



**IN TRANSFORMATION  
INITIATIVE**

# Zimbabwe Case Study



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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This case study examines In Transformation Initiative's (ITI) involvement in Zimbabwe through the various activities that were implemented in the pre-election phase leading up to the 2018 elections. It looks at lessons learnt from this engagement in Zimbabwe that can be used as a reflective tool for peacebuilding practitioners and inform peacebuilding practices in related contexts. The case study also gives ITI an opportunity to reflect on and strengthen its model in peacebuilding.

Zimbabwe is an example of a democratic transition that has not led to democratic consolidation. The country gained independence from British rule in 1980 and held much promise in its early years. The belief was that it would take a progressive trajectory in entrenching democratic principles in state governance. However, as argued by Brian Raftopoulos, 'the history of liberation movements in Africa has been dented by a tendency to centralise power; close the democratic space; and repress any dissenting voices'.<sup>1</sup> Zimbabwe is one such state. For the past four decades it has had a dominant party system under the rule of its erstwhile liberation movement, the Zimbabwe African National Union–Patriotic Front (Zanu-PF).<sup>2</sup> A system of centralisation of authority in the party and presidency, extended to the state and government, has largely compromised other institutional centres of power, notably Parliament and the judiciary. Zimbabwe thus continues to face democratic deficit challenges.

The political landscape is characterised by weak governance institutions; growing repression and intolerance of dissenting views; a poor human rights record; low and declining levels of trust in leadership and institutions among the general populace; a highly politicised and polarised environment; and a largely fragmented and weak political opposition. Political expediency has over the years trumped the exercise of sound macro-economic policy. This has led to an economy in free fall with no signs of reprieve. All of this has made for a fragile democracy in Zimbabwe. Yet some democratic gains were made over time through the persistence of a growing pro-democracy movement, including a better organised and focused opposition movement in the late 1990s and 2000s. This led to hopes of an imminent transitional<sup>3</sup> moment that would put the country on a truly democratic trajectory.

ITI's intervention in Zimbabwe in 2016 focused on supporting the vision of political opposition parties and the pro-democracy movement to safeguard these democratic gains. At the time of its engagement the country was preparing for the 2018 elections. With the opposition having lost the 2013 elections, when the Government of National Unity (GNU) ended, Zanu-PF again gained dominance in the country. This led to fears of a possible reversal of these gains, given that they were not in the ruling party's favour. At the invitation of some in the pro-democracy movement, ITI focused primarily



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on strengthening and supporting opposition parties in safeguarding the democratic gains of the GNU era. It addressed the fragmentation among these opposition parties and helped them to realise that safeguarding past gains and taking the democratic reform agenda forward was impossible without a united front at the elections and beyond.

By providing advisory services through one-on-one sessions and group meetings, hosting delegations in South Africa on learning visits, and facilitating research on socio-economic and political issues in Zimbabwe, ITI was able to bring some critical insights to the political scene. Although the main opposition party, the MDC Alliance, narrowly lost the 2018 elections, there was enough evidence to convince stakeholders that political alliances can be effective in the Zimbabwean context.

Several lessons can be distilled from the Zimbabwe case study.

- Peacebuilding interventions in countries with intractable political crises like Zimbabwe require a long-term perspective with adaptive and innovative approaches to address systemic challenges. In contexts where long-term initiatives are needed to support and build the capacity of political transitions, short-term interventions reliant on budget cycles determined by funding partners tend to be limiting.
- When working on political processes to ensure more effective participation, it is also necessary to build sufficient incentives for hardliners and powerful individuals and institutions to participate in transitional processes.
- Inclusivity can be applied systematically in contexts where there are multiple stakeholders with diametrically opposed views. While it is necessary to engage with and bring all stakeholders to dialogue, it is often a challenging task. It may be necessary in some instances to engage those who are ready and willing to rally behind a common cause and keep the door open for other stakeholders who might require time and convincing before coming to the table.
- In a context of deep-rooted mistrust, building trust takes time and requires continuity and consistency, as the trust built can easily be undone. Building and sustaining this trust thus requires a focus on strengthening the capacity of national actors for genuine and continuous dialogue.
- In contexts where political conflict is protracted, there is a high likelihood of fatigue setting in among peacebuilding practitioners, including mediators, who must show a considerable degree of patience, flexibility, persistence and political juggling. Some effects are only observed long after the intervention. Although ITI is keen on assisting in the Zimbabwean situation, in certain instances the protracted conflict has caused disillusionment and frustration at ITI owing to the lack of movement despite significant effort on multiple fronts.



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## INTRODUCTION

The Zimbabwean case study, focusing on the pre-2018 election period, is one of a series designed to capture lessons from ITI's application of the South African transition model in various countries. The political context in Zimbabwe, while sharing similarities with other countries in the region based on their colonial history, has unique local dynamics that provide lessons that validate and strengthen ITI's model. This model gives countries an opportunity to be exposed to and learn from the South African peacemaking model and transitional process from apartheid to democracy, thereby enhancing and strengthening their own efforts towards peaceful settlements and transitions.

The case study is informed by ITI's project documentation, including research reports, annual grant reports and feedback summary reports following visits to the country during the project period. Further details and first-hand accounts were obtained through interviews with ITI directors. More detailed information was gathered through interviews with ITI director Ivor Jenkins,<sup>4</sup> renowned activist and scholar Prof. Brian Raftopoulos,<sup>5</sup> opposition movement member Sesel Zvidzayi,<sup>6</sup> Marcelline Chikasha of the Coalition for Democrats (CODE), and Thoko Matshe,<sup>7</sup> the Regional Coordinator at the Olof Palme International Center in South Africa. Literature on the Zimbabwean political developments available in the public domain was also used to locate ITI's work in the broader context of the country's political dynamics and interventions.

### BACKGROUND TO THE CONFLICT SITUATION IN ZIMBABWE

The conflict described in this case study is set against the backdrop of the country's struggles to consolidate democracy. There is increasing political contestation, which includes election disputes and resistance from the ruling party to democratic reforms. However, pressure for democratic reforms is mounting as pro-democracy voices intensify and stronger opposition parties emerge. With four decades having passed since the country gained political independence, a true transitional<sup>8</sup> moment has appeared elusive, although the country has had moments in its postcolonial history where such transitions seemed imminent.

