

## Zimbabwe's Government of National Unity: Successes and Challenges in Restoring Peace and Order

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### Abstract

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This paper seeks to assess the efficacy of Government of National Unity (GNU) political system, using Zimbabwe as a case study when comparing it with other forms of government. This paper also looks at how problems and crises which were prevailing before signing of the Global Political Agreement (GPA) were addressed by the formation of the GNU. The Global Political Agreement was an agreement between the Zimbabwe African National Union-Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF) and the two Movement for Democratic Change (MDC)s. The GNU in Zimbabwe was born on 11 February 2009 out of mediations by Thabo Mbeki the then South African president. Negotiations started in September 2008 and it subsequently resulted in the signing of the GPA on 15 September 2009 by R.G Mugabe (ZANU PF), M. Tsvangirai (MDC .T) and A. Mutambara (MDC.M). The GPA was concerned about the challenges that faced Zimbabwe and the multiple threats to the wellbeing of the people and therefore determined to resolve these permanently. The effectiveness of the GNU could also be judged according to the framework that created it that was the GPA. The issue of power-sharing in Zimbabwe proved to be effective because it offered checks and balances against abuse of power by political parties in the GNU.

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**Keywords:** Political settlement, government of national unity, global political agreement

### Introduction

The term GNU is used to refer to a case in which all the major political parties in a country form a governing coalition. Modern political scientists have envisaged the formation of unity government as the panacea to political deadlocks such as the one witnessed in Zimbabwe 2008.

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GNUs are a fragile, acrimonious, usually transitional arrangement with a high risk of disintegrating at the slightest opportunity (Mapuva, 2010). Zimbabwe's GNU can be dubbed as a "marriage of convenience". The three political parties that is ZANU (PF), MDC (T) and MDC (M), were forced to this "marriage of convenience" by circumstances on ground that is the political and economic turbulence within the country.

### **The GNU Concept**

There is no consensus among the academic and political circles on the precise definition on the concept of GNU as its meaning and application vary from one country to another According to Laws (2012), for some, the term encompasses only 'horizontal' agreements between key elites; at other times it has been used to refer to the 'vertical' relations between states and societies. Some conceptions point towards political settlements as 'one off' events, or deals; others suggest that settlements are better used to describe the on-going institutional arrangements and political processes that both reflect and shape the (no doubt changing) distribution of power in a society. Mukoma (2008) defines a GNU as a coalition government designed specifically to accommodate all participating political players in government structures

In the world GNUs have occurred in countries such as Israel, Greece, Italy, United Kingdom and Luxembourg. In Africa, Kenya is one good example which had a GNU. As of 2008, Kenya was governed by Government of National Unity between the rival Party of National Unity of Mwai Kibaki and the Orange Democratic Movement of Raila Odinga following the 2007 presidential election and subsequent violence. This was due to the ODM winning the majority of seats in the National Assembly, but controversially losing the presidential election by a margin that has since been called into question for its validity.

In Zimbabwe, a national unity government was formed from the major parties as a result of the economic and political crisis. The logic behind this is that equitable participation will diminish the potential for conflict and enhance prospects of national stability, intergration and development. Zimbabwes GNU was formed through an accord between the main political parties' leaders only of ZANU PF, MDC M and MDC T leaving out civil society organizations and other leaders and lesser political parties (Chigora and Guzura, 2011).

## **Background to the birth of the Zimbabwe's GNU**

The period from 2000-2008 had been dubbed by Sachikonye, (2009) as a "lost decade" because Zimbabwe plunged into severe economic doldrums. Bratton and Masunungure (2011) viewed it as "crisis decade".

