Crisis in Zimbabwe

Contents

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The Choices Program develops curricula on current and historical international issues and offers workshops, institutes, and in-service programs for high school teachers. Course materials place special emphasis on the importance of educating students in their participatory role as citizens.

Michael Kennedy
Director, Watson Institute for International Studies

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Crisis in Zimbabwe

Zimbabwe is a landlocked country in Southern Africa, bordered by Mozambique, South Africa, Botswana, and Zambia. Once one of the region's most prosperous economies, by November 2008 Zimbabwe's annual inflation rate was 89.7 sextillion (10^{21}) percent, the second highest inflation rate ever recorded in world history. This made Zimbabwean currency—and people's salaries—basically worthless. Today approximately 80 percent of the population is unemployed and millions live in poverty, suffering from famine, drought, illness, and economic hardship. The World Food Programme estimates that approximately seven million people (out of a population of 11.3 million) require food aid to survive. Millions more have left the country, many to live illegally in neighboring South Africa.

Many observers have placed the blame for this economic and humanitarian crisis on Zimbabwe's president, Robert Mugabe. Mugabe has been in power since the country's independence in 1980. Anxious to solidify the power of the ruling party, Mugabe's government has ruthlessly repressed opponents: politicians, the courts, the media, and even the civilian population. Recent elections and international pressure have forced Mugabe to share power with opposition parties. Today Morgan Tsvangirai, the leader of the opposition party Movement for Democratic Change (MDC), is the country's prime minister. But many wonder whether it will be possible for this new government to work together and address Zimbabwe's many pressing problems.

Map by Alexander Sayer Gard-Murray.

A Short History of Zimbabwe

People have lived in the region of what is now Zimbabwe for at least 100,000 years. Scientists believe it was one of the earliest locations of so-called modern man or *homo sapien*. Great Zimbabwe, a stone city that was the center of a large-scale empire in the eleventh to fifteenth centuries, boasts the largest stone structures built in early Sub-Saharan Africa.

Today Zimbabwe's population is approximately 98 percent of African-descent, 1 percent of European-descent, and less than 1 percent each of mixed and Asian-descent. The majority of Zimbabwe's population of African-descent is Shona, which is a broad name for a number of groups who live in Zimbabwe and Mozambique. The Ndebele people came to Zimbabwe in the nineteenth century from what is now South Africa. (Their migration was due in part to the upheaval of groups in South Africa, also known as the *Mfecane*.) Today they make up about 14 percent of Zimbabwe's population.

Why did whites colonize Zimbabwe?

Early groups in Zimbabwe were in contact with Portuguese and Arab traders as early as the tenth century. But white settlement in the region began in earnest only in the late nineteenth century. In the 1890s, colonists from South Africa led by Cecil Rhodes, an English-born businessman and politician, moved north in search of gold and land. Rhodes established the British South Africa Company (BSAC) to colonize the region. The company fought resis-

tance by the Shona and Ndebele in two wars in the 1890s.

After these wars, white settlers took livestock and land, and the BSAC began levying taxes on the black population. Rhodes named the territory "Rhodesia" after himself and the company administered the region until 1923, when it became an official British colony. The BSAC, and then the British, created laws to segregate and control the country's black population in much the same way that the British colonial government ruled South Africa. Discriminatory laws determined where a person could live, as well as what land they could own, where they could work, and whether they could vote.

Why did Rhodesia's government declare independence from Britain in 1965?

By the early 1960s, many of Britain's former colonies in Africa—places like Zambia, Malawi, Tanzania, and Kenya—had gained their independence and were ruled by black majorities. Although Rhodesia was a British colony, the country had a semi-autonomous (partly independent), white-led government.

Frank and Frances Carpenter Collection/Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division, LC-USZ62-97838.

Workers on a Rhodesian tobacco farm in the early twentieth century.

Britain pressured Rhodesia's government to agree to black majority rule at some point in the future.

Instead, in 1965, Rhodesia declared independence from Britain. This was only the second time that a British colony had declared independence (the first time was in the American colonies in 1776). Other colonies had negotiated their independence with Britain. Rhodesia's Prime Minister Ian Smith believed that independence was the only way to preserve white control. Britain did not recognize Rhodesia's independence and the United Nations Security Council imposed economic sanctions, or penalties, on the country until 1979.

By 1965, Rhodesia already had a strong, organized African opposition movement. In the 1950s, African groups had advocated for the abolition of discriminatory laws and for the creation of more opportunities for the country's black population. In response, the government banned these organizations and arrested their leaders. Nevertheless, more opposition groups formed. As time went on, the aims of these groups became more radical and many came to support using violence as a way to achieve them.

By 1963, the movement had shifted its goals from advocating for political and economic rights to demanding black majority rule. There were two parties leading this movement: the Zimbabwe African People's Union (ZAPU) led by Joshua Nkomo, and the Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU) led by Robert Mugabe. The groups had similar aims and used similar tactics to achieve them, including both political methods and guerrilla warfare. But competition for popular support between these groups was fierce. Violence between ZANU and ZAPU began in the 1960s and continued well into the 1980s, years after the country became majority-ruled.

Independence

Most Africans in Rhodesia did not consider the country independent after 1965 because it was still ruled by a white minority. The

international community also did not recognize Rhodesia's independence. From 1966 to 1979, ZANU and ZAPU fought the Rhodesian government to achieve majority rule and to end white domination and racism.

From 1965 onwards, the government kept the country under a constant state of emergency. It passed laws allowing it to detain people without trial, ban public meetings, and limit political activity. As the 1970s progressed, the war became more and more violent. Oftentimes, ordinary citizens were caught in the middle, punished by the Rhodesian army for supporting the guerrilla fighters or by ZANU and ZAPU for not helping the liberation cause. Livestock and croplands were destroyed, many families were displaced from their homes because of the violence, and tens of thousands of people were killed.