Since its ascendance to power in 1980, Zanu (later Zanu-PF), with the late President Robert Mugabe<sup>9</sup> at the helm, has consolidated political power and control and suppressed any attempts to change the political architecture in the country. A series of highly contested elections, especially the 2008 national elections, demonstrated the government's resolve to retain power at any cost. The country has endured recurring economic and political crises, and there has been a dramatic deterioration in livelihoods since 2000. For the past four decades Zimbabwe has seen policy inconsistencies, a



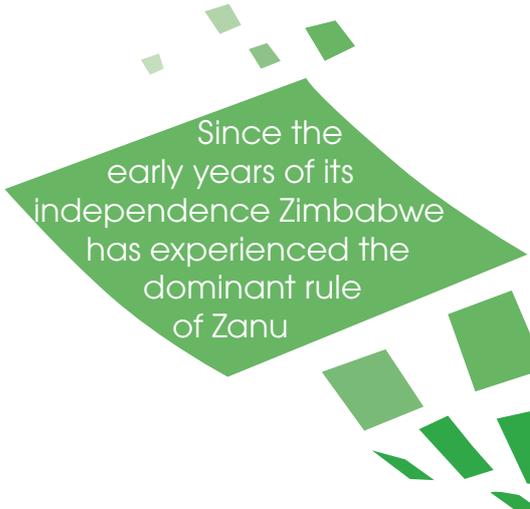
Pressure for democratic reforms is mounting as pro-democracy voices intensify

controversially implemented land reform process, international sanctions, poor governance and fiscal excesses. It has become an unattractive investment destination, with no meaningful foreign direct investment, hyperinflation (particularly in 2007/8), de-industrialisation, low productivity, a high unemployment rate, high poverty levels and a deteriorating social service infrastructure. While the country's leaders deny the existence of any crisis in the country, evidence on the ground shows a different reality. Many analysts have noted that the challenge in Zimbabwe is a political one with socio-economic consequences.

Democratic consolidation in Zimbabwe has remained elusive. Democratic and governance institutions are weak, given the limited attention given to their development. Opposition parties, which are a key component in the institutionalising of any democracy, are largely fragmented and too weak to successfully challenge the deeply entrenched ruling party and authoritarian system. Sachikonye et al. (2007)<sup>10</sup> note that the country failed to undertake any notable political and democratic reforms for over three decades after its independence. Apart from the significant step of attaining independence in 1980, there has been no transition from the prevailing authoritarian political system and culture adopted and practised by Zanu-PF to a more open, inclusive and democratic one.

Since the early years of its independence the country has experienced the dominant rule of Zanu. While smaller parties existed, they were too weak to pose any real threat to its rule. Only the Zimbabwe African People's Union (Zapu), led by the late Joshua Nkomo, offered a credible challenge to Zanu. However, the ensuing political violence and government's heavy-handedness neutralised Zapu, leading to the merger of the two parties through the Unity Accord signed in 1987. The new party was called the Zimbabwe African National Union – Patriotic Front (Zanu-PF). Further opposition to Zanu-PF later came from the newly formed Zimbabwe Unity Movement (ZUM), which prevented a one-party state from forming. Opposition to Zanu-PF's quest for a one-party state also emerged from civil society organisations (CSOs), including student and labour bodies, and human rights organisations. However, these CSOs and the new political formations that continued to emerge in the early 1990s were too weak to offer a credible threat to the ruling party in the elections of 1990 and 1995.

Growing disenchantment among CSOs, notably the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions (ZCTU) and the National Constitutional Assembly (NCA), led to the formation of the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) led by Morgan Tsvangirai in 1999. The emergence of the MDC on the political scene dented Zanu-PF's parliamentary dominance in the 2000 election. Although by the next elections (in 2008) the MDC had split into three factions,<sup>11</sup> the election results were too close to call and resulted in a negotiated Government of National Unity (GNU) through a power-sharing agreement known as the Global Political Agreement (GPA).<sup>12</sup> While the GNU was an opportunity to



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attend to reforms, notably electoral, media and security reforms, these were never realised.

The GNU ran from 2009 to 2013, when Zanu-PF won the elections and regained power. With Zanu-PF back in control, there were mounting fears that it would make amendments to the progressive 2013 constitution to suit its authoritarian agenda and destroy multipartyism.

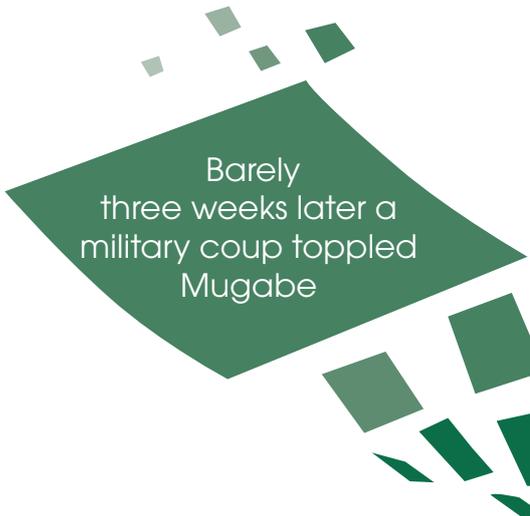
In the run-up to the 2018 elections there were more splits in the MDC-T faction. Former Minister of Finance Tendai Biti left the MDC and formed his own party, the People's Development Party (PDP). Another MDC stalwart, Elton Mangoma,<sup>13</sup> left to form the Renewal Democrats of Zimbabwe (RDZ). The main opposition was thrown into disarray and weakened considerably. A plethora of small parties also emerged in this period. As individual parties they failed to make any inroads electorally. Alliances began to emerge among the opposition in 2017. Notably, the MDC-T formed an alliance with some of its breakaway factions in mid-2017 to become the MDC-Alliance (MDC-A).<sup>14</sup>

Within the ruling party itself factional battles that had always been at play intensified. After Zanu-PF's 2014 congress then Vice President Joice Mujuru was relieved of her duties amid allegations of plotting President Mugabe's assassination. She and her perceived supporters were expelled from the party. Mujuru was to form her own party – Zimbabwe People First (ZimPF). This party later split and Mujuru's faction formed the National People's Party (NPP). In more dramatic events, in early November 2017 Vice President Emmerson Mnangagwa was also relieved of his duties and expelled from the party, supposedly to pave way for the ascendancy of a younger generation of Mugabe loyalists with close ties to then First Lady Grace Mugabe. Barely three weeks later a military coup toppled Mugabe. Mnangagwa was named leader of both Zanu-PF and the country.