According to Sachikonye (2009), some of the traits of the crisis include endemic shortages of inputs such as fuel resulting in legendary winding queues and also of basic consumer goods. As a result of sour relations between the ZANU PF government and the West, most multinational companies such as Lever Brothers scaled down and majority of the companies relocated. Sanctions were imposed on Zimbabwe by the European Union and United States of America on its land reform programme and allegations on human rights abuse. Due to the deterioration of the economy, health facilities such as Parirenyatwa and Chitungwiza General Hospital dilapidated. Doctors and nurses were continuously on strike and there were no drugs in referral hospitals. Civil servants' salaries were seriously eroded by inflation and the majority of them relocated to some other countries. According to Makumbe, (2009) three to four million Zimbabweans were said to have migrated to South Africa, Botswana, USA, Britain, Australia etc. For instance, a civil servants salary in October 2008 which was 24 billion Zimbabwean dollars could not buy two litres cooking oil.

To make matters worse the banks had insufficient money to offer people as there was a shortage of cash. Gideon Gono, the then RBZ Governor implemented various policies in order to combat inflation such as the introduction of the Basic Commodities Supply Side Intervention (BACOSSI) programme, price control but it did not succeed to resolve the problems. According to Mkandawire et al (<http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed>), in 2008, four thousand two hundred eighty size (4 287) people died as a result of cholera outbreak and it brought the economy to a standstill as it worsened the situation which was already bad.

On the education sector, schools closed and institutions of higher learning such as Midlands State University (MSU), National University of Science and Technology (NUST) and University of Zimbabwe (UZ) closed for one semester. Zimbabwe's GNU was born out of these conditions which were pathetic. Zimbabwe's case can be likened to that of Germany after the second world war where one preferred to take a wheelbarrow than loads of banknotes in that wheel barrow.

Politically the landscape was very volatile, there were strong tensions between ZANU Pf and MDC and hate speech was the order of the day. The period was marred by violence and people were butchered and their houses were burnt. Zimbabwe was no longer a safe place. All these conditions led to the signing of the GPA on 15 September 2008 in a bid to normalise the situation which had got out of hand.

### **Research Methodology**

This paper is a snap survey of successes and failures of Zimbabwe's GNU from 2009 to 2013 and it was purely qualitative. The researcher employed desktop research and analysed books, newspapers, peer reviewed articles and various internet sources. Purposive sampling was used to target political analysts and some members of the public. Lastly, through observation the author managed to note some of the successes and challenges.

### **Effects**

The effects of GNU on political and economic development of the country were a mixed bag but it was a sigh of relief to Zimbabweans who have endured it all during the period 2000 to 2008.

### **Economic Successes**

With the inception of the GNU, multi-currency system was introduced. This gave birth to stability in the financial sector. The period from 2005 to early 2009 was marred by uncontrollable hyper-inflation. Chaos characterised the banking sector as people failed to withdraw their salaries. Savings and investments were severely eroded. At one time inflation was pegged at two hundred and thirty one million percent. The country ended having no legal tender, hard cash of its own. This compelled the Reserve Bank to use bearer cheques and also more than thirty zeros were slashed from the currency. In June 2013, the current inflation is pegged at single digits of below 5%. Latest inflation figures released by the Zimbabwe National Statistics Agency (Zimstat) show that the year-on-year inflation rate (annual percentage change) for the month of May 2013 as measured by the all items Consumer Price Index (CPI) dipped 0,29 to 2,20% from the April 2013 rate of 2,49%.(the independent co.zw).

There was now the resurrection of defunct services such as Medical aid, Insurance and Pension schemes. Basic goods such as cooking oil, sugar, reappeared in supermarkets and fuel was now available. Due to the availability of fuel at filling stations the transport system normalised. However, through the introduction of the multicurrency systems other sectors realised the erosion of Zimbabwe's self identity and sovereignty due to failure to use its own currency for instance Botswana is identified by its pula, South Africa by its rand.

### **Social Effects**

With the advent of the GNU schools reopened and universities opened their doors to the public. The government negotiated deals with United Nations Children Education Fund (UNICEF) and textbooks were availed to schools. Schools were given the leeway to use the incentive system and some teachers began to receive incentives from parents. With the use of the American dollar and other monetary systems civil servants salaries began regaining buying power. Many Diasporas began to flock back to Zimbabwe.

