LOCAL PROTECTION IN ZIMBABWE

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Local to Global Protection (L2GP) is an initiative intended to document and promote local perspectives on protection in major humanitarian crises. So far, community oriented studies have been carried out in Burma/Myanmar, Sudan, South Sudan and Zimbabwe.

L2GP studies from Burma/Myanmar, Sudan, South Sudan and Zimbabwe are available at www.local2global.info

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The 'Local to Global Protection' (L2GP) initiative explores how people living in areas affected by armed conflict, political violence and unrest and natural disasters understand 'protection' – what do people value, and how do they go about protecting themselves, their families and communities? The study also examines how affected populations view the roles of other stakeholders in protection, including state and non-state actors, international agencies, and community-based organisations.

The L2GP project, was implemented by a group of organisations within the ACT Alliance in cooperation with other organisations and individuals in Sudan, South Sudan, Zimbabwe, and Burma/Myanmar.[1]

This Zimbabwe case study examines the protection implications of the multiple crises that the country has been going through in recent years: economic, social and political. It looks at how communities perceive the threats that they face, and the steps that they take to protect themselves from these threats.

Zimbabwe's decline has been precipitous: the country has gone in a few years from one of the most developed in sub-Saharan Africa to one of the least developed.[2] The rural economy collapsed and industry closed down, leading to mass unemployment. The country has gone through one of the worst episodes of hyperinflation in history, which was only ended by the abolition of the Zimbabwe dollar and the adoption of foreign currencies as legal tender. Social and municipal services, including water supplies, electricity and sewage systems, collapsed. People were left with little time to adjust. It is therefore hardly surprising that coping strategies are still evolving, and expectations (of employment in the formal sector, of government services, and so on) are not yet aligned to the realities.

While the unity government installed in 2009 has succeeded in halting the economic decline and providing temporary relief from the political

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[1] The first report from the L2GP initiative was published by Chatham House as "Conflict and Survival: Self-Protection in South-East Burma" (Ashley South with Malin Perhult and Nils Carstensen, September 2010) and is available at http://www.chathamhouse.org.uk/publications/papers/view/-/id/945/ (accessed 1 June 2011).

[2] According to UNDP data, Zimbabwe had a Human Development Index (HDI) value of 0.241 at independence in 1980, 0.284 in 1990, and 0.232 in 2000. By 2009 it had fallen to 0.118, and as of 2010 is ranked lowest of the 169 countries included.

crisis, Zanu–PF continues to control most of the levers of power and violence, and the future remains uncertain.

As in many crisis situations around the world, people's main focus is on their daily survival. They often feel remote from the political forces that are affecting them, but the sudden nature of the decline in Zimbabwe leaves little doubt in most people's minds that politics is ultimately responsible for their woes.

The study also showed that politics and livelihoods interacted in complex ways. For example, many of the political grievances that people expressed were focussed on the livelihoods impacts of politics – the fact that forced attendance at political rallies takes them away from their fields, say, or the fact that both sides of the political divide use economic tools to further their agendas – rewarding their supporters by, for example, allocating them plots of land or market stalls, or punishing their opponents by withholding them.

It was also clear that much 'political violence' was only peripherally related to politics, and that politics and the impunity it confers is often used as a convenient cover for something else: settling old scores, gaining commercial advantage, or plain corruption and opportunism. Moreover, given the high levels of violence in Zimbabwean society, most threats of violence – particularly for women and children – were not related to politics.

Typically, violence within communities is dealt with by traditional mechanisms at a local level. Traditional leaders, particularly in rural areas, are the custodians of customary law, which plays an important role in protection. This can be both positive and negative: by providing effective local mechanisms of mediation and redress, but also in some cases failing to protect the vulnerable in society or perpetuating abusive cultural practices.

It was obvious that particularly traumatic past events – the 2008 election violence, the 2008–09 cholera epidemic and (in Matabeleland) the Gukurahundi massacres of the 1980s – have a big impact on people's contemporary protection concerns. Across Zimbabwe, people's worries about the future are shaped to a significant degree by their experiences of such traumatic past events.

Zimbabwe's multiple crises have taken a heavy toll on the population, and together with the breakdown in social service provision have left communities with a heavy burden of care. This burden is particularly acute given that in many communities there are very few working–age people left – the legacy of a devastating HIV/AIDS epidemic, and of the fact that a large proportion of Zimbabwe's labour force has left the

country (or in some cases moved to urban centres within the country) in search of work. The burden of care thus falls disproportionately on grandparents, or on children themselves, leading to many further challenges.

The political and economic crises have certainly had effects on the dynamics within communities. However, there were varying views expressed as to the nature and extent of these effects. Many people referred to a feeling of distrust within communities, as a result of political polarization and fear of informants. Political violence in particular was seen as very divisive for communities. Others pointed out that pre-existing divisions within communities facilitated political violence.