After a number of failed negotiations, in late 1979 the Rhodesian government and the liberation parties agreed to end hostilities. The agreement they negotiated, known as the Lancaster House Agreement, called for a new constitution and free elections. In February 1980, elections were held in which every adult citizen could vote. In April 1980, the country—rechristened Zimbabwe—ushered in former freedom fighter Robert Mugabe as prime minister.

What happened in Matabeleland in the 1980s?

Despite his uncompromising attitude during the war, Mugabe took power under a banner of reconciliation and peace. Although many had considered him a radical communist revolutionary, once in office he emphasized the need for stability and gradual change. He appointed his rival Joshua Nkomo to a government position. A number of Rhodesian government officials, including former Prime Minister Ian Smith, served in the new government. The international community reacted very positively to Zimbabwe's new government. It ended its economic sanctions and offered aid and development funds. Many countries believed that a peaceful and prosperous Zimbabwe would help bring about change in South Africa, where the white-ruled apartheid government had grown increasingly repressive.

Department of Defense. Photo by TSGT James F. Clawson.

Robert Mugabe and his wife Sally on a trip to the United States in 1983.

But peace in Zimbabwe was short lived. Almost immediately, South Africa's white government began a campaign to destabilize Zimbabwe's new government. It recruited many ex-Rhodesian soldiers as agents and spies within Zimbabwe. The South African government was fearful of the influence that the successful armed struggle in Zimbabwe would have on South Africa's liberation movements. Mugabe lashed out at Zimbabwe's whites for joining the South Africans and betraying the ideal of reconciliation.

Hostilities between ZAPU and ZANU also continued. In 1981, Mugabe announced that he hoped to create a one-party state in Zimbabwe. The following year he fired Nkomo from the government. Violent skirmishes occurred between former fighters from ZAPU and ZANU. Many from ZAPU returned to Matabeleland, a region in western Zimbabwe where most ZAPU fighters came from. At the same time, reports came from Matabeleland of armed bandits and dissidents killing, stealing, and damaging property in the region. There were also reports that some ex-ZAPU fighters in Matabeleland had been recruited by the South Africans.

Mugabe argued that the dissidents, the bandits, and the former ZAPU fighters were one and the same. He also claimed that the local population in Matabeleland was actively supporting this movement in order to overthrow his government. In January 1983 he sent troops into the region to target not only the dissidents but the entire civilian population. Beatings, arson, arrest, detention, torture, and mass murder became widespread. The army imposed strict curfews and cut food supply networks in order to starve whole communities. It killed men, women, and children in public executions. The dissidents committed violence in turn. Over the course of more than four years, at least ten thousand people were killed, mainly by government forces. The violence finally abated in 1987, with a Unity Accord in which ZAPU became part of ZANU-PF. (By this time, ZANU had changed its name to the Zimbabwe African National Union Patriotic Front, or ZANU-PF.)

Many analysts today believe that the dissident threat in Matabeleland was actually quite small. They argue that Mugabe exaggerated this threat as a way to justify crushing ZAPU, the one major threat to ZANU-PF's political control. The Zimbabwean government has never acknowledged its responsibility for the violence that happened in Matabeleland.

Why has opposition to the government grown since independence?

Mugabe's government made significant gains in the health care and education sectors in the 1980s. Before 1980, these services were vastly unequal across the population, with the bulk of resources going to facilities for whites. Upon coming to power, the new government aimed to correct imbalances and improve these services, particularly in the countryside. While in the 1970s, approximately 30 percent of the African population was functionally illiterate, today Zimbabwe boasts the highest literacy rate in Africa at 90 percent. Similarly, the government created a health care system that, for a time, was one of the best on the continent. Doctors in neighboring countries would refer their patients to Zimbabwean hospitals for special treatments.

But over the course of its twenty-eight-year reign, Mugabe's government followed a number of less-popular policies as well. Mugabe and his top aides sought to consolidate the power of ZANU-PF in the government. In 1987, Mugabe dissolved the position of prime minister and became the country's executive president—the sole head of state—with the power to dissolve parliament. Members of parliament were forced to agree with ZANU-PF or they were fired from government. ZANU-PF also took over nearly all news sources in the country. Journalists who spoke out against the government were threatened and harassed. Violence and electoral fraud routinely marred elections. Opposition leaders and activists faced intimidation, abuse, detention, and torture. International human rights groups, including Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch, repeatedly criticized the government for its gross human rights violations.

ZANU-PF also consolidated its economic power. In the years after independence, a "new elite" emerged. This new elite was made up of government ministers, ZANU-PF party officials, and top government officials. These individuals used their power and connections to secure themselves lucrative business deals and huge sums of money. Bribery, corruption, and theft were rampant within Mugabe's government. For example, money raised for various projects, including funds donated by foreign governments, would mysteriously disappear. In 1995, Mugabe and all government ministers and members of parliament received salary increases of 133 percent, while health spending was cut by 43 percent. In the mid-1990s, the government sent troops to fight in the civil war in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) in return for mining rights there. The war sapped resources from Zimbabwe's struggling economy. Hundreds of Zimbabweans lost their lives in the DRC; most of the mining contracts were taken by Mugabe's family and top aides.

Many Zimbabweans became increasingly frustrated at the state of the country.

A protest by the National Constitutional Assembly (NCA) in Harare, Zimbabwe in October 2007. The NCA is a nongovernmental organization that advocates for constitutional reform. During this demonstration, protesters were beaten by riot police and forty people were hospitalized.

> ***"...[O]nce they got their farms, houses and limos they forgot about the people who put them there.***
>
> —Margaret Dongo, former ZANU member who became a powerful opposition figure in the 1990s

As the 1990s progressed, the country faced growing economic problems. Economic decline stifled job growth, and despite their education, most of Zimbabwe's youth were unemployed. As the economic crisis worsened, food disappeared from shelves, fuel shortages crippled the country, and many fell deeper and deeper into poverty. Services such as health care and education suffered from the lack of resources. There were repeated power outages and water shortages. By 2004, more than three million people had fled the country.