In the media, reforms could be seen because independent newspapers were being allowed to operate right now we have Zi fm, Star fm, Newsday, Dailynews. However, time and again there were reports of editors of the independent media being arrested.

Service delivery in the form of electricity provision, water provision and refuse collection greatly improved.

### **Political Effects**

Political leaders for ZANU PF .MDC M and MDC N were like oil and water which never mix but they managed to conduct meetings together.

In the press conference on 30 July 2013, where Mugabe was addressing journalists on the eve of the 2013 harmonised elections Mugabe said they had to put their differences away in order to develop Zimbabwe.

According to Article 6 of the Global Political Agreement, the three parties acknowledged that it is the fundamental right and duty of the Zimbabwean people to make a constitution by themselves and for themselves. This new constitution would create a conducive environment for elections and for the rule of law. The constitution making process has been successfully completed though it had some hitches and did not beat the target time. Although there were some cases of violence reported here and there currently Zimbabwe can be regarded as a peaceful country as compared to 2008 where people were being butchered. The constitutional referendum was held on 16 and 17 March 2013, and 94,5% voted for it. People voted peacefully for the supreme law of the land. The percentage which voted was an indication that majority were happy on the work done by the GNU.

Due to some of the reforms which the international community were seeing being done in Zimbabwe they laxed some stringent upon Zimbabwe on the issue of sanctions. For example the European Union foreign policy chief said in a statement 'the EU has today agreed immediately suspended the application of measures against 81 individuals and eight entities. (the telegraph .co.uk EU suspends Zimbabwe sanctions).

## **Challenges**

The GNU cannot through and through be glorified. According to Bratton and Masunungure (2011), narrow settlements that focus on political power sharing alone are less likely to endure than comprehensive settlements that also address the stakeholder's economic and military interests. This was the case the Zimbabwe's GNU fundamental causes which led to political polarisation remain unaddressed. According to Goredema (2013), although there was an air of political stability, there were undercurrents between the political parties....the GNU has been characterised by squabbles, disagreements, disengagements and reengagements among the main actors.

Makoni (2012) said that the GNU was not people oriented and hence it was a failure. He said five years after the formation of the GNU; Zimbabwe was still struggling with massive water and power cuts, poor health facilities, company closures translating into huge losses, skills flight as evidenced by almost four million of the country's nationals who have left the country in search of better prospects in the Diaspora.

Employment creation has been bought to a virtual standstill while the few people working are earning poor salaries below the poverty datum line. 80% of Zimbabwe's population people are currently unemployed.

The effectiveness of the Government of National Unity (GNU) can only be judged according to the framework that created it, which is the Global Political Agreement (GPA) of 2008. Pertinently, there were over 27 areas of the GPA which the GNU has failed to implement. If one is to use measurable and verifiable indicators to measure the inclusive government's success or failure rate, the GPA is the most useful barometer to use and it is pointing to what we can describe as a failure. As supported by Bratton and Masunungure (2011), the GNU has been eminent the central provisions of the GPA leading to repeated breakdowns in communication and cooperation between the principals and thus resulting in an opposing rather than cooperating partnership.

According to Sunday Opinion (2011), the Government of National Unity has failed the people of Zimbabwe because the politicians from all parties have been focusing more on political posts for their leaders and self-aggrandisement as opposed to improvement of the economy and social lives of Zimbabweans. From the onset the GNU cabinet was too big. It was meant to ensure that politicians from all parties benefited from government resources. The GNU has been criticised for a big cabinet with large budget, salaries and allowances and over-expenditure on low priority areas. One would find the classiest and expensive vehicles being driven by government officials yet government was claiming it did not have money to pay civil servants who were earning salaries below the poverty datum line. The government expenditure was not being controlled. There was a lot of foreign travelling by ministers and senior civil servants on which huge allowances were being claimed on every trip.