With the coup government promising renewal, there was hope that a transitional moment had arrived. A new leadership was in place promising a new dispensation, and the political environment shifted somewhat. The new regime, keen to be seen in a positive light both regionally and internationally, opened up the political environment to allow more transparent and peaceful electoral processes. Soon after the removal of Mugabe, opposition leader Tsvangirai passed away in February 2018. This ushered in new leadership at the helm of the MDC-T and ultimately the MDC-A. The 2018 elections saw Mnangagwa narrowly win with 50.8% of the vote. The MDC-A's Nelson Chamisa came a close second with 44.39%, in what the MDC-A claimed was a fraudulent election. Zanu-PF was to get a two-thirds majority in Parliament with 179 seats, while the MDC-A got 88.

### ITI INVOLVEMENT IN ZIMBABWE<sup>15</sup>

ITI's involvement in any conflict context arises from direct requests for advice from political or civil society leaders. The decision to engage in a country



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is based on ITI's assessment of the feasibility of bringing about meaningful change and the availability of adequate resources.

ITI's involvement in Zimbabwe in the pre-2018 election period developed organically as a carry-over from the work of the Institute for Democratic Alternatives in South Africa (Idasa) in which Ivor Jenkins was involved. However, this work did not last for long and momentum fizzled (2013/14).<sup>16</sup> ITI's interest in Zimbabwe was renewed in 2015/2016 through high-profile networks linking Jenkins to the now late Dumiso Dabengwa.<sup>17</sup> At the time, although he was the leader of Zapu, Dabengwa was interested in ITI's exploring the possibility of helping opposition parties to form a unified front as a strategy to bring about democratic transfer of political power in Zimbabwe. In response to this, ITI undertook an initial exploratory visit to Zimbabwe and met with a group of concerned citizens under the name Zimbabwean Preparatory Committee. The group comprised members of political parties, business and civil society.

From the outset there was a sense that the country was in danger of losing the democratic gains made in the pre-GNU and GNU period. These gains include the launch of the new constitution in 2013, which was to usher in various reforms. These included electoral reform, devolution of power, and media and security reforms to advance democracy in the country. Steps taken to weaken the dominant party system and entrench a multi-party system were also at risk.

In view of the mounting challenges, and amid a growing economic crisis, ITI determined that its purpose in engaging Zimbabwe would be to strengthen opposition parties to safeguard these democratic gains for the benefit of the country and its citizens. While protecting democratic gains was in the interest of the nation as a whole, such a conversation would, of course, not be in the immediate interest of the ruling party. It was determined that ITI would assist political parties to form a united front or coalition to contest the harmonised national elections due in July 2018. It would also try to persuade the government to adopt a reform agenda that would usher in stronger and more democratic institutions, particularly as relates to electoral reforms.

ITI was aware that this would not be easy, given the continued dominance of the ruling party. In one of the reports<sup>18</sup> produced by a reference group formed by ITI, the authors pointed out the difficulties in dislodging dominant and entrenched ruling parties. They noted that this had compelled oppositional groups across Africa to form coalitions. The authors concluded that coalitions/alliances tended to offer the most realistic possibility of electoral success for opposition parties, as had been observed in Nigeria and The Gambia.

### HOSTING POLITICIANS IN SOUTH AFRICA

ITI embarked on a series of engagements to drive the idea of forming coalitions/alliances to strengthen opposition parties in the run-up to the 2018



elections. These engagements were initiated before the 2017 coup. The first consisted of a dialogue with the leadership of 13 Zimbabwean opposition parties at Boschendal, Cape Town from 28 November to 1 December 2016. ITI concluded from earlier scoping engagements that a united front going into the elections was of critical importance, and thus the dialogue session was designed as a platform for opposition parties to learn from the South African experience and develop a clear idea of how to manage a transition and not work against each other.

The delegates engaged in a series of discussions, including understanding the depth of the crisis in Zimbabwe, in order to move towards a consensual understanding before seeking to develop a common response strategy. They acknowledged that there was a leadership crisis in the opposition parties, that there were ideological differences and that parties were generally too weak and fragmented to coordinate a serious response to the Zimbabwean crisis or guarantee a formidable showing in the upcoming elections.

Emanating from the dialogue was an agreement to, in principle, form a coalition that would maximise and unify the opposition's voice and so become a credible contender in the 2018 elections. The delegates also committed to continue working towards a collective programme of action, and released a media statement confirming that they were committed to building a broad coalition of political parties in order to create the Zimbabwe we want.

A second dialogue – a follow-up to that of December 2016 – was held with delegates from 16 political parties at Boschendal from 8–9 May 2017. As a result of the first Boschendal dialogue, two coalitions had been established, namely the Coalition of Democrats (CODE) and the National Rainbow Alliance (NRA).<sup>19</sup> These drew together the parties that had been present at the first meeting in Boschendal and some that the participants had mobilised later. The alliances showed that the opposition parties were



*A delegation of political parties from Zimbabwe on a learning visit to South Africa in 2017.*

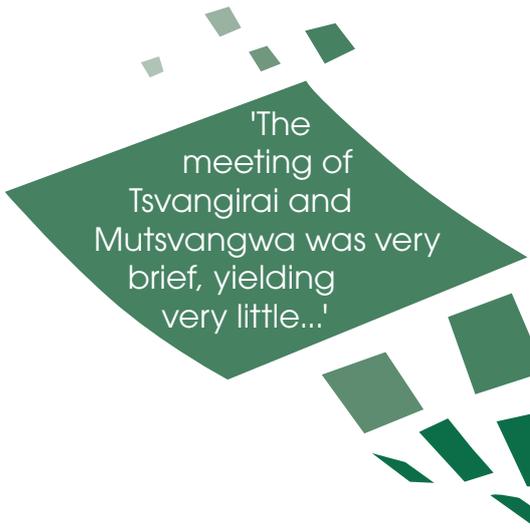
coalescing around common principles and interests and slowly moving towards the goal of a united front. ITI facilitated discussions on forms of cooperation among political parties and the impact on elections. Another attempt was made to create a single and united opposition coalition to contest the 2018 elections. The delegates deliberated on the formation of the Mass Opposition Movement (MOM), where a single candidate would be selected to run for the presidency by a united opposition.

At the end of the two-day dialogue session the delegates drafted a resolution for the formation of the MOM and undertook to seek the buy-in of their various constituencies. The basic idea was that the opposition would come up with a common election platform and field one presidential candidate; individual political parties would still maintain their own identity; and individual political parties would not compete against each other in the election of Members of Parliament.

Following the second dialogue session, the opposition party leaders met in Masvingo from 22–25 June 2017 to discuss follow-up actions and further establish common grounds for cooperation. The meeting was intended to bring on board both the NPP, led by Joice Mujuru, and the MDC-T, led by Morgan Tsvangirai, which appeared reluctant to join hands with smaller parties. While Mujuru joined the Rainbow Alliance, the MDC-T formed its own alliance in August 2017 with some of its former factions, among others.

