

The Impact of the quest for land to people with HIV and AIDS in Zimbabwe

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Abstract: *The quest for land in Zimbabwe started since time immemorial with tribes fighting for the control of land. The coming of Europeans and the subsequent colonisation and occupation of Zimbabwe by Europeans further exacerbated the quest for land. It is for this reason that the quest for land in Zimbabwe can be closely linked to the spread of HIV and AIDS. As the ugly face of the pandemic is seen characterising the lives of many people today, the burning questions which can be asked are; How has the quest for land impacted on the lives of people with HIV and AIDS; What were the effects of the strategies used to redress the land problem in Zimbabwe. This paper seeks to unravel the impact of the quest for land to people with HIV and AIDS in Zimbabwe. Interviews and personal observations are going to be used to glean data for this paper.*

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I. Introduction

The spread of HIV and AIDS pandemic in Zimbabwe can be alleged to be very much related to the quest for land in Zimbabwe. As the ugly face of HIV and AIDS is seen characterising the lives of many Zimbabweans today, the burning questions in many people's minds are, 'how has the land reform exercise redressed the problem of HIV and AIDS in Zimbabwe? In what ways did the quest for land in Zimbabwe impacted on people with HIV and AIDS? What were the strategies used to address the problem of land in the face of HIV and AIDS? This paper therefore, seeks to bring out the impact of the quest for land to people with HIV and AIDS in Zimbabwe. The paper contends that the political violence that characterised the quest for land in the Zimbabwean political landscape was a clear indication of lack of foresight in the culminating effects it has to people with HIV and AIDS.

II. The significance of land among Zimbabweans

Bakare, (1993:46) described the term land as meaning several things in Zimbabwean culture. These meanings contribute to an understanding and appreciation of it as a cultural reality. Therefore, the term land refers to a ward, community, district, province or territory. People may identify themselves with the *dunhu* (land) they come from. For many Zimbabweans *kumusha* (home) means a village, district, province, or country. Land therefore, is a place of connection with mother earth, where one's roots are, where one's umbilical cord was buried, where one's ancestors are deposited (those who are in the subterrein or *varipasi*). Eliade (1961:22) says: "When the individual is in his land, he is 'oriented' in an orderly cosmos, he feels 'at home.' Taken outside his land, he is disoriented." A similar concept of land is expressed by Rich, (1977:34f) quoting Chief Seattle who is a Native American. He argued that, "Every part of this earth is sacred to my people. Every shining pine needle, every sand shore, every mist in the dark woods, every clearing and humming insect is holy in the memory and experience of my people". This means that land is very important in the lives of human beings.

Land may mean an allocated plot on which to build a house or a field for farming purposes, or an inherited piece of land reserved for special purposes. Land consists of things that can be both quantified and not quantified. It offers people identity, history, and livelihood, and it is sacred (Bakare, 1993:46).

III. The historical background of the quest for land in Zimbabwe

The land quest and the problems associated with it in Zimbabwe from first to second Chimurenga have received a wide research. Bakare (1993), Rich (1997), Fage (1978), Manson (1970), Banana (1996) and Moyana (1984) have conducted wide researches on the land question in Zimbabwe and there is nothing that we can add but only to argue that the solution to it has not been reached. Rather, the link between the land reform and HIV and AIDS has been neglected in the scholarly world and a lot needs to be done. This research has shown that the issue of HIV and AIDS in Zimbabwe cannot be discussed outside the land question and the land reform in particular. The impact of the land reform programme to the wide spread of HIV and AIDS in Zimbabwe still needs a lot of attention. It is this vacuum that this paper wants to fill. Thus the period between 2000 and 2008 can be seen as the period of a wide escalation of the spread of HIV and AIDS in Zimbabwe. Be that as it may, the political instability and unrest in Zimbabwe during the fast track land reform programme exacerbated lack of respect to human rights and dignity and in turn this intensified the spread of HIV and AIDS in the country.

