and violence. Then in 2009, the ruling ZANU-PF signed a five-year Global Political Agreement with the opposition Movement for Democratic Change. During the Unity Government, a home-grown constitution was drafted and was adopted in a referendum held in 2013.

Current Form of Government

Zimbabwe is a constitutional republic with a presidential system. The legislature is parliamentary with a National Assembly and a Senate.

Presidential, parliamentary and local government elections are held once every five years. President Robert Mugabe was first elected in 1980 and stayed in power for 37 years.

Zimbabwe also has a multiparty system, where major political parties jostle to get positions every time elections are held.

The current flag of the Republic of Zimbabwe was adopted after the independence from Britain in 1980. The green represents vegetation, the yellow represents minerals, black represents the black majority of the population, red represents the blood that was shed during the liberation struggle (Chimurenga War) and the white represents peace.

Harare is the capital city and also the seat of government, while Bulawayo is the second largest city.

Change in Government Leadership

The increasing deterioration of economy and social service delivery, the nationalization of the diamonds, and succession crisis in the ruling party had influenced the country's situation since 2014.

The year of 2017 saw a major change in the political history of Zimbabwe. On November 15, 2017 a military intervention forced the departure of President Robert Mugabe at 93 years of age. Cde Emmerson Dambudzo Mnangagwa, ZANU PF, was inaugurated as the new president of the Republic of Zimbabwe.

New presidential elections were held in July 2018, and Emmerson Mnangagwa was elected, but the result was contested by the opposition leader Nelson Chamisa. The Constitutional court

upheld the result of the election and Emmerson Mnangagwa was confirmed the elected president with 50.8 percent of the vote, and was sworn in on August 26, 2018.¹

Education

Zimbabwe has one of the highest literacy rates in Africa at 91 percent. The government of Zimbabwe declared access to education a basic human right in 1980. This resulted in the construction of primary and secondary schools, technical colleges, vocational training centers and universities in all the provinces. Zimbabwe has 13 universities; four of them are private and church-affiliated. The educational structure begins with preschool, then, primary, secondary higher and tertiary education. Education is not free.

However, in rural areas some children are not able to go to school as the schools are very far, and the parents are unable to pay fees.

Economy

The major industry in the country is mining of natural resources such as coal, gold, platinum, copper, nickel, tin, clay, and diamonds. The country produces corn, cotton, tobacco, wheat, coffee, sugar cane, peanuts, and raises sheep, goats, pigs, poultry and cattle.

While the country exports cotton, tobacco, gold, ferroalloys and ivory; it imports machinery, vehicles, chemicals and fuels. However, with the advancement of neo-liberal policies and political upheaval, the economy of Zimbabwe has shrunk significantly and most of the industries were closed.

A sign of the economic crisis is the multicurrency system adopted to stem hyperinflation. The government allowed use of foreign currency in the national economy like the United States Dollar, South African Rand, Botswana Pula, European Union Euro, Indian Rupees, British Pound Sterling, or Australian Dollars.

Zimbabwean bond coins are used as a proxy for US dollar and cent coins. Zimbabwean bond notes for 2 and 5 dollars were introduced in 2016 at par value of the US dollar.

Religion

Missionary Christianity had arrived in Zimbabwe just before the establishment of colonial rule. The British came in with the Bible and the knowledge of the Christian God. They built schools, hospitals, industries, churches and many infrastructures which are still in use today.

In time the two could not be neatly distinguished from each other as the missionary Churches sought the support of the colonial government in order to execute their work, especially in the area of health and education. However, in the 1960s, the churches' frustration with the unjust rule of the colonialists reached its limits and many of them increasingly stood up to declare their support for black majority rule.

¹ As this material was finalized in August 2018, WDP Committees needs to update the information about the current government situation in the year of the celebration – 2020.

The churches had high expectations with the 1980s independence, and complimented the government's attempts for the post-conflict reconstruction which affected the health and educational church institutions.

Since then, churches had made public statements to assure that the country finds its political and economic way peacefully. In 2006, the Evangelical Fellowship of Zimbabwe (EFZ), the Zimbabwe Council of Churches (ZCC), Zimbabwe Catholic Bishops Conference (ZCBC), Union for Development of Apostolic Churches in Zimbabwe (UDACIZA) prepared a discussion document called "The Zimbabwe We Want: Towards A National Vision For Zimbabwe". This document was revised in 2016, and a new Communiqué: "The Zimbabwe We Want – Taking the Process Forward" was made public.

In 2018, churches and ecumenical organizations monitored the political transition calling for unity and peaceful process. They organized vigils prayers for peace, promoted citizen education and dialogue with civil society and government authorities to sustain the democratic process during national elections. For the most updated information on how the churches and ecumenical organizations campaigned for a peaceful transition after the national elections in 2018, please visit their websites or Facebook.

The current Zimbabwean Constitution allows for freedom of worship and freedom of association. There is separation between state and church. Christianity is the major religion, observed by more than 80 percent of the population. The other 20 percent observe Islam, African Traditional religion and Judaism.

Women

Women constitute 51 percent of the population. Women play a very significant role in the socioeconomic affairs in Zimbabwe. Many of the households in the rural area are headed by women, who have nothing to feed their families. The husbands have migrated to towns and mines for employment, while the young women and men have migrated to the neighbouring countries and all over the world for work.