With the alliance-building initiative underway, ITI was aware that any sound transition would require the cooperation of the ruling elite. To test the appetite for a transition away from Mugabe, ITI facilitated an August 2017 meeting between Tsvangirai and Chris Mutsvangwa of Zanu-PF (at the time the leader of the War Veterans Association in Zimbabwe). The intention was to create pathways for dialogue between Tsvangirai and then Deputy President Emmerson Mnangagwa in anticipation of a transitional moment in Zimbabwe emerging as a result of the upcoming elections. Ivor Jenkins remarked that 'the meeting of Tsvangirai and Mutsvangwa was very brief, yielding very little, with attempts at any further follow-up meeting unsuccessful'.

Given the reluctance of the MDC-T to enter into an alliance with other opposition parties, the initiative gained little traction. ITI decided at that point to gather a small reference group of Zimbabweans representing civil society, academia and political parties to help unblock some of the resistance to a common election platform. Among others, the think tank identified the need to establish a strong national consensus to urge political parties towards alliance building. This could help all parties, notably the MDC-T, understand what was at stake. It was recognised that the MDC-T had to form part of this opposition alliance, as the other parties were too small to have the hoped-for impact in the 2018 elections.



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The MDC-T, despite its internal challenges and disappointing showing in the 2013 election, was still the most viable democratic option for an opposition victory at the polls against Zanu-PF. While ITI was trying to unite the opposition, including encouraging the MDC-T to join the discussions, the MDC-T on its own took heed of the message of alliance building and united with factions that had previously defected from it and these factions together other parties<sup>20</sup> formed the MDC-Alliance in August 2017. Tsvangirai was chosen as leader of the Alliance, and after his death in February 2018 was replaced by Nelson Chamisa.

There were now three alliances that needed to find each other to build a grand coalition with the central objective of uniting against Zanu-PF in the 2018 election. In a review by the reference group working with ITI, the authors noted that the alliance agreement was mostly concerned with parcelling out positions and parliamentary seats, without much attention given to substantive issues such as attending to the country's democratic challenges as a collective.

The deep polarity in the country meant that the MDC-A was not interested in working with most of the other opposition parties, which it viewed as too insignificant to affect what it felt it could achieve on its own. However, some of these parties and personalities had a constituency and notable social capital that they could mobilise. The MDC-A did try to get the more significant of the smaller parties to join its alliance, notably Joice Mujuru's NPP. While Mujuru showed interest, her condition that the alliance be renamed could not be met and the NPP was to stay in the Rainbow Alliance. Closer to the election Zapu, then led by Dumiso Dabengwa and part of the CODE alliance, did, however, throw its weight behind the MDC-A.

Given this stalemate, social movements<sup>21</sup> that had gained traction during the 2016/2017 period and had been successful in mobilising support were called in to see if they could assist. They were key stakeholders that could rally together and influence the agenda for cooperation among the opposition parties, notably to get the involvement of the MDC-A. From 15–16 September 2017 ITI facilitated a dialogue between seven social movements<sup>22</sup> representing diverse constituencies and agendas, including vendor rights, civil society coordination, young women's involvement in political and electoral processes, citizen manifestos, and governance accountability advocacy. The aim was to determine whether there could be any synergies between the social movement agenda and that of the opposition parties, and ultimately to build national consensus on a reform agenda. Among the issues emerging from that meeting were a recognition that:

- The upcoming 2018 elections would give legitimacy to the ruling party in light of a weak and troubled opposition that would be unlikely to have any meaningful impact, hence the need for a sound strategy by the opposition.
- It was necessary to rethink opposition politics for the immediate and future democratic goals of Zimbabwe. Social movements, as a key



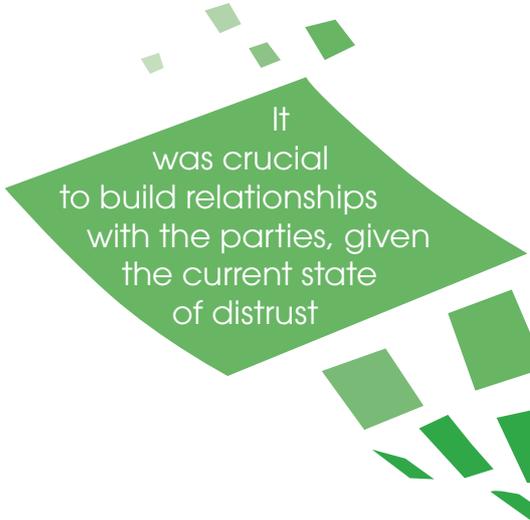
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component of the opposition forces, needed to determine what they could do to support credible coalition building. The social movements acknowledged that they needed to rally together so as to form a power bloc to impress upon opposition parties the need to get form a grand coalition.

- It was crucial to build relationships with the parties, given the current state of resentment and distrust. Working with mainstream civil society was considered, but this was rejected as a large number of them were politically compromised.

Ultimately the social movements agreed to the following:

- Give opposition parties pointers on how to build public support and so change how they have been approaching the elections.
- Support the agenda of stopping the ruling party from gaining a two-thirds majority.
- Draw up a framework for cross-sectoral engagement.
- Come up with a grand and commonly shared goal ahead of the 2018 elections and beyond.
- Hold a summit to agree on a list of key demands targeted at all political parties.



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## THE 2017 COUP

The coup in 2017 ushered in a new dynamic in Zimbabwean politics. The removal of President Mugabe gave birth to a modicum of hope and enthusiasm among opposition parties, civil society and many ordinary people. As one of the ITI directors remarked, 'for but a brief moment Zimbabweans seemed to come together in celebrating the removal of the long serving President who had come to be associated with all that was wrong in Zimbabwe'.<sup>23</sup> This milestone event initially appeared to signal a transition. Some in the opposition were hopeful that a transitional government that would accommodate them would be put in place. However, all the hope for change was wiped away when newly appointed President Mnangagwa showed no sign of implementing any reforms. Instead, he immediately began to consolidate his position, closing democratic spaces and disenfranchising dissenting voices.