The impact of the quest for land to people with HIV and AIDS in Zimbabwe

The impact of the land question to HIV and AIDS in Zimbabwe can be traced back to the armed struggle. This was the period when young men and women were moving out of the country to join arms against the white settlers who had confiscated and colonized their land. The period was characterized by too much mobility and most people were leaving away from their families and thus it became the best breeding ground for HIV and Aids. The political instability and unrest exacerbated lack of respect to human rights and dignity and in turn this intensified the spread of HIV and AIDS in the country.

Some of the displaced people already had the HIV virus and were removed from areas where they were receiving treatment. As a result, the majority of them died. One interviewee said:

Mushure mekunge tatora minda taisazorora. Zuva rega rega tainge tiri parufu. Pane mazuva ataiti tiri pane rumwe rufu wobva wanzwa kuti kune mumwe afa. Dzimwe nguva taipedzesera takamurana kuti vamwe voenda uku, vamwe uku nekuti ndufu dzacho dzainge dzawanda. (After we grabbed the land we were not resting. Almost every day we were attending a funeral. There were days when we would be at a funeral then you receive news that another person has died. Sometimes we ended up dividing ourselves into groups to say some would attend this funeral and others another one because the deaths were many.(Interview with a female interviewee in Manicaland Rural, 30 June 2011).

So the land reform provide a window through which the HIV and AIDS pandemic was spreading.

IV. The land reform and HIV and AIDS in Zimbabwe

In February, 2000, Zimbabweans rejected a government-backed draft constitution in a referendum. It was the first time President Robert Mugabe, in power since independence in 1980, was defeated at the polls. One of the provisions of that draft would have allowed the government to expropriate white- owned agricultural land for the resettlement of landless blacks. The proposal would only compensate the farmers for improvements on the farms, such as buildings and equipment. The former colonial power, Britain would pay the farmers for the land they had lost. The British government denied that responsibility. The rejection of the draft constitution set off what became known as the fast-track land-reform program. It was dubbed the 'Third Chimurenga' or Third revolution in the Shona language. The government argued that white settlers had seized land from blacks and it was correcting a historical wrong. Under the programme, white commercial farmers were forced off farms by militant veterans of Zimbabwe's war of independence. The president of the white Commercial Farmers, Deon Theron, tells Voice of America in 2002 that out of 4000 white commercial Farmers at the beginning of the exercise, only about 300 are still working the land. Very few of those 300 are operating fully. Theron acknowledged that the land reform was necessary but laments what he calls the politicization and racialisation of the exercise. The Movement for Democratic Change clearly stated that it supports the land reform programme but it says the exercise should be carried out in an orderly and non-violent manner. Prime Minister Morgan Tsvangirai of the MDC formation told VOA in 2008 that the programme should also benefit more people. In principle, we have all agreed that a land audit is the first step before we rationalize the mistakes of the land-reform programme, not the reversal of it but we are against multiple farm ownership, patrician nature of land distribution, unproductive use of the land, all those things have to be dealt with so that we have a permanent solution to the land problem in this country." Critics of the exercise have dismissed it as a disaster because the new farmers have failed to maintain production. But Professor Sam Moyo (2011), of the African Institute of Agrarian Studies, says ten years is too short a time to judge the success or otherwise of such a large undertaking.⁷

As farming communities were disrupted, the economy deteriorated, leading to increased poverty and reduced access to education and healthcare. Many farm workers were forced to move to different areas and in some cases families were separated. All these factors widened sexual networks and increased the risk of HIV transmission. Violence against farmers was practically encouraged, a climate of lawlessness ensued in many areas and rape became increasingly common, making women more vulnerable to HIV infection.