Land Reform

One of the most critically important issues for many Zimbabweans is that of land reform. Many analysts have argued the government's land reform policies are a major contributing factor to the economic crisis in Zimbabwe today.

Land reform has been a key point of contention among the black majority for more than a century. As soon as Europeans began to settle in the country, they forced local communities off their lands and created legislation that designated large parts of the country for the white population. Within the first ten years of European settlement, whites had taken about one-sixth of all land in the country. Throughout the colonial period, the government continued to displace people from their lands, generally reserving the best farmland for the white population.

> ***"It is the Europeans who have come to disturb us, to destroy our property, to deprive us of the wealth of this land.... Every place that they find to be good they say belongs to them. Good and fertile land they want for themselves. As Africans we have been driven into the mountains."***
>
> —Chief Rekayi Tangwena after the Rhodesian government ruled that the Tangwena people had to be moved from their land, 1969

By 1980, approximately six thousand white commercial farmers owned 39 percent of Zimbabwe's land, while more than four million people lived overcrowded on approximately 41 percent. Land redistribution was one of the most important issues for many who supported the independence struggle. Throughout the war, liberation leaders promised that when they were victorious, every African would be given land.

As agreed in the Lancaster House Agreement, the British government provided money to compensate white farmers who were willing to sell their land to the new government. But according to the agreement, for the first ten years of independence the Zimbabwean government could not force farmers to give up their lands. By 1990, about 50,000 black families had been resettled. But this was only a fraction of Zimbabwe's population—at the

time, about eight million. Many were frustrated at the slow pace of land redistribution.

Land reform was delayed for a number of reasons. Zimbabwe's white-owned commercial farms produced more than three-quarters of the country's agricultural output. These farms provided approximately one-third of the country's exports, employed at least one-third of the labor force, and were vital to the domestic food supply. Redistributing commercial farmlands could destabilize the economy and lead to job losses among African farm workers. In addition to farms, whites controlled the country's banking, industrial, and manufacturing sectors. Rapid land reform might push whites to leave the country, taking their financial resources and further threatening the economy. Additionally, many Western countries were wary about land reform policies. Rapid land reform could hurt Zimbabwe's international reputation, scaring away international donors and investors.

How did the government redistribute land after 1990?

In 1990, the government amended the constitution to allow it to seize farmland without permission and to set the price it would pay for this land. There was a great deal of opposition to this both within the country and in the international community. Many argued that this policy did not guarantee farmers fair compensation for their lands.

> ***"If white settlers just took the land from us without paying for it, we can in a similar way just take it from them, without paying for it, or entertaining any ideas of legality and constitutionality."***
>
> —President Mugabe, September 1993

Over the course of the 1990s, the government periodically printed lists of farms designated for acquisition in the newspaper. Although it promised to target mainly underutilized land, many of the farms listed were productive commercial farms, some owned by black farmers.

In the mid-1990s, the independent media revealed that many of the farms that the government had taken had in fact been leased to government ministers and senior officials for their own private use. By 1998, only about twenty thousand additional families had been resettled. When selecting those amongst the general population to resettle, the government had not chosen people with any farming knowledge but instead had given priority to ZANU-PF supporters. Once resettled, these families were not given training or support and many lacked the necessary equipment and supplies to create productive farms.

By early 2000, the government claimed that pressure for land reform was reaching the boiling point. Armed groups began invading white-owned farms across the country. There were widespread reports of violence, harassment, and intimidation, both of white farmers and black farm workers. Invading groups constructed makeshift dwellings on the farmlands, in many cases bringing production to a standstill. The government claimed that the armed groups were veterans from the independence war, frustrated about the slow pace of land reform. But it quickly became apparent that the government was orchestrating the invasions, providing the agitators with transportation and supplies. Many analysts argue that the majority of the so-called "war vets" were in fact unemployed youth paid by the government to participate.

The land invasions caused agricultural production to plummet. Food disappeared from markets and the once-prosperous country became dependent on food imports and foreign aid. As they had done with land resettlement, the government directed food supplies to ZANU-PF supporters and blocked supplies to areas where opposition supporters lived.

> ***"As long as you value the government of the day you will not starve. But we do not want people who vote for colonialists and then come to us when they want food. You cannot vote for the MDC and expect ZANU-***

Morgan Tsvangirai and his late wife Susan in 2001. Susan Tsvangirai died in a car accident in March 2009. Although some have claimed that the accident was orchestrated by ZANU-PF, Morgan Tsvangirai has stated that the crash was an accident.

PF to help you….”

—government minister Abednico Ncube to villagers who needed food aid, 2002

Many within Zimbabwe and in the international community reacted with outrage. Some analysts have argued that the land invasions were used as a political tool, to threaten the opposition and gain the support of the population. In fact, a number of the farms that were targeted were owned by black supporters of the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC), a growing opposition party.

“This is not about correcting a colonial imbalance. This is about punishing your enemies and rewarding your friends. This is about staying in power no matter what the damage is to your country or its democracy.”

—Philemon Matibe, farmer and MDC politician who was forced off his land after the 2000 election

Some observers have argued that the government instigated the land invasions because of the political defeat it had suffered in early 2000.

The Political Challenge to Mugabe

In February 2000, the government organized a referendum to ratify a new constitution. The proposed constitution would have given the government additional powers and allowed Mugabe to run for president for two more terms. In 1999, while the document was being drafted, a number of civic groups formed a coalition to oppose it. The group criticized the constitution for giving the president too much power, failing to limit corruption, and not providing sufficient checks and balances within the government. The coalition was called the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) and was led by Morgan Tsvangirai, a leader in Zimbabwe’s trade union movement. Tsvangirai had become one of Mugabe’s strongest rivals in the 1990s.

In a referendum held in February 2000, Zimbabweans voted against the new constitution. The defeat was unexpected and was a blow for Mugabe. It was the first major political defeat his government had experienced. In parliamentary elections later that year, the MDC won a record number of seats. Prior to this, opposition parties had been a tiny minority in parliament.

What happened in the presidential election of 2002?

During the 2000 parliamentary elections held later that year, there were widespread reports of violence and voter intimidation. Many observers claimed that violence increased after the election, as the government began gearing up for the 2002 presidential election. The presidential election would pit Mugabe against MDC candidate Morgan Tsvangirai.

In the run-up to the election, the government harshly criticized the MDC and Tsvangirai in the state-controlled press and in speeches. Mugabe claimed that MDC politicians were puppets of Zimbabwe’s whites and of the British government, which it claimed wished to recolonize the country. ZANU-PF and its supporters attacked MDC supporters and politicians, increased land seizures, and

harassed business owners in the months leading up to election. Amid widespread reports of election fraud, Mugabe won another six-year term as president in 2002. With Tsvangirai trailing by less than half a million votes, it was the closest presidential election in Zimbabwe since independence.

While Western governments quickly denounced the elections as illegitimate, African leaders were reluctant to criticize Mugabe publicly. Many remembered the important role Mugabe had played in the liberation struggles in the region. Nevertheless, in private some leaders, including South African President Thabo Mbeki, expressed concern to Mugabe that Zimbabwe was headed for a social and economic crisis.

A woman sits with her possessions among homes that were destroyed by Operation Murambatsvina in Bulawayo, Zimbabwe in June 2005. The photographer has distorted the woman's face to protect her identity.

What was Operation Murambatsvina?

In May 2005, the government initiated a program to destroy the country's shantytowns, or slums. The government named this program Operation "Murambatsvina," a Shona word that can mean "to restore order" or "to clean out the rubbish." For more than two months, police demolished homes in the shantytowns and targeted the unlicensed traders who sold their goods in street markets. The campaign was fiercest in the cities but eventually spread to some rural towns as well. While the government claimed that the campaign affected only 120,000 people, according to the UN more than 700,000 people lost their homes, their livelihoods, or both. Most were forced to move to rural areas where they had no resources and few employment opportunities. Hundreds of thousands became homeless, without access to food, water, sanitation, or health care. Many Zimbabweans referred to the campaign as "Zimbabwe's Tsunami."

International observers condemned the campaign. Many were shocked that the government undertook such a program in the midst of the country's deteriorating economy.

> ***"Operation Restore Order, while purporting to target illegal dwellings and structures and to clamp down on alleged illicit activities, was carried out in an indiscriminate and unjustified manner, with indifference to human suffering..."***
>
> —Anna Tibaijuko, UN Special Envoy on Human Settlements Issues in Zimbabwe who investigated Operation Murambatsvina on behalf of the UN in June and July 2005

Even after the UN called for an immediate end to the program, the government continued to demolish homes. The government claimed that it had initiated Operation Murambatsvina to fight crime and to end illegal housing and employment. The MDC argued that the government was targeting the urban poor because this group was a major support base for the opposition. The government began Operation Murambatsvina just a few weeks after the 2005 parliamentary elections were held. The MDC claimed that the government initiated this program to punish people for voting for the MDC.

Zimbabwe Today

The next elections for Zimbabwe's president were held in March 2008. Parliamentary elections were held at the same time. The MDC won a majority of seats in the House of Assembly, which made ZANU-PF a minority in that body of parliament for the first time since independence. (Similar to the U.S. legislature, Zimbabwe's parliament is made up of a Senate and a House of Assembly.)

The presidential election was more contested. After taking more than a month to announce the results, the government reported that Tsvangirai had won 48 percent of the vote and Mugabe had won 42 percent. The MDC claimed that the election had been fixed. But because neither candidate had a 50 percent majority in the official results, the government scheduled a runoff. Violence, particularly against MDC supporters, was harsh in the weeks leading up to the election. Close to two hundred people were killed. Shortly before the election date, Tsvangirai dropped out of the race and encouraged his followers to boycott the election. Despite international pressure to delay, the election was held in June 2008 and Mugabe won with 85 percent of the vote.

The international community—including both Western and African leaders—widely criticized the election and refused to accept the results. Zimbabwe's neighbors, afraid that instability in Zimbabwe would spill across their borders, pressured Mugabe to negotiate. Mugabe conceded and the negotiations were mediated by South African President Thabo Mbeki. The parties agreed to a power-sharing government in which Mugabe would be president, Tsvangirai would be prime minister, and cabinet positions would be split between the two parties. It took four months of additional negotiations to determine the cabinet. Many in the international community were frustrated because they believed that Mugabe was reluctant to induct the power-sharing government. But in January 2009 the two sides reached an agreement and on February 11, Mugabe and Tsvangirai were sworn in as the country's new leaders.

What are the major economic challenges Zimbabwe faces today?

Zimbabwe's already-failing economy spiralled downward at the end of 2008, in the midst of the political negotiations. In January 2009 massive hyperinflation forced the government to issue a ten trillion dollar note (worth about US$8 on the black market). Later that month, bending to pressure over the worthlessness of the Zimbabwean dollar, the government announced that foreign currencies would be acceptable forms of payment within Zimbabwe.

Life is still difficult for most Zimbabweans. According to the UN, 83 percent of the population lives on less than two dollars per day. Election violence and economic decline closed many schools in 2008. For most of that year, a teacher's monthly salary could not pay for one day's transportation to work. In November 2008, the UN announced that the number of students attending school regularly had dropped from 90 percent to 20 percent. The country has also been plagued by water shortages and drought. Aid agencies have struggled to meet the growing demands of the millions of Zimbabweans who now need food aid to survive. In October 2008, the UN reported that many in

In 2007, the price of this beer was Z$1 million (Zimbabwean dollars), stacked next to the beer in Z$500 notes. At that time, the basic salary for a teacher was less than Z$3 million per month.

Zimbabwe were surviving by eating wild fruits and roots. Nearly one-quarter of Zimbabwe's population has fled the country in the last ten years.

The Zimbabwean government has blamed sanctions by Western governments for the country's economic woes. In the past, Mugabe claimed that Western governments had instituted sanctions in order to topple his government because of its land reform policies. Western governments have contended that the sanctions target specific individuals and organizations accused of economically supporting Mugabe's government. Many Western governments have given money to aid agencies in Zimbabwe, but most have refused to give aid directly to the government.

Economic conditions in Zimbabwe have improved somewhat since January 2009. Some hospitals and schools have reopened. Food has filled empty shelves in supermarkets, and Zimbabweans no longer need to travel across the borders to get supplies. But these goods are only accessible to those who have foreign currency. According to many within the country, those who are paid in Zimbabwean dollars are at a severe disadvantage. Most stores refuse to accept Zimbabwean currency as a form of payment.

What are the major health challenges Zimbabwe faces?

Zimbabwe's health system is also desperately in need of funds. The country's life expectancy rate is 46 years, one of the lowest in the world. According to the UN, 45 percent of the population is malnourished. Zimbabwe also has one of the highest rates of HIV/AIDS in the world.

In addition, from August 2008 to July 2009, Zimbabwe was wracked by a devastating cholera outbreak. Cholera is a disease that spreads through contaminated water supplies. Although the disease is usually easy to treat, Zimbabwe's health system was unable to respond effectively to the crisis. Many hospitals did not have the funds to stay open. Those that did lacked drugs and medical supplies. Deteriorating water and sanitation infrastructure also contributed to the outbreak, as many people had no choice but to use contaminated water. For example, in December 2008, the government cut water supplies to Harare, the capital city, because it could not afford to treat the water chemically. In the end, nearly 100,000 people were infected and more than 4,000 died. The disease also spread to Zimbabwe's neighbors, with cases reported in South Africa, Namibia, Mozambique, and Botswana. Although the epidemic subsided in July 2009, the factors that contributed to the spread of the disease—including inadequate water and sanitation infrastructure—have not been repaired. There are fears that another outbreak could occur.

What political challenges does Zimbabwe face?

Zimbabwe's government also faces a number of political challenges. Many Western countries have refused to give aid to Zimbabwe's government. Since the early 2000s, Western nations and international organizations such as Human Rights Watch have been fierce critics of Mugabe and Zimbabwe's gov-

Photograph by Médicins Sans Frontières/Sokwanele-Zvakwana. Licensed under the Attribution-Non Commercial-Share Alike 2.0 Generic license: http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/2.0/deed.en

Workers with Médicins Sans Frontières, an international medical and humanitarian aid organization, treat people infected with cholera in Beitbridge, Zimbabwe in November 2008.

ernment. Mugabe's government blocked most Western journalists from reporting in Zimbabwe. Many countries in Europe as well as the United States have had targeted sanctions in Zimbabwe since the early 2000s. Today, many Western countries are hesitant to change their policies until there is clear evidence of cooperation within the power-sharing government. Without the financial support of the United States and the European Union, Zimbabwe's two largest humanitarian donors, Zimbabwe's government is struggling to raise the estimated five billion dollars it needs to get the economy back on track.

African countries have been the Zimbabwean government's biggest allies over the last thirty years. Most recently, Southern African countries pledged to help raise funds and lobby rich governments to remove sanctions in order to help the power-sharing government succeed. But Zimbabwe's crisis has taxed its neighbors. In addition to the cholera crisis, bordering countries have seen huge influxes of legal and illegal immigrants from Zimbabwe. For example, in September 2008, more than six thousand Zimbabweans crossed the border to South Africa each day. These immigrants put pressure on local services and many countries have routinely rounded up illegal immigrants and returned them to Zimbabwe. In addition, some African leaders have been more critical of Mugabe and ZANU-PF, particularly since the elections in 2008.

So far, the new government is off to a shaky start. It is unclear how much cooperation will be possible between the MDC and ZANU-PF. The MDC claims that many of its supporters are still harassed by the police. The two parties continue to argue over control of certain key government posts. And the land seizures have continued unabated, despite Tsvangirai's opposition. Many observers believe that Mugabe and ZANU-PF still have the government in a stranglehold and many wonder whether Tsvangirai will have any real power in his position as prime minister. Robert Mugabe is now in his eighties and many believe that it is his top advisors who actually hold the power in ZANU-PF. Some have claimed that these officials are working behind the scenes to force the MDC to leave the government.

> ***"No person in Zimbabwe is above the law. As long as these...[political] issues remain unresolved, it will be impossible for the transitional government to move forward with the reforms that this country so desperately needs."***
>
> —Morgan Tsvangirai, February 2009

For the past nine years, numerous human rights groups, nongovernmental organizations, UN officials, and world leaders have urged the international community to take action in Zimbabwe. Some have pushed for UN economic sanctions, while others have called on the UN to remove Mugabe from power, by force if necessary. Others, including a number of African leaders, have staunchly opposed foreign action on Zimbabwe.

Outside of its humanitarian efforts, the UN has not undertaken any collective action on Zimbabwe. In July 2008, the United States lobbied the UN Security Council to approve sanctions against Zimbabwe, but this measure was vetoed by both Russia and China. Thus far, only individual states have taken action, mainly in the form of economic sanctions. The debate about the international community's role in Zimbabwe brings up many important issues: questions of state sovereignty, the role of the UN in safeguarding human rights, and the effects of international actions, such as sanctions, on the suffering of the Zimbabwean people.

Teacher's Guide

Zimbabwe and the International Community

Objectives:

Students will: Examine the crisis in Zimbabwe from the perspective of another country.

Explore and deliberate about the international response to Zimbabwe's crisis and assess possible consequences.

Consider the role of the UN in addressing a crisis like the one in Zimbabwe.

Handouts:

"UN Member Profiles" (page 14)

Profiles, one country for each group (pages 15-19)

In the Classroom:

1. Assessing the Situation in Zimbabwe— Have students consider the previous night's reading. You might wish to show the short video "Life Lines" to help students understand what life in Zimbabwe is like today. "Life Lines" is from the Wide Angle episode *Underground Zimbabwe*, which aired February 11, 2009. If you have time, you might also wish to show "Zimbabwe: A Harsh Reality," a short interview with a Zimbabwean journalist from January 30, 2009. This video was a joint project of FRONTLINE/World and the Pulitzer Center on Crisis Reporting. Both videos can be found at <www.choices.edu/zimbabwematerials>.

Ask students about the major challenges in Zimbabwe today. What issues make life difficult for much of Zimbabwe's population? Why have many in the international community been concerned about human rights abuses in Zimbabwe, both in the past and today? How have things changed since 2009?

Have students consider the role of foreign governments in Zimbabwe in the country's history. How has the international community responded to recent developments in the country? Why have some leaders and groups called for more action from the international community? Why have others opposed it?

2. Taking a Perspective—Divide students into five groups and distribute "UN Member Profiles." Assign each group a UN member to represent. Tell students that three countries have drafted a proposal for all UN members to impose sanctions against Zimbabwe unless certain conditions are met within the next six months. Groups must determine whether their assigned country would support the proposal and why. Have groups read their assigned profiles and answer the questions on the handout.

Note:

Although the profiles are provided as a guide, students may find it helpful to do additional research in order to better understand the positions of their assigned countries. You may also wish to assign students additional countries to represent as UN members. The list of resources provided on page 20 is a good starting point for additional information about Zimbabwe and the international community.

3. Considering the Role of the UN—Have each group report on their assigned country's perspective on Zimbabwe and the proposed sanctions. Which countries would support the proposal? Why would those countries be in favor of sanctions? Which countries would oppose the proposal? Why would they be opposed to sanctions? Are there any countries that students are unsure of? Record student answers on the board. How important are factors such as history, economic relationships, international law, human rights, and humanitarian concerns in determining whether a country supports the proposal? How important should these factors be when the UN makes decisions?

To help students understand the role of the UN in protecting or promoting human rights, there are a number of free videos available from Choices' Scholars Online, including:

"How does membership in the UN promote human rights?" answered by Susan Allee, Senior Political Affairs Officer, United Nations

"Why is there a tension between state sovereignty and international law?" answered by David Kennedy, Vice President for International Affairs, Brown University

"How can the UN and other international organizations prevent human rights abuses?" and "What is the UN authorized to do when human rights are violated?" answered by Paulo Sérgio Pinheiro, Center for the Study of Violence, Universidade de São Paulo.

These videos can be found at <www.choices.edu/zimbabwematerials>.

How do students think UN sanctions would affect Zimbabwe? Should the UN intervene in Zimbabwe? Why or why not? What factors make intervention important or necessary? What factors make intervention problematic or unnecessary?

Name:_____

UN Member Profiles

Instructions: You have been assigned to represent a UN member in a UN General Assembly hearing on Zimbabwe. Three other UN member countries have proposed that the UN apply sanctions against Zimbabwe unless certain conditions are met within the next six months: land invasions must cease, all political prisoners and human rights activists must be released from prison, there must be no evidence that ZANU-PF is violating the terms of the power-sharing government, and new elections must be scheduled for the following year. If this proposal is passed and the sanctions take effect, there will be travel bans and financial restrictions on President Mugabe and a dozen of his top advisors. (This is similar to the policy that a number of individual UN members follow currently.) The UN proposal will also block all arms shipments to the country.

With your group members, read your assigned profile and determine whether your country would support the proposal or oppose it. Answer the questions below to help you determine your country's position on Zimbabwe.

Questions

1. What is your country's historical relationship with Zimbabwe?

2. What is your country's current relationship with Zimbabwe? Be sure to include any policies or interests your country has in Zimbabwe.

3. What does your country see as the major problems facing Zimbabwe today?

4. Does your country believe the United Nations should play a role in addressing the problems in Zimbabwe? Why or why not?

5. Would your country support the current proposal for sanctions? Why or why not?

Profile: South Africa

South Africa has had a long and complicated relationship with its northern neighbor. The two countries have strong geographic, economic, historical, and political ties that go back more than a century.

During the liberation movements in each country, the black liberation parties from South Africa and Zimbabwe supported each other in their struggles against white minority rule. Today, these liberation movements are still in power in both countries. Many black South Africans feel solidarity with ZANU-PF and Mugabe, although they may not agree with the policies that Zimbabwe's government has followed. Many also admire Mugabe's willingness to stand up to powerful Western countries that some feel have too much power in dictating the policies of other countries. For these reasons, among others, many black leaders in South Africa have been reluctant to criticize Zimbabwe's government until recently.

Zimbabwe and South Africa's economic ties also have a long history. Today, Zimbabwe's economy relies a great deal on South Africa, both through formal imports and exports, and by Zimbabweans who cross the border to buy or sell goods. South Africa has also been key in providing essential goods and services, including water, electricity, and oil, throughout Zimbabwe's economic crisis. South Africa is one of Zimbabwe's largest sources of investment and many large South African companies have operations in Zimbabwe. Until recently, Zimbabwe was also one of South Africa's most important trading partners.

As Zimbabwe's economy has deteriorated over the last decade, the effects have been felt in South Africa. South Africa's business leaders have expressed fear that land invasions, like the ones that took place in Zimbabwe, could happen in South Africa. (South Africa's own land inequities and its slow pace of land reform have left many frustrated and sympathetic to the land reform policies of Zimbabwe.) Many are worried that this could deter foreign investment in the country. Additionally, millions of Zimbabweans have moved to South Africa in the last ten years, putting strains on the local population. South Africa also has not been immune to Zimbabwe's health crises. By March 2009 more than twelve thousand cholera cases were reported in South Africa.

Thabo Mbeki (South Africa's president from 1999 to 2008) has been the key player mediating Zimbabwe's political crisis since 2000. Mbeki's approach was to negotiate with Mugabe rather than criticize Zimbabwe's government and its policies. Mbeki was an outspoken critic of involvement by foreign governments and promoted the idea that Africa should solve Africa's problems. His government was staunchly opposed to sanctions against Zimbabwe. It repeatedly protested any UN attempts to criticize Zimbabwe's government or take action on the situation outside of humanitarian efforts.

As the crisis in Zimbabwe grew more and more dire, many within the international community, as well as within Zimbabwe and South Africa, sharply criticized Mbeki for this "soft" approach. Since Zimbabwe's election in March 2008, many black South African leaders have become more outspoken in their opposition to Mugabe and his government. South Africa's new president, Jacob Zuma, has pledged to take a tougher approach to Mugabe and Zimbabwe's crisis. So far he has been a strong proponent of additional negotiation, and has encouraged donors to give support to the power-sharing government.

> ***"The remaining issues are not insurmountable, and can be overcome. The most difficult path has already been travelled."***
>
> —President Jacob Zuma,
> August 2009

Profile: Botswana

Botswana's relationship with neighboring Zimbabwe stretches back into the colonial period, when both were controlled by Britain. The countries have had preferential trade agreements with each other since the 1950s and are major trading partners. In addition to their geographic proximity, the two have close economic and political ties through the South African Development Community (SADC). SADC is an organization of fifteen Southern African governments that aims to increase economic, political, and security cooperation among its member states.

Botswana is one of the richest countries in Africa and maintains strong relationships with Britain and the United States. While relations between Botswana and Zimbabwe historically have been friendly, in recent years that relationship has soured. Since 2004, Botswana's government has complained of negative reports in Zimbabwe's state-run press, accusing Botswana of supporting Zimbabwe's opposition movement and of assisting Western countries in a plot to overthrow the Zimbabwean government. During Zimbabwe's 2008 elections, Botswana denounced the state-sponsored political violence and the detention of opposition members. Later that year, Botswana's President Seretse Khama Ian Khama refused to attend a SADC summit in protest of Zimbabwe's runoff election results. Khama has been one of the few African leaders to openly criticize Mugabe. He has pledged Botswana's support to the MDC and to democratic change in Zimbabwe.

During the ZANU-PF and MDC negotiations in late 2008, Botswana's government called on all African nations to impose sanctions against Zimbabwe. He also called on Zimbabwe's neighbors to close their borders in order to force Mugabe from power. Although no country heeded his call, in December 2008 Botswana announced that it would close its embassy in Zimbabwe. A week later, the Zimbabwean government accused Botswana of providing military training to MDC activists in Botswana. (An inquiry later found this claim to be false.) This was the first time that there had been such openly hostile relations between SADC members since the organization was founded in 1980.

Botswana has received a large influx of both legal and illegal immigrants from Zimbabwe, particularly since 2008. By 2009, approximately 600,000 Zimbabweans lived in Botswana, causing strains among the local population. Botswana's government has claimed that there is a correlation between crime in Botswana and the increase in illegal immigration, most of which is from Zimbabwe. In 2003, the government built a fence along its border with Zimbabwe in order to prevent the spread of diseases among cattle in the two countries. Many have claimed that the fence, in fact, was built to stem the flow of illegal immigrants. In early 2008, Botswana also was affected by the cholera outbreak that originated in Zimbabwe.

> ***"We are of the...view that it is important for all SADC member states to uphold the regional standards they have collectively and voluntarily adopted. We strongly believe that the one viable way forward in Zimbabwe is to have a rerun of the Presidential Election under full international sponsorship and supervision.... It should be unacceptable for ruling parties to seek to manipulate election outcomes to extend their stay in power, as this is bad for democracy on our continent.***
>
> —President Seretse Khama Ian Khama, November 2008

Profile: Great Britain

Throughout its history, Zimbabwe has been closely linked to Great Britain. As the former colonial power in Zimbabwe, Britain took a leading role in mediating the negotiations for peace in 1979. After the war, Britain supplied funding and support to the new government, particularly for land reform.

The relationship between Britain and Zimbabwe has become increasingly strained over the last decade. In response to human rights abuses and land seizures, in 2000 Britain instituted a number of punitive measures, including ending arms shipments to Zimbabwe and cutting its financial aid to the Zimbabwean government.

Zimbabwe has often accused the former colonial power of trying to interfere in its domestic affairs. Zimbabwe's government has claimed that Britain, in support of white farmers, has been trying to force regime change in Zimbabwe. In 2007, the press reported that Britain's former Prime Minister Tony Blair had had a conversation with a former general about whether to invade Zimbabwe. (The general advised against it.) Mugabe has maintained that the British wish to re-colonize Zimbabwe. In an attempt to discredit the opposition, ZANU-PF has claimed that the MDC is a puppet of the British government, acting on behalf of British interests.

Leaders of the two countries have viciously attacked each other in the press. In 2007 Britain's Prime Minister Gordon Brown refused to attend an EU-Africa summit because Mugabe would be in attendance. After Zimbabwe's presidential election in 2008, Brown called on the UN to send a mission to Zimbabwe to investigate human rights abuses perpetrated by the state. Britain also advocated for the UN Security Council to take a strong stand against Mugabe's government in the weeks and months after the March election.

Like the United States, Britain remains a major donor to humanitarian efforts in the country.

> ***"This is now an international rather than a national emergency. International because disease crosses borders. International because the systems of government in Zimbabwe are now broken. There is no state capable or willing of protecting its people. International because—not least in the week of the 60th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights—we must stand together to defend human rights and democracy, to say firmly to Mugabe that enough is enough."***
>
> —Prime Minister Gordon Brown, December 2008

Profile: China

Mugabe has had relations with China since the liberation struggle in the 1970s, when China provided financial, logistical, and military support for ZANU-PF. Since Zimbabwe's independence, China has had friendly relations with Zimbabwe's government. Today, China is one of Zimbabwe's largest sources of investment and China is an important trading partner for Zimbabwe. China also provides Zimbabwe's government with financial aid. This has been particularly important to Zimbabwe as its relationships with Western powers have soured.

China has built economic relationships with Zimbabwe within a broader strategy to expand Chinese investments in Africa. In Zimbabwe, China's government and Chinese companies have developed coal and platinum mines, hydroelectric generators, and thermal power stations, as well as built airports, bridges, and hospitals. Dozens of Chinese companies have operations in Zimbabwe. A number of ZANU-PF officials have business relationships in China. China has also supplied the government with massive arms shipments. In recent years, China has been criticized for its willingness to arm Mugabe's government. For example, in April 2008, dock workers in South Africa refused to unload a Chinese shipment of weapons and ammunition bound for Zimbabwe. After Mozambique, Angola, and Namibia also refused to accept the ship, it was forced to return to China.

China does not usually criticize the domestic affairs of other countries. But in June 2008 it supported a UN Security Council declaration that stated that a fair election in Zimbabwe's runoff would be impossible because of state-sponsored violence. At the same time, China has opposed UN sanctions against Zimbabwe. Like Russia, China generally supports state sovereignty and believes that the Security Council should not intervene in the domestic affairs of a country. According to the Security Council mandate, the Council is only supposed to address issues that threaten international peace and security. The Chinese government does not believe that Zimbabwe constitutes such a threat.

> ***"We believe that the parties concerned should seek compromise and cooperation through political dialogue and negotiation. This is the only correct way to solve the stalemate in Zimbabwe."***
>
> —Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Liu Jianchao, July 2008

Profile: The United States

The United States has had relations with Zimbabwe since the colonial period. In 1965, it broke diplomatic relations with Rhodesia after Ian Smith's government declared independence. In the 1970s the United States lent support to South African and then British efforts to negotiate an end to Zimbabwe's war. In 1980, the United States reopened its embassy in Zimbabwe and provided the Zimbabwean government with hundreds of millions of dollars in grants and loans for reconstruction, land reform, and worker training programs.

The relationship between the two countries was generally positive until 2000. According to the U.S. State Department, since then the U.S. government has taken a leading role in condemning Zimbabwe's government for its human rights abuses and violations of the rule of law. In 2005, then-Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice identified Zimbabwe, along with Cuba, Iran, North Korea, Burma, and Belarus, as an "outpost of tyranny." From 2000 onwards, the United States joined other Western countries to push for Zimbabwe's government to accept a democratic transition.

In 2002, the United States instituted a series of measures to squeeze Zimbabwe's government economically, including financial and travel restrictions on a number of high-ranking government officials, a ban on military assistance, and a ban on funding to the government. Nevertheless, the United States has remained a top aid donor to Zimbabwe, providing $900 million between 2002 and 2008. In 2009, President Barack Obama extended the country's punitive measures towards Zimbabwe for another year, claiming that he was hesitant about the potential for success within the new power-sharing government.

While the mandate of the Security Council is to become involved only in matters that threaten international security, some analysts have argued that the United States and its allies in Europe have attempted to broaden the Council's mandate to include issues of human rights and good governance. The U.S. government is concerned about the human rights and humanitarian implications of Zimbabwe's crisis. The United States also is concerned that the crisis might spill over Zimbabwe's borders and threaten the stability of the region. In 2008, the United States brought a resolution to impose UN sanctions—including an arms embargo and targeted financial and travel restrictions on fourteen top Zimbabwean officials—to the UN Security Council, but the resolution was vetoed by Russia and China.

> ***"The crisis constituted by the actions and policies of certain members of the government of Zimbabwe and other persons to undermine Zimbabwe's democratic processes or institutions has not been resolved. These actions and policies pose a continuing unusual and extraordinary threat to the foreign policy of the United States."***
>
> —President Barack Obama, March 2009

Web Resources

Video

Zimbabwe: Shadows and Lies
PBS Frontline World
This 25-minute episode is about life in Zimbabwe and aired in 2006. The site also has additional interviews, videos, resources, and interactive media.
<http://www.pbs.org/frontlineworld/stories/zimbabwe504/>

Combatting Cholera in Zimbabwe
Médicins Sans Frontières
This five-minute was filmed in 2009 and is about the cholera epidemic in Zimbabwe.
<http://www.msf.org/msfinternational/invoke.cfm?objectid=41C22C59-B5F0-4394-08B002C811C753FF&component=toolkit.article&method=full_html>

Choices' Scholars Online
Videos about the role of the UN and human rights can be found on this webpage.
<http://www.choices.edu/resources/scholars_un.php>

News Resources

Zimbabwe: New Era?
BBC Special Report
This page has links to the BBC's most recent articles and video and audio resources about Zimbabwe.
<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/in_depth/africa/2008/zimbabwe/default.stm>

Zimbabwe: The Battle for Land
BBC News Online
This BBC site is from 2000, and provides the background for understanding the land invasions that began that year.
<http://www.choices.edu/resources/twtn_zimbabwe_resources.php>

The Zimbabwe Standard
Homepage of an independent weekly newspaper published in Harare.
<http://www.thezimbabwestandard.com/>

The Herald
Homepage of a state-run daily newspaper published in Harare.
<http://www.herald.co.zw/index.aspx>

Global Voices Online (GVO) Zimbabwe page
GVO is a media organization that produces articles based on the local blogs from every country. This page has information about the issues that Zimbabweans are blogging about.
<http://globalvoicesonline.org/-/world/sub-saharan-africa/zimbabwe/>