ITI hosted a learning workshop in Cape Town, South Africa in February 2018 to allow the opposition to learn from the experiences of Botswana, The Gambia, Kenya and Nigeria in coalition and alliance building. The experiences of South Africa and Germany were also shared. Bi- and multilateral engagements between and among the political groupings were held during the week-long workshop, which was attended by representatives from CODE and the NRA. For the first time the MDC-A also agreed to participate, and was represented at the leadership level.<sup>24</sup>

Key lessons that emerged from the workshop were: the need to be clear on the goal bringing the parties together in a coalition/alliance; the need for compromises and sacrifices to achieve the desired goal; that coalitions are never perfect and it takes time to build trust among coalition partners; and the need for some criteria and benchmarks to qualify those parties that are suitable coalition partners.

Resulting from the workshop, the party secretary generals of the various formations at the workshop were tasked by the collective with putting together a possible framework of cooperation. This framework would look into the goal of cooperation, resourcing of the coalition, and an examination of the environment in Zimbabwe in a bid to manage the risks such cooperation would face. Unfortunately, none of these tasks ever materialised. In the week after the workshop Morgan Tsvangirai died in hospital. A leadership tussle to succeed Tsvangirai ensued, with Nelson Chamisa emerging as the new party leader over the more senior vice presidents.<sup>25</sup> One MDC-T vice president, Thokozani Khuphe, would subsequently break away from the MDC-A and contest the elections under the banner of the MDC-T. Chamisa was later confirmed as the MDC-A leader and its endorsed presidential candidate. The three alliances then went to the elections as separate groupings.



Coalitions are never perfect and it takes time to build trust among coalition partners

## LESSONS LEARNT

Although ITI's intervention in Zimbabwe is still on-going, several lessons can be drawn from the 2013–2018 initiative. Continued political repression of the media and civic society, coupled with a weak and fragmented opposition, makes Zimbabwe an ideal testing ground for new and progressive ideas in peacebuilding. While the narrative around the political context in Zimbabwe is hotly contested, this case study is focused on the efficacy of strengthening democracy by supporting political parties to create a stronger election platform. The intervention was meant to facilitate the deepening of democracy in Zimbabwe by enabling opposition parties to participate effectively in elections and thereby stand a chance of safeguarding the country's democratic gains. All ITI interventions are informed by the South African experience and seek to apply the lessons learnt to individual country contexts.

### GUIDING PRINCIPLES

In all its interventions in Zimbabwe, ITI applied the three core principles – trust, inclusivity and local ownership – derived from the South African experience. It was evident that without trust, there would be no meeting of minds in Zimbabwe, nor would the opposition come together on a common electoral platform. Dialogue was seen as the tool to help bring about that trust. The principle of inclusivity required that ITI engage with all stakeholders, including government, opposition parties, activists, scholars and CSOs. Having recognised the deep polarisation in Zimbabwe, especially among political players, an emphasis on dialogue permeated all ITI's interventions, to enable stakeholders to develop locally derived strategies to bring about democratic change based on a national consensus. While the application of these principles to the Zimbabwean context met with some major challenges,<sup>26</sup> they remain critical in shaping the direction towards the stability needed to deepen democracy in the country.

### TRUST - A MISSING LINK

One of the major lessons emanating from the South African transition process is that peacebuilding processes more often than not fail owing to a lack of trust between the parties to the conflict; a failure to include all stakeholders; and a lack of ownership of both the process and the outcomes of the peace process. Key lessons learnt in terms of trust in the Zimbabwean case include the following:

- The gradual building of trust among protagonists requires a lot of attention and time. Even when they have an interest in working together towards a common cause, they are often afraid to trust each other lest it jeopardise their own existence.

Protagonists are often afraid to trust each other lest it jeopardise their own existence

- The absence of trust at a critical time can be detrimental in achieving the desired goal. The inability to work through and transcend the trust deficit in Zimbabwe has ultimately set the pro-democracy agenda back.

At the time of the intervention by ITI in Zimbabwe, the trust deficit among political players ran deep, and it continues to do so. This has had a negative impact on democratic processes in the country, especially against the backdrop of a political environment that breeds political polarisation, the ruling elite's aversion to genuine multi-party democracy, a centralised approach to power that has affected the governance and practice of democratic institutions, and the weak and fragmented state of opposition parties.

When ITI was invited to work with the opposition parties, it noted the deep-rooted nature of the mistrust between them, and how the national democratisation agenda had become lost to them as a result. ITI observed that there was heightened competition for power, with everyone and every party wanting to emerge as the leader of any formation. This is largely a result of the political and electoral system in Zimbabwe, where the winner takes all. As pointed out by Ivor Jenkins, 'having multiple parties in such a system splits the vote among themselves instead of consolidating the opposition votes'. Building trust between the various opposition parties was important in this regard, and would help the opposition win vital parliamentary seats. This, in turn, would ideally stop an outright two-thirds majority win by the dominant party and so provide a counter-balance in policymaking.

ITI made trust building a priority issue, hence the focus on a series of inter-party dialogues. In its interventions, ITI engaged directly with all the main opposition parties and the smaller upcoming parties. The Boschendal dialogues and the coalition-building workshop in Cape Town involved both the big and smaller opposition parties to pave the way for their understanding and acknowledging each other. This was a way of building trust and preparing the ground for a united front in the 2018 elections. Through a protracted process, the trust deficit would gradually shift. It does appear that the smaller parties and their alliances were more amenable towards finding each other and thus giving the alliance-building process a chance. However, ITI noted that more time was needed before the election to thoroughly address this issue.

The fact that the multiple parties ultimately coalesced into two alliances, i.e., CODE and the NRA, was a positive sign. It was evidence that it was possible to gradually break the trust deficit among political players. This was in spite of the initial challenges over who would lead the alliances. Another challenge was the MDC-A's lack of interest in joining the other two alliances. 'Perhaps, with the benefit of more time, more headway would have been made in breaking some of the deep divisions,' said Ivor Jenkins.

When the MDC-A did finally agree to discuss a grand alliance at the Cape Town meeting, progress was hampered by Tsvangirai's death. The ensuing



There was heightened competition for power, with every party wanting to emerge as the leader

leadership battle also came into play, as it created further rifts in the party. When Chamisa emerged as the MDC-A leader and with his popularity rising, the party ultimately saw no need to align with smaller parties. Jenkins believes that the MDC-A lost votes that would have made a difference to its electoral outcome by failing to embrace a grand alliance with the smaller parties. The break-up with Thokozani Khuphe, for example, meant the loss of an additional parliamentary and senate seat, as well as some 45 000 votes.<sup>27</sup>

## THE CHALLENGE OF INCLUSIVITY

Achieving higher levels of inclusivity in peacebuilding and democracy consolidation processes has been associated with stability and more sustainable processes. Although it is evident that inclusive processes are necessary to break the various cycles of political impasse in Zimbabwe, these have often been sacrificed on the altar of political elite deals.