Since the GNU took office there has been much tension and disagreement between the parties on the outstanding issues preventing the full implementation of the GPA. These relate to the contestation over senior political officers and key reforms in the media, economic, mining and security sectors. Restrictive statutes such as the Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act (AIPPA) and the Broadcasting Services Act (BSA), for example, are yet to be repealed in spite of the GPA's stated commitment to a free and independent media.

Furthermore, most state institutions remain militarised leading to continued impunity for human rights abusers and a partisan military and police force.

The inclusive government has often acted as two distinct competing, sometimes opposing entities rather than a government of national unity. The GPA and the inclusive government do represent a new political era but progress remains painfully slow. The agreement's language is ambiguous which means that implementation depends on continued good-faith cooperation. Its vagueness has also provoked considerable doubt that these arrangements will be workable and will produce the necessary changes that will restore democracy and the rule of law in Zimbabwe. The parties are unable or unwilling to work together in the inclusive government toward joint goals and the constitution-making process is a victim of their machinations.

Though the GNU has managed to bring sanity to the economy through the Short Term Emergency Recovery Programmes (STERP) which have managed to address issues pertaining to runaway inflation and economic instability, basic commodities such as bread, milk and mealie-meal are now readily available even though the country's supermarkets have been flooded with foreign products to the detriment of locally produced goods and the inclusive government is yet to effectively conclude the setting up of the National Economic Council which is supposed to consist of representatives of the parties, the manufacturing sector, commerce, finance, labour, academia and other stakeholders (Article 3c of the Global Political Agreement).

The GPA provides only oblique references to the security forces and criminal justice system and neither has been brought under democratic control. Formal security sector reform within the GPA framework has in effect remained off limits and a number of unofficial initiatives to constructively engage the security sector have not gained traction. This remains the most immediate and profound challenge to the transition and continues to have a large effect on public confidence.

Article 13 of the GPA stipulates that State organs and institutions do not belong to any political party and should be impartial in the discharge of their duties. For the purposes of ensuring that all state organs and institutions perform their duties ethically and professionally in conformity with the principles and requirements of a multiparty democratic system in which all parties are treated equally, the parties have agreed that there be inclusion in the training curriculum of members of the uniformed forces of the subjects on human rights, international humanitarian law and statute law so that there is greater understanding and full appreciation of their roles and duties in a multiparty democratic system, all state organs and institutions strictly observe the principles of the Rule of Law and remain non-partisan and impartial, laws and regulations governing state organs and institutions are strictly adhered to and those violating them be penalised without fear or favour and recruitment policies and practices be conducted in a manner that ensures that no political or other form of favouritism is practised. However, other provisions have been ignored or blatantly violated including those for holding perpetrators of political violence to account. The scope of challenges facing reformers is daunting and includes the failure to effect relevant institutional and legislative changes

Violence has become an ingrained part of Zimbabwe's authoritarian political culture and is an underlying causal factor in its crisis. The International Crisis Group (2011), said that intensified violence has exposed the limitations of Zimbabwe's much delayed reform process and threatens to derail the Global Political Agreement (GPA).

There is rampant corruption at both Local and Central Government levels which have been a major blow to the country's development. This is coupled by a high degree of lack of accountability and responsibility exposed by both Local and Central Governments. The Zimbabwe Independent (2011) said that Finance Minister told the cabinet that \$174 million in diamond revenues could not be accounted for and a further \$125.8 million realised in January 2011 had not been remitted to the treasury. According to the Herald, the Anticorruption Commission was denied entrance to search the ZMDC offices.

Although the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission (ZEC), the Zimbabwe Media Commission (ZMC) and the Zimbabwe Human Rights Commission were appointed in 2010 and the Anti-Corruption Commission in 2011, none of these have been highly effective as they have been under-funded.