V. The 2008 Political violence and its impacts people with HIV and AIDS

The violence associated with the first and second rounds of Zimbabwe's 2008 presidential election continued the trend of violence that runs throughout the history of Zimbabwe since its attainment of independence. After the MDC garnered more votes than ZANU PF on 29 March 2008, the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission declared on May 2, over strong objections, that neither candidate had won an outright majority, and scheduled a runoff election for June 27, 2008. After the announcement of the presidential results, the political violence erupted at a magnified level across the country.

Between May and June, as part of ZANU-PF's effort to win the runoff election and intimidate the opposition, ZANU PF reportedly sent out its supporters to punish MDC members for 'voting wrongly' in the election. On one of his campaign rallies, Mugabe commenting on the police beating of the MDC leader, Tsvangirai quoted by AIDS-Free World (2009:1) said "I told the police to beat him a lot because he asked for it... I will not allow Tsvangirai and his bosses to taste this seat. Never, ever..." Armed with such a statement all ZANU - PF supporters thought it was a licence for them to engage in acts of terror. During this period local and international media coverage focused heavily on the country's inflation rates, sanctions, outbreaks of diseases such as cholera and efforts by outside mediators to broker peace, we strongly felt that the implication of this violence for HIV and AIDS transmissions was not part of the media agenda. Reports of human rights abuses in Zimbabwe over the past years pay very little attention to the impact of political violence on the transmission of HIV/AIDS. The testimonies of people who were victims of sexual violence are an indication of how the 2008 political violence perpetuated the spread of HIV and AIDS in Zimbabwe and beyond. As said by the executive director of the Women and AIDS Support Network (WASN), "HIV and AIDS and violence drive each other."

Most of the people interviewed for this paper indicted that the gang raping that took place in 2008 had an impact in the transmissions of HIV and AIDS. A Zimbabwe Prison Service Chaplain operating at Chikurubi Maximum Prison said "the issue of gang raping that took place in 2008 increases the transmission of HIV and AIDS in the sense that it was done under the name of politics and most of the offenders were at times not brought to book and no punishment was enforced" (Interview with a ZPS Chaplin in Harare, 30 November, 2010, Harare). This view is also echoed by the AIDS-Free World (2009) which says "... in every instance, the Zimbabwe police failed to adequately respond to the crimes." What it means therefore is that for those who attempted to report their rapes to the police, the officers did nothing or explicitly refused to write a report. As a result, the effect of this was severe for the victims since without a police report they were denied treatment at government hospitals. For example in 2010 a COPAC official is said to have brought a lorry full of women to Harare from Buhera who had indicated that they were raped in 2008 and had never received medical attention.

In our interview with a female war veteran in Harare, she said, "where there is raping there is no protective sexual intercourse as a result, those who were raped were exposed to high chances of getting HIV and AIDS if those who raped them were HIV positive" (Interview with a female war veteran in Harare, 1 December 2010). Reverend Masiwa echoes the same sentiments when he says, "After removing the democratic right i.e freedom (eg. Freedom to say no to sex) many women found themselves infected by an incurable disease (Interview with Reverend Masiwa in Harare, 3 December, 2010).

By gang raping and humiliating people throughout the country, most of the well-being of women, their reproductive abilities, families and happiness was destroyed. It should be noted that most of the perpetrators were intentionally infecting the women with HIV and AIDS. According to AIDS - Free World (2009), a twenty-five - year old woman from Matabeleland South was gang raped and then told, "Now you have AIDS and will die." A twenty-seven-year- old woman in Harare was told after her gang rape, "We have hurt you. . So go get tested because we have given you the prize for what you were doing". The perpetrators of this abuse knew very well that they were HIV positive and they were spreading it to their victims. For them this was the permanent punishment for supporting the opposition. Though in Zimbabwe it is a crime to infect someone with HIV virus intentionally, these men were never tried in a court of law clearly indicating that vulnerable groups in Zimbabwe were not protected by the law or by the government for political expedience. With the police in the country highly politicized, it became difficulty for the victims of political violence to find redress in the courts.