Lessons that emerged from this case study with regard to inclusivity were the following:

- Inclusive processes, while important, do not necessarily mean everyone comes to the table and at the same time. In the case of South Africa, the notion of 'sufficient consensus' was used to denote a process that is not held to ransom by a few but is instead focussed on the greater good. In the Zimbabwean case, while the hope initially was to get all the major opposition parties to the table, ITI recognised that this was not going to happen. ITI accepted that not every actor or group had to be present at the table at the same time. Given the mistrust among political parties and differing ideological positions, as well as differing appetites and preferences for alternative ways of engagement, ITI operated on the basis of sufficient consensus. This created opportunities to engage with more and more stakeholders whenever they were ready and willing.

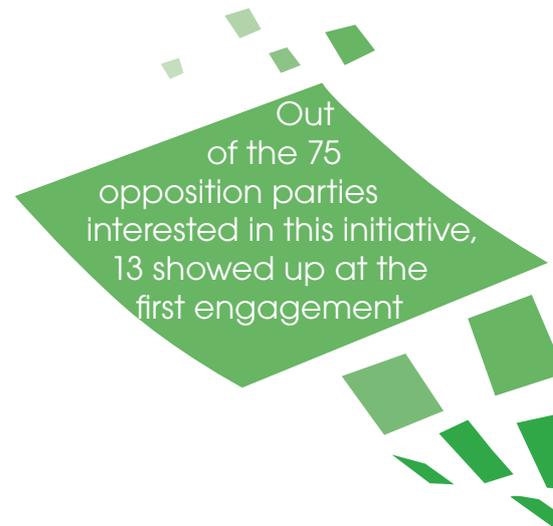
Thus, while the participation of a key player like the MDC-T was important from the outset of the alliance-building process, the process with the other opposition parties could carry on and gain traction to such an extent that the MDC-T was also motivated to form an alliance. It ultimately encouraged the MDC-A to consider talks with the other alliances by agreeing to participate in the Cape Town coalition workshop.

- It is necessary to look at the multiple processes that represent inclusive democracy building in Zimbabwe, especially in light of the challenging political environment, the political and electoral system, the country's political history, and deep polarity and mistrust. Mindful of the lessons learnt regarding inclusivity in the South African transition experience, ITI focused on engaging with a wide range of political stakeholders in Zimbabwe. Attempts were made to engage the ruling party, although this was to no avail at that time. The involvement of social movements was also insightful and promised to open the door to a broader national consensus process on emboldening an agenda for protecting and deepening the



democratic gains of earlier years. While engaging with mainstream civil society was at some point mooted, these groups were said to be too politically compromised.<sup>28</sup>

- The principle of inclusivity only works when people want to be included or have the capacity to participate in processes such as the one on alliance building. Even the opposition parties advocating for change in Zimbabwe were initially reluctant to come together in an inclusive alliance. They had to be convinced of the common interest in relinquishing their individual positions and joining hands with other political formations. Even then, some stakeholders remained on the periphery, and the principle and practice of inclusivity have been limited to those with a keen interest in being involved. Out of the 75 opposition parties that were interested in this initiative, an initial 13 showed up at the first engagement. These were able to recruit three more parties. One of the major obstacles to an inclusive approach, as stated by Thoko Matshe,<sup>29</sup> is that 'there are too many male egos in these parties and institutions and each one wants to go it alone and take all the credit'. Alliance building is a relatively new practice in Zimbabwean politics. Given that the electoral system is by and large a 'first past the post' one, this reinforces the notion of individualised leadership and dominance. Furthermore, political formations are too fragmented to individually make any significant change to the greater political system. In the 2018 election, 75 parties were registered to contest the elections. This indicates the magnitude of the challenge in any effort to create an inclusive platform that can address the needs of all involved.



## OWNERSHIP

The issue of ownership in a peace process stems from the need to ensure that such processes and their outcomes are sustained over time. ITI is mindful of this and, given its own experiences both in the South African context and elsewhere, has seen how processes that have high levels of local ownership are often fiercely guarded and protected. In the Zimbabwean case, the motivation to protect the democratic gains of the pro-democracy movement and to build on these was a locally owned agenda. This agenda was, however, embraced more by some than others in the opposition. The challenge in the Zimbabwean context was how to deepen the sense of ownership and broaden understanding of the real agenda beyond just an election race. Ensuring that the desired vision would enjoy the same urgency across all groups was also an important ownership aspect. A key lesson on ownership that emerged from the Zimbabwean case was:

- Ownership of a process ideally needs to be seen as taking ownership of the content of the process being undertaken, the steps taken to realise the desired outcomes and, ultimately, the outcomes that emerge. In this regard, ownership gradually grew as alliance partners became more comfortable with each other and with the route being taken. ITI's role was largely

facilitatory, in providing spaces for dialogue and for bi- and multilateral engagements, providing advisory support, and linking the parties and alliances to each other and to key resource persons. An example of the latter occurred at the Cape Town meeting, where resource persons from several African countries were able to share their experiences on alliance/coalition building.

## ACCESS TO POLITICAL ELITES

As part of its strategy, ITI's interventions often target political elites, opinion makers and influential active leaders in each conflict context. Over time and by virtue of their participation in the South African transition process, the ITI directors have amassed political capital that have created demand across the continent and globally. In the Zimbabwean case, Ivor Jenkins already had access to Zimbabwean political elites through previous work with Idasa. An invitation to explore opportunities for resuming work in Zimbabwe came through a system of networks linked to the late Dumiso Dabengwa. Subsequent meetings in Zimbabwe with the Zimbabwean Preparatory Committee led to further access to the leadership of the key opposition political parties in Zimbabwe, as well as business people. It is as a result of these meetings that ITI was able to host them, with the intention to expose them to the South African transition experience and assist them to establish the three alliances that contested the 2018 elections. The ITI directorate also had access to diplomats in Zimbabwe, influential scholars such as Prof. Brian Raffopoulos, business and CSO leaders, and senior South African government officials. Although much of ITI's work was with opposition parties, the directors also met with senior government officials.

While ITI targets political elites to gain entry to countries and access to government and other institutions, it also opens up its engagements to other players with a stake in the conflict. Targeting political elites remains an effective strategy for ITI.

## SCOPING VISITS

Understanding the nature of any conflict and the context in which it emerged cannot happen from a distance. Scoping visits provide an opportunity to engage in conversations and discussions that illuminate the depth of the conflict. In addition, these visits help to provide clarity on the range of parties to the conflict, as well as the victims who suffer the consequences. It is on the basis of a deep understanding of the above that ITI undertakes multiple scoping visits to every country in which it engages.