Gender inequality is a very real and persistent problem in Zimbabwe. Women and girls are subject to systematic disadvantage and discrimination – particularly those who are poor, live in rural areas and are from particular social groups. Gender inequality is manifested in violence against women and girls. Girls face early marriage and barriers to access quality education. Women deal with legal discrimination, particularly regarding family law, and poor reproductive and maternal health services.

Differences in women and men's status and equality are due to a complex interplay of economic, political, historical and social factors operating at the household, community, institutional and policy level. Key amongst these are prevalent social and cultural norms perpetuated both formally and informally through social institutions and structures, traditions, codes of conduct and laws; which influence attitudes and behaviors towards girls and women, and boys and men.

The government of Zimbabwe and other civil society organizations, including ecumenical ones, are lobbying for gender equality and laws have been enacted to protect women against gender-based violence. A series of micro finances initiatives support women and youth to start their own enterprises.

Women look after children with special needs and disabilities finding little to no support from husbands or relatives. HIV and AIDS, cancer of the cervix and breast have affected most women. Typhoid and cholera have killed many people, mostly women and children.

Children

Children find themselves in very difficult situations, like heading their families due to the loss of their parents to HIV and AIDS. Some are staying with their grandparents who can't afford basic living conditions. A UNICEF report from 2011 stated "that one in four children in Zimbabwe has lost one or both parents due to HIV and other causes. These children are being looked after by extended families and are among the 100,000 child headed households in the country."

Some children have special needs and disabilities. Some are autistic, and the schools that cater to them are expensive. It would help if there were centres to teach them skills and support the mothers to provide economically and emotionally for their families. Many families are broken and those children are left with no parents and the need for love, peace and reconciliation.

World Day of Prayer

In 1962, Mai Rev. Kachidza of the Methodist Church and Mai Major Nhari of the Salvation Army Church formed the first interdenominational prayer committee meeting. These two leaders saw the need for the reverends, bishops, ministers and pastor's wives to meet, pray, know each other and strengthen one another in doing God's work.

They would rotate locations and use their homes as venues for prayers and meetings, which were attended by women from Highfield, Mabvuku and Mbare. Usually, the churches represented were Anglican Church, Methodist Church, United Methodist Church, Roman Catholic Church, Dutch Reformed Church, Salvation Army, Church of Christ, AIMC Church, C.C.A.P and Independent African Church.

These women had a strong sense of identification with the needs of women and children and looked for ways to provide appropriate support. On those days women were ordered out of their homes after the death of their husbands by the local council. They would come back from burying their husbands to find their belongings outside and the house locked. Most of these families had nowhere to go as some were foreigners who had come in search of work in Zimbabwe.

Mai Major Nhari and Rev Kachidza, with the encouragement and support from the other women and church leaders in the Protestant and Roman Catholic Church, went to the local council and put forward the women's grievances. The Deputy Attorney thought these women were organizing an uprising against the council. Mai Major Nhari and Rev Kachidza were detained at

the Mbare Police Station for a day, but that did not stop them from coming back to the council to air their grievances until a solution was found. The council decided to build Matapi Hostels for those families who had nowhere to go when their husbands/fathers died.

With the growth of the churches and participation of women in WDP meetings came a need for a venue where they could meet regularly to pray, organize and discuss the issues that affect women in different locations. Since 1967, with the support of Reverend Kachidza of the Methodist Church in Zimbabwe who was then the general secretary for the Bible Society of Zimbabwe, the women were given an office for their meetings. They would meet once a month at the Bible House to discuss issues that were affecting them in their communities then at their Mibatanzwa they would meet for prayers. Everyone was welcome regardless of denomination.

In 1987, Mai Major Kagoro of the Salvation Army and the Africa Regional Representative for the International Committee of the World Day of Prayer formed Greater Harare Choir in preparation for the World Day of Prayer Africa Regional meeting at the University of Zimbabwe in 1988.

We have seen the growth of World Day of Prayer Zimbabwe from churches to schools, from universities to girls' and women's organizations. It is with deep gratitude that the growing power inherent in World Day of Prayer and the Mibatanzwa prayer meetings are recognized. To this day, World Day of Prayer and Mibatanzwa yeMadzimai follow the tradition of praying and helping the needy in their communities rotating the giving to the needy in the different provinces as identified by the local women in the provinces. The circle of prayer and the call to help the needy has expanded literally around Zimbabwe. WDP women usually go to Mutemwa Leprosy Center, Matthew Rusike Children's Home to assist with chores, donate goods and food.

We annually report to World Day of Prayer International Committee and have our story published in its Journal for the world to see what Zimbabwean women are doing. We have learnt the great lesson of prayer and helping the needy, thus enriching our experiences and realizing the power which must be ours if we are to accomplish the tasks entrusted on us.

We thank God for Mai Reverend Kachidza and Mai Major Nhari, our predecessors who had the wisdom for this beautiful movement. We thank the present Zimbabwean women and girls who agreed to dedicate themselves in doing God's work.

This material is part of the worship service and educational resource
for the 2020 WDP annual celebration.

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