In Masvingo there was an albino woman gang raped by six men in front of her husband and son. She fled to Harare after the incident and when she went for HIV test she was found to be HIV positive. This person suffered at three levels. First she is a woman in a patriarchal society where women are generally looked down upon. Secondly, she is an albino and albinos are usually treated as outcasts in African societies. Thirdly, her condition of being HIV positive worsens her plight due to stigma and discrimination.

This albino woman might have been HIV positive prior to this incident. What it means therefore is that the six men who raped her might have contracted the virus during the rape. If the woman was HIV negative then the probability is high that she contracted the virus during the rape. Recent statistics show that one in every six Zimbabweans is HIV positive. It follows therefore that one of these men had the virus which he shared with his other five colleagues including the victim. This is not to mention the wives of these men and the children that are going to be born.

In the Midlands province a certain woman with her husband were abducted and the husband was killed in front of his wife soon after they arrived at the base. After they killed her husband the wife was then taken as a slave who prepared meals for the militia. To ensure that she would not run away she was then guarded in turns for twenty four hours a day by the militias. She reported to us in an interview with her that every guard who was on duty raped her. This was done when these men were not aware of the fact that each one of them was doing like wise. They took it as opportunistic sex. This being the case, if any one of these men were HIV positive, chances is that all those who were involved in that sexual abuse contracted HIV and AIDS.

Prior to the gang raping this woman told us that she had tested negative to HIV. However, it is a sad story to hear from her that after being gang raped she went for HIV testing and was found to be HIV positive.

It should be noted that it was not always the case that the men who were involved in gang raping did it willingly. Some of them were forced to do so. One woman who was gang raped pointed out that one of the man who raped her indicated that he did not want to perform the act but was told to do so by the gang which threatened to kill him if he refused. This man asked for a condom which he was not given and even when he was raping the woman he asked for forgiveness. So even though the woman is HIV positive today, she indicated that she forgave this man because she understands that he did it not out of his own will.

By asking for a condom, it is clear that this man was aware that the gang raping that was taking place had an implication for HIV transmission; hence, he was trying to protect himself and the woman from contracting the virus.

What we also get from this testimony is that though the 2008 political violence was highly feminized, there were quite a number of men who went through the same experiences though their voices remain silent. These people who were interviewed are just but a fraction of what was transpiring in 2008.

In a democratic nation, rape, sexual slavery, sexual violence, gender-based persecution and torture constitute crimes against humanity. They are a violation of the democratic freedoms that should be enjoyed by citizens of any nation. This, however, was not the case in Zimbabwe as indicated by the interviews for this paper. The manner in which the gang rapes occurred were very similar across the country giving an impression that the 2008 political violence was institutionalized. Thus, the use of sexual violence as a political tool, undermine democracy and exacerbates the transmission of HIV and AIDS in Zimbabwe.

VI. Effects of gang raping

All the gang raping that took place during the 2008 elections had a physical and psychological effect on the victims. Physically, most of the people who were raped during this period were denied access to medical care and therefore left vulnerable to HIV and AIDS, unwanted pregnancies, affected by sexual transmitted diseases, and their life threatening injuries. Psychologically, all women have experienced trauma from the rapes, including recurring nightmares and flashbacks AIDS-Free World (2009).

AIDS-Free World(2009) noted that throughout their interviews the women relayed a litany of post-traumatic stress symptoms, including ongoing headaches, stomachaches, depression, fatigue, weight loss, trouble concentrating and forgetfulness, nightmares, insomnia, loss of appetite, body pain, desire to be alone, dizziness, unhappiness, shame, and loss of self worth. This is supported by one woman in Mbare who told us that:

I feel like my body no longer belongs to me. I have lost my self-worth and self-esteem. I don't feel like my old self, because, in my heart I feel like a different person because of the rape. It's like losing a sibling, when someone in your family dies...(interview with a female interviewee in Mbare, 30 November, 2010).