As indicated, ITI made various scoping visits to Zimbabwe in this phase of the programme. Its directorate made multiple trips to Zimbabwe and had meetings with the Zimbabwean Preparatory Committee and political parties, particularly the MDC-T, the PDP and ZimPF.



Scoping visits provide an opportunity to engage in conversations that illuminate the depth of the conflict

## HOSTING DELEGATIONS IN SOUTH AFRICA

Hosting delegations from conflict areas for the purpose of learning from the South African experience is one of the strategies that ITI uses in its peacebuilding interventions. The delegates are exposed to different aspects and periods in the South African transition:

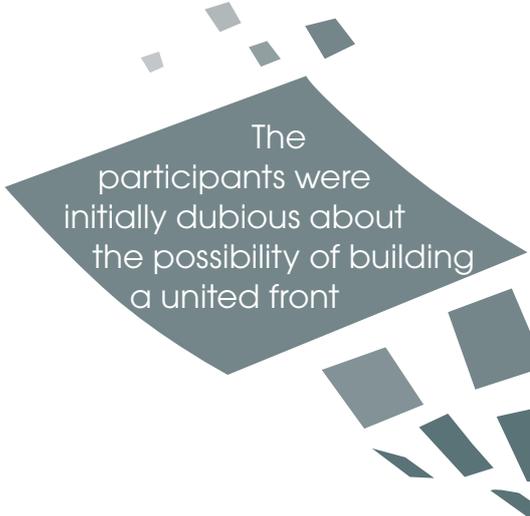
- Pre-negotiations prior to 1990: the details, principles and technical aspects of the South African negotiations
- 1990–1994: the constitution-making process
- 1994–1996: establishing and functioning of the TRC and reconciliation efforts
- 1997 onwards: nation and state building in South Africa

The emphasis on specific elements of the transition process depends on the composition of the delegation.

Hosting delegations is also viewed as a strategy for building trust among stakeholders. ITI hosted multi-party delegations from Zimbabwe with the intention of exposing them to the South African transition experience, building a commitment to dialogue, and assisting them to create a united front in the run-up to the 2018 elections. The respective presidents, secretaries-general and vice presidents of the three key opposition political parties, as well as of the other smaller parties, were invited to South Africa for the two dialogue sessions. These dialogues were influential in building capacity and trust among the parties in order to build alliances. Stakeholders could learn from experiences in other countries in the region, and realise that by creating a unified front they increased their chances of shifting the centre of political power in Zimbabwe.

The participants were initially dubious about the possibility of building a united front, given the inherent weaknesses within parties and the level of mistrust between them. Some members of political parties failed to attend, despite having committed to the process earlier on. However, those who attended benefited from the experience. The delegates felt that the presentations and discussions enabled the building of the alliance, since political parties embraced the necessity of moving from a positional stance to considering common interests. Once the delegates realised and accepted that their common interest was taking over power from the ruling party through democratic elections in order to safeguard democratic gains, they were more interested in working together.<sup>30</sup>

There was, however, a sense that the political parties took a long time to realise their common interest and put their political and ideological differences aside. Nonetheless, they were able to form alliances and contest the elections.



The participants were initially dubious about the possibility of building a united front

## MOMENTS OF TRANSFORMATION

By sharing the South African transition experience ITI has often created moments of transformation for stakeholders. The protracted nature of the conflict in Zimbabwe has caused stakeholders to experience a kind of *déjà vu* every time conflict issues are discussed. This realisation tends to dampen the hopes of many stakeholders in search of lasting peace in Zimbabwe. However, the ITI intervention resulted in a new perception among stakeholders. For instance, Sesel Zvidzayi of the MDC-A admitted that the party leadership went into discussions with ITI and other parties with scepticism. This was because previous initiatives had failed to provide viable alternatives. In this case, Zvidzayi said that when ITI talked about the lessons around party positions and party interests, it was a watershed moment for a number of stakeholders. It became clear that all the political formations had similar interests and could rally behind these interests without losing their political identity.

Another transformative moment cited by one of the CODE members<sup>31</sup> who attended the coalition-building meeting was the lesson on the need to be clear on the goal that brings parties to an alliance/coalition, and on an agreement on a minimum programme of government reform (hence the need for both short- and long-term goals). She recounted how it got them to re-think the shortcomings in their alliance agreement. She added that it would have been more helpful to have been exposed to the African lessons earlier in the process of alliance building.

In another transformative moment, one of the CODE members remarked how meeting different parties over time around a common agenda helped him realise that building an alliance and, ultimately, protecting and advancing the democratic gains of earlier years depended on their ability as opposition parties to transcend their mistrust in each other. 'I realised that the alternative we were offering as opposition had to appeal to the hopes and aspirations of Zimbabweans, and for us to do this as a collective required that we learn to trust each other more.' He added that he gradually started to listen more and consider what others from different parties and alliances were proposing.



'I realised that the alternative we were offering as opposition had to appeal to the hope of Zimbabweans'

## LIMITATIONS

ITI interventions in various conflict contexts always bring hope to those involved, based on how the seemingly intractable situation in South Africa was turned around and a peaceful solution was found. However, each context brings with it its own circumstances that dictate the extent to which success is possible.

In Zimbabwe, the continued dominance of one party, lack of the necessary political and economic reforms to put the country on a firm trajectory of stability and recovery, a struggling economy, weak democratic institutions and a lack of trust in these institutions limit the prospects of deepening democracy. The weakness of the opposition, especially in the face of the onslaught on both it and the pro-democracy movement, has intensified since the 2018 elections. It is also feared that the ruling party may make constitutional changes that will erode or reverse the democratic gains of the past.



It is feared that the ruling party may make constitutional changes that will erode democratic gains of the past

## CONCLUSION

The Zimbabwean case study provides lessons on the challenges of trying to deepen democracy in a hostile political environment and with a weakened and fragmented opposition and pro-democracy movement.

The existence of weak and fragmented political parties fraught with in-fighting tilts the situation in favour of a system that does not support deepened democracy. However, the intervention by ITI in building the capacity of political parties and helping them to form alliances has provided key lessons to the opposition on the potential of such alliances. It remains to be seen if the motivation to continue with the agenda of protecting and furthering the democratic path will again gain traction, particularly in a more difficult political environment.



Helping political parties to form alliances provided key lessons to the opposition

## PROJECT TIMELINE

2016

**28 NOVEMBER – 1 DECEMBER****Cape Town, South Africa****PURPOSE OF TRIP**

Zimbabwean multiparty delegation representing 13 political parties is hosted by ITI at Boschendal, Cape Town to learn about the South African experience, including awareness on building alliances and coalitions.