The Bills for ZEC and the ZHRC have not yet been finalised in Parliament and this has severely affected the ability of the ZHRC in particular to operate. The ZHRC has no offices, no staff and no equipment. Though the appointment of independent commissions to address media, human rights and election issues were done including the issuing of new print media licenses, however, these commissions have been hampered by lack of funds and ambiguous mandates. The Human Rights Commission and the Media Commission still do not have legislative frameworks for their activities or support staff and the Electoral Commission retained the same staff.

One of the key reforms as envisaged in the GPA and as agreed by the Principals is the issue of comprehensive media reforms which includes introduction of more and diverse players in both the print and electronic media as well as the immediate cessation of hate speech. The appointments of the BAZ board, the board of the Mass Media Trust and the ZBC board have not been effected despite adoption by Cabinet and agreement by the Principals. During 2010, the new Media Commission licensed fifteen publications, including several newspapers and news agencies, but many have not started operations. Licenses were only given for print media. Broadcast media, from which most Zimbabweans receive their information, remains exclusively monopolised by Zimbabwe Broadcasting Corporation. On one hand, the elite accord restored a welcome modicum of peace and economic stability. On the other hand, it papered over key issues, especially how to divide executive power, manage the economy, and ensure civilian control of the armed forces. In practice, the GNU has been unable to implement the central provisions of the GPA, leading to repeated breakdowns in communication and cooperation between President and Prime Minister. The roots of the impasse lie in the Mugabe's unwillingness to share power and resistance to political reform by senior military elements in the dominant coalition. But the divisions, inexperience and organizational weaknesses of the rival MDC coalition are also to blame (Masunungure,2011)

One of the inclusive government's biggest failures has been the poor management of the transition from the Zimbabwean dollar to the multi-currency system. This has on the other hand dealt a heavy blow to the country's economy. Government-provided services are too expensive i.e. passport fees, import permit charges, vehicle number plates, Environmental Management Agency permit to move pit sand and TIMB tobacco registration fee. This is why farmers failed to register because they could not afford these exorbitant rates.

No effort was done to compare service charges with those prevailing in, say 1997, in US dollar terms or to benchmark with region. Black market rates are being used taking advantage of monopoly and legislation.

The marriage was made up with two distinct ideologies. For instance ZANU PF preach the gospel of black empowerment, maintaining the gains of the liberation struggle and Look East Policy but MDC's emphasis is on the creation of employment through alignment with Western powers and democracy.

However, on the other hand there were a number of critical issues in the GPA that have gone past their time limits without being finalized as discussed above. It was marred by mutual distrust with threats from both sides to withdraw from the GNU and others have called it a marriage of convenience. As supported by Chitiyo(2008), the Zimbabwe's Government of National Unity was a forced marriage and has attracted criticism for being the worst possible solution to Zimbabwe's crisis. It certainly was a coalition of the unwilling, with each of the three partners driven by need not want. Mapuva (2010) further alluded that GNUs on the African continent have come to represent a short-cut to those who want to cling to power and even promote electoral inconsistency to achieve this objective. As a result, democracy has been dealt a heavy blow by the GNU phenomenon, which appears to have emerged in many countries where rival political parties unite after disputed elections to form an inclusive government in the interim and to implement structural political reforms. However, despite justifications for this form of political arrangement, political scientists have predicted that this formation could herald the demise of democracy on the continent. In a nutshell, this all qualifies to say that the GNU is not a permanent solution to Zimbabwe's political and economic crisis.

## **Conclusion**

To a greater extent, Zimbabwe's GNU brought order and sanity to the state as evidenced by sentiments from the general populace. To most citizens the Government of National Unity has been welcomed because it brought a sigh of relief to most Zimbabweans. Politicians from ZANU PF who wanted to enjoy sharing the nation's cake all by themselves were strongly against the existence of the GNU. The issue of sharing power seems to be a political situation in Zimbabwe as shown by the economic successes of the GNU.

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