This brings us to the debate of whether HIV and AIDS incidence in Zimbabwe is on a downward trend. According to the Zimbabwe situation in 2010 66000 new HIV infections were recorded. Therefore, the statistics that indicate the HIV prevalence in Zimbabwe is on a downward trend may be explained in various ways. Researchers of this paper do not dispute the fact that efforts that have been put in awareness campaigns have resulted in behavior change in some individuals in Zimbabwe. For example, in areas where the Family AIDS Care Trust operate like Bikita and Mutare Rural, most people acknowledged that the awareness campaigns conducted by the organization have given them the much needed knowledge about HIV and AIDS and has led to behaviour change in both the youth and adults. However, when the economic and political situation worsened in the country, many Zimbabweans went into the diaspora, some of these people had tested positive to HIV and had been included in the statistics. Thus, their relocating to other countries may have contributed to the reduced number of people living with the virus. Furthermore, the economic crisis that dogged the country during the period under review led to many people who were affected succumbing to the disease. This was made worse by

the breakdown of the health delivery system as the majority of those infected could not afford to by the required antiretroviral drugs. Yet still some people feel that the statistics are being manipulated for political reasons. (Interview) The issue of HIV prevalence in Zimbabwe needs further research, research which is characterized by truth telling so that going forward the nation really knows where it stands in as far as the pandemic is concerned.

VII. Conclusion

This paper has shown that HIV and AIDS remains a challenge in Zimbabwe despite published statistics of its prevalence showing a downward trend. By focusing on the political violence of 2008, the paper has highlighted that the gang raping that occurred increased the transmission of HIV and AIDS. Since such rapes were used as a punishment for an electorate which was being accused of 'wrongly voting' the paper has shown that no democratic principles were being respected. As such, from interviews conducted, it has been proven that there is a very close relationship between democracy or the lack of it and HIV and AIDS. The church has also been shown to be a critical player in ensuring that the Zimbabwean political turf becomes a peaceful one and that the national healing agenda is successful not by calling the victims to forgive without justice being served on the perpetrators of the violence. The church has been called to come with relevant theologies that directly speak to the situation which Zimbabweans currently find themselves embraced in. Many men and single women move about looking for means of survival. Some women, mostly casual labourers, found shelter by cohabiting with resettled farmers as the second 'wives'. Informal settlements have sprung up with shifting populations, shared shelters and broken families. Gold panning, brewing beer and prostitution have become a means of survival for many. An increased incidence of child sexual abuse, rape and violence against women and girls was reported. For most, there is little access to health or education services or HIV/AIDS prevention and care programmes. Humanitarian organisations distribute some food, but shortages and malnutrition among this population are still rife and have already led to an increased number of AIDS related deaths. The accompanying hardships and breakdown of family life following displacement has resulted in increased risk taking behaviour. There is constant interaction with other communities and this has impact on the HIV infection rate throughout the country.

Recommendations:

The provision of HIV/AIDS care or prevention work in this scattered and still shifting population must be addressed by NGO's and government as a matter of urgency or the HIV/AIDS pandemic in Zimbabwe will worsen drastically.

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Interviews

Interview with a female interviewee in Harare, 24 November 2010

Interview with a ZRP Chaplain in Harare, 2 December 2010

Interview with an Apostolic Faith Mission member in Harare, 1 December 2010

Interview with a Rock of Ages church member in Marondera, 30 November 2010

Interview with female interviewee in Marondera Rural, 30 November 2010

Interview with a Zimbabwe Prison Service Chaplain in Harare, 30 November 2010

Interview with a female war veteran in Harare in Harare, 1 December 2010

Interview with Reverend Ray Masiwa in Harare, 3 December 2010

Interview with a female interviewee in Mbare, 30 November 2010

Interview with a female victim of political violence, 5 November 2010

Interview with a female victim of political violence, 12 November 2010

Interview with a female victim of political violence in Marondera, 26 November 2010