2017

**28-31 MAY****Cape Town,  
South Africa****PURPOSE OF TRIP**

Four-day closed session comprising the presidents and other party leaders from 16 opposition parties from Zimbabwe is facilitated by ITI to explore the possibility of a cooperation agreement.

**23-25 JUNE****Masvingo,  
Zimbabwe****PURPOSE OF TRIP**

Opposition party leaders meet to discuss follow-up actions after meeting in South Africa. The purpose is to seek further agreement, especially in an effort to bring on board the NPP and the MDC-T.

**15-16 SEPTEMBER****Pretoria, South Africa****PURPOSE OF TRIP**

ITI meeting with seven social movement leaders, together with the three Zimbabwe experts, to determine if there are any synergies between the social movement's agenda and that of the opposition in Zimbabwe.

**6 JUNE****Harare, Zimbabwe****PURPOSE OF TRIP**

ITI visit to meet with the South African embassy, proxies of leaders of the ruling party, as well as with the group of opposition leaders who were part of the earlier group in Cape Town.

**14-15 SEPTEMBER****Pretoria, South Africa****PURPOSE OF TRIP**

ITI facilitates a strategic discussion on Zimbabwe with a group of political leaders from Zimbabwe, as well as Zimbabwe experts and academics living in South Africa. The purpose is to start a discussion that can create a framework for cooperation between all the opposition parties in Zimbabwe, even if they cannot form an alliance.

### KEY EVENTS IN ZIMBABWE

On 19 November, Zanu-PF removes Mugabe as party leader, replacing him with Mnangagwa, and issues a deadline of 20 November for Mugabe to resign the presidency or face impeachment. Mugabe does not resign, so on 21 November a joint session of Parliament meets for his impeachment. After the session convenes, Mugabe sends a letter to Parliament resigning the presidency. Second Vice President Phelekezela Mphoko becomes acting president. Mnangagwa is sworn in as president on 24 November 2017.

## 2018

**8-10 FEBRUARY**

**Cape Town, South Africa**

#### PURPOSE OF TRIP

Three-day experience-sharing and learning workshop and dialogue on coalition building with all three Zimbabwean opposition coalitions, including representatives of the MDC-A. Representatives from Botswana, The Gambia, Kenya and Nigeria are invited to share their experiences in coalition building with their Zimbabwean counterparts.

- 1 Interview with Prof. Brian Raftopoulos on 27 August 2020.
- 2 The name was to change after the unity accord with the opposition Zimbabwe African People's Union (Zapu) in 1987 to Zanu-Patriotic Front (Zanu-PF).
- 3 Sachikonye L. M. et al. (2007). *Consolidating Democratic Governance in Southern Africa: Zimbabwe*. Research Report 30. EISA.
- 4 Interview with Ivor Jenkins on 4 June 2020.
- 5 Interview with Prof. Brian Raftopoulos on 27 August 2020.
- 6 Interview with Sesel Zvidzayi on 27 August 2020.
- 7 Interview with Thoko Matshe on 4 September 2020.
- 8 See Sachikonye et al. (2007).
- 9 Robert Mugabe was a Zimbabwean revolutionary and politician who served as prime minister of Zimbabwe from 1980–1987 and as president from 1987–2017.
- 10 See Sachikonye et al. (2007).
- 11 The three formations were: the MDC-T, led by Morgan Tsvangirai; the MDC-N, led by Welshman Ncube; and the MDC-M, led by Arthur Mutambara.
- 12 The GPA was signed on 15 September 2008 with the signatories being Mugabe, Mutambara and Tsvangirai. The Government of National Unity (GNU) came into being on 11 February 2009.
- 13 Elton Mangoma was a senior member of the MDC-T and had been Minister of Economic Planning and Investment Promotion under the GNU.
- 14 Other than the MDC-A the other two were the National Rainbow Alliance (NRA) and Coalition for Democrats (CODE).
- 15 The project timeline shows the chronology of project events from 2017.
- 16 Idasa was tracking democracy in Zimbabwe through the Democracy Index.
- 17 Dumiso Dabengwa was a Zimbabwean politician and president of the Zimbabwe African People's Union (Zapu) from 2008–2019.
- 18 Brian Kagoro, Thoko Matshe and Brian Raftopoulos (2018). *Reflections on coalitions and coalition building in Africa*. ITI [unpublished].
- 19 CODE was eventually led by Elton Mangoma, formerly of the MDC-T and now with the Renewal Democrats of Zimbabwe. Other members of CODE were Zapu, led by Dumiso Dabengwa, and Mavambo/Kusile/Dawn, led by former Finance Minister Simba Makoni, as well as other smaller parties like ZUNDE. The National Rainbow Coalition was later led by former Vice President Joice Mujuru, and involved components of the People's Democratic Party led by Gordon Moyo.
- 20 Seven parties formed the MDC-A, namely the MDC-T, MDC-N, Tendai Biti's PDP, Transform Zimbabwe, Zanu-Ndonga, Zimbabwe People First and the Multi-Racial Christian Democratic Party.
- 21 According to *A dictionary of sociology* (Scott, J. & Marshall, G. 2009), a social movement is a loosely organised effort by a large group of people to achieve a particular goal, typically a social or political one.
- 22 These social movements included Crisis Coalition, Trust Africa, #Thisflag, Institute for Young Women's Development (IYWD), Bulawayo Vendors and Traders Association, Ibhetso and She Votes.
- 23 Interview with ITI director Patience Hwenha January, 2021.
- 24 Present at the workshop were the two vice presidents and the secretary general.
- 25 Elias Mudzuru and Thokozani Khuphe were then the senior vice presidents of the MDC-T.
- 26 Marais, N. & Davies, J. (2014). *Deconstructing the conditions that enabled South Africa's transition to power-sharing*. White Paper prepared for the Norwegian Peacebuilding Resource Centre, The Carter Center and Swiss Peace for the seminar on 'The Syria Transition Options Project of The Carter Center'.
- 27 Mnangagwa got 2 460 463 votes, Chamisa 2 147 436.
- 28 ITI (2017). *Notes to meeting on Zimbabwe conversation, Silverlakes, South Africa, 1–2 November 2017*.
- 29 Interview with Thoko Matshe on 4 September 2020.
- 30 ITI (2016). *Zimbabwe leaders dialogue Boschendal retreat 28/11/2016 – 01/12/2016*.
- 31 Marcelline Chikasha.