However, it must be recognized that a significant proportion of the threats that people identified did not relate directly to the political and economic crises in the country. Some were social issues such as gender-based and domestic violence, alcohol abuse and petty crime; others related to the geographical context, such as problems with erratic rainfall or drought, or problems and dangers associated with wild animals; and some were very specific to the socio-cultural setting, such as fear of black magic, or of avenging spirits, or of possession by demons.

Socio-cultural issues such as witchcraft and occult beliefs are not mere novelties or curiosities. They may be highly relevant as threats, and in shaping responses to threats. And yet most of the related issues would not fit on any standard protection questionnaire. Other aspects of traditional and religious belief can have a significant impact on protection – such as the proliferation of religious sects in Zimbabwe with doctrines prohibiting conventional medical treatment, or denying girls education, or facilitating forced child marriages in a context of polygamy.

Individuals and communities develop sophisticated strategies for responding to the various threats that they face. These strategies are not always very effective, since there is often no good solution for responding to grave threats. And in some cases, the strategies themselves lead to other problems, or 'secondary threats'. It is often the case that impossible trade-offs must be made: for example, between health and economic survival (when a person takes on a 'dirty and dangerous' job); or between economic survival and physical security (when a person supports themselves through illegal activities, or flees from political violence, leaving job and home). Also important to recognize is that coping strategies are sometimes (perhaps often) illegal, immoral, or otherwise 'negative' in some normative sense.

A summary of threats and coping strategies that the study identified is set out in the following table.

Threat	Coping strategies
Political violence	Cooption (e.g. joining Zanu–PF, befriending those committing violence); compliance (e.g. pretending to support a party's views, or attending its rallies or buying membership cards); political neutrality (in fact or in appearance); threat management (e.g. walking in groups, carrying a loud whistle, information sharing); seeking protection (e.g. from another party, local power holders or mediators); bribery (e.g. paying protection money, or bribing police to provide protection); threat avoidance (e.g. by fleeing or hiding); resistance (e.g. issuing threats, fighting back or retaliating).
Economic deprivation	Community organization (e.g. forming 'clubs', self–help groups, or cooperatives); subsistence strategies (e.g. subsistence agriculture or urban farming, living off the land); barter trade; frugality (eating less expensive food or skipping meals); participating in the informal economy (e.g. informal vending, piece work, cross–border trading); unregistered cottage industries or home businesses; illegal or criminal activities (illicit gold–panning or diamond prospecting/trading, making and selling illicit alcohol, drug dealing, prostitution, shoplifting, burglary, fraud); migration (internal and to neighbouring countries or beyond).
Theft and burglary	Guarding crops (individually or through community protection groups); neighbourhood watch; black magic (e.g. tying threatening symbols or objects to crops, "using magic to punish thieves"); reporting to police (and sometimes bribing them to take action).
Lack of municipal services (electricity, water, etc.)	Use alternative fuels (wood, paraffin); use diesel generators (expensive); rely on communal boreholes; purchase water; digging backyard wells; bribing local authorities to provide services.

Health threats	Resorting to traditional medicines; relying on witch-doctors and faith healers; using unregistered midwives or traditional birth attendants (cheaper than government clinics); home births without trained help; running away from hospitals after treatment/birth without paying bills.

GLOSSARY

base	a centre of political organization, typically set up in rural areas by Zanu-PF during periods of campaigning and elections, and used as a location for rallies as well as for 'political re-education' of opposition supporters, including through the use of violence and torture
CIO	Central Intelligence Organization, the national intelligence agency ("secret police") of Zimbabwe
Gukurahundi	literally, "the early rain which washes away the chaff before the spring rains" in the Shona language, was a campaign of repression in the 1980s by the Zimbabwe army against the predominantly Ndebele regions of the country
kombi	small van used as a commuter bus
MDC (M and T)	the opposition Movement for Democratic Change political party. Formed in 1999, it split into two factions in 2005, one led by Morgan Tsvangirai (MDC-T), the other by Arthur Mutambara (MDC-M).
Murambatsvina	literally, "clear out the trash" in the Shona language, was a large-scale forcible slum clearance campaign conducted by the government across Zimbabwe starting in 2005
rand	the currency of South Africa (and, along with several other foreign currencies, now legal tender in Zimbabwe), worth approximately 14 US cents (May 2011)
tokoloshi	(also tikoloshe, tokoloshe) in Zimbabwe folklore, a dwarf-like mischievous or evil spirit; a gremlin
Zanu-PF	the Zimbabwe African National Union (Zanu) party, led by Robert Mugabe, and later part of a "Patriotic Front" (PF) alliance with Zapu (see below), known as Zanu-PF

Zapu   the Zimbabwe African People's Union party, led by
                 the late Joshua Nkomo. It merged with Zanu-PF in
                 1987, but one faction of the party split off in 2008
                 to re-form the Zapu party.

ZANLA   the Zimbabwe African National Liberation Army, the
                 pre-independence military wing of Zanu

ZIPRA   the Zimbabwe People's Revolutionary Army, the pre-
                 independence military wing of Zapu

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Local protection[3]