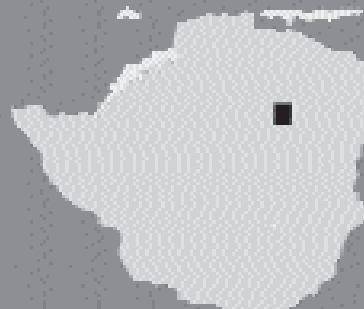


Informal workers and hawkers under attack in Zimbabwe



INSIDE AFRICA

Thousands of farm workers were displaced and lost their jobs through President Robert Mugabe's land reform process. It now appears that a similar process is affecting the livelihoods of thousands operating in Zimbabwe's informal economy, which accounts for an estimated 80% of overall employment. The **Labour Bulletin** draws on various reports to highlight how Operation Murambatsvina – 'drive out the rubbish' – is targeting hawkers, street vendors and those living in urban 'informal settlements'.



The Canadian Labour Congress (CLC) has written directly to Zimbabwean President Robert Mugabe expressing its concern over recent action by the Zimbabwean riot police who have flattened and burned down houses, market stalls and informal businesses throughout the country. The CLC said this campaign amounted to a policy of forced removal and was resulting in the loss of livelihoods of thousands of people in a country where the vast majority are employed in the informal economy. Operation Murambatsvina – 'drive out the rubbish' is, according to the government, aimed at cleaning up the urban areas and weeding out criminal elements. The CLC and Streetnet International say this campaign is indiscriminately attacking all forms of traders.

Amnesty International has condemned the government's actions and the United Nations has called them a clear violation of human rights. The opposition Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) has compared 'Operation Murambatsvina' to the Cambodian Pol Pot regime's efforts to drive urban people to rural areas for political 're-

education'. The MDC has its support base among the urban poor, and has argued that 'Operation Murambatsvina' is aimed at forcing them to rural areas where the government can more easily control them.

Streetnet International has argued that the latest crackdown by the Zimbabwean government is against the newly formed Zimbabwe Chamber of Informal Economy Associations (ZCIEA). The organisation said the government had been made aware that street vendors and informal traders are organising themselves as workers in the informal economy, and hitting them relentlessly.

According to Streetnet International, ZCIEA represents 4 404 members from 80 informal trade organisations, which have joined together to form the Zimbabwe Chamber of Informal Economy Associations. 'The government has apparently taken exception to the fact that informal workers are now organising themselves to defend their livelihoods, and that they have been given office space by the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions (ZCTU)', Streetnet International says.

Elijah Mutemeri, a ZCIEA organiser, reports that 'Zimbabwean municipal police have once again come on the throats of the poor vendors who are trying to eke a living from selling their wares, after serious harassment of the ZCTU and accusations that the labour centre of organising the informal economy. There is clear evidence that they are pouring their venom on innocent vendors. The destruction is so bad. Some of the people had used their very last few dollars to order some wares to sell. This exercise by police has spread into other small towns as well. They are trying to send a message that everything associated to ZCTU must be destroyed to the roots. Government is trying to make it difficult for us to continue organising. But what they are doing is actually strengthening the association.'

Mutemeri adds that, 'They (the Zimbabwean government) are actually trying to say the informal economy association is a political plot. This is baseless. The government thinks that since we were able to organise in the rural areas this means to say we are trying to counter the ruling party - yet ours is really to make sure that the informal economy has structures and have a voice in the issues that concerns them in terms of policy and legislation. We are really under siege as workers here in Zimbabwe.'

The CLC argued in its letter to Mugabe that if evictions are necessary then they should be carried out in full compliance with international human rights law including due process, legal protection, redress and appropriate relocation measures. The CLC also referred to the ILO resolution on decent work and the informal economy adopted in 2002.

The resolution states: 'The informal economy absorbs workers who would otherwise be without work or income, especially in developing countries that have a large and rapidly growing labour force, for example in countries where workers are made redundant following structural adjustment programmes. Most people enter the informal economy not by choice but out of a need to survive. Especially in circumstances of high unemployment, underemployment and poverty, the informal economy has significant job and income generation potential. The informal economy also helps to meet the needs of poor consumers by providing accessible and low-priced goods and services.'

ZIMBABWE OPPOSITION POST ELECTIONS

President Robert Mugabe's overwhelming victory in the recent elections in Zimbabwe has forced opposition parties and movements for change to rethink their strategy. The **Labour Bulletin** reports on an informal discussion held with **Dr Lovemore Madhuku**, leader of the national constitutional assembly, the civil society organisation lobbying for a new constitution.

Madhuku argued that the focus of opposition parties post elections had to shift away from the legitimacy of both the recent elections and the current government to ensuring the adoption of a roadmap to restore democracy. He said organisations such as the MDC and other organs of civil society had to focus on ensuring the entrenchment of democratic conditions in the country - hence a focus on a constitutional reform process. 'The focus is on creating the building blocks for democracy and creating opportunities for civil society and opposition parties to work together. We need to try to get a broad alliance premised on an open democracy founded on a new constitution'. This process, he said, was critical in the build-up to the 2008 elections.

The MDC and other opposition organisations, he said, had to review their strategy of focusing only on Mugabe. 'The West has become obsessed with Mugabe, which is not helpful'. He said it was important for opposition parties to shift focus away from Mugabe if these forces were to get support from the broader African community. It is hoped, he said, that South Africa, the ANC and other African governments would support an open process for constitutional reforms. The focus on Mugabe was not helpful in winning support amongst African leaders as Mugabe has been promoted as the first African leader to stand up against the colonialists and the West.

This raises some important questions relating to the nature of post-colonial movements in Africa and what type of government is in place. Madhuku posed the question: 'What kind of democracy do African leaders want in Africa?' This too brings us to the point, he said, about what Africans expect of their leaders. There is a view, he said, that the democracy of the



north is not the same as African democracy. Many workers, he said, support Mugabe because they say he was elected to lead, therefore, he must now lead. One delegate posed the question, 'What is African democracy in relation to exercising political power?'

He acknowledges various weaknesses in the pro-democracy movement, especially the MDC. The MDC, he said, was not formed as an organisation that would engage in a long-term struggle. It believed when it was formed that groundswell opposition to Mugabe would assure the MDC immediate victory. This has impacted on its ability to mobilise on the ground. Whilst elections effectively took place within a state of emergency, the MDC had to answer the question how Mugabe still managed to win a two-thirds majority? He acknowledges, following discussion on how the left in SA view the MDC, that the organisation has not projected the struggle against Mugabe as a working class struggle. Instead the MDC is still perceived to be a front for white capital.

There is a general belief that Zanu-PF wants Mugabe to step down in 2008. If that is the case then opposition parties might accept an interim president for two years followed by the holding of both presidential and parliamentary elections in 2010. This position, he said, would however, be dependent on whether a constitutional reform process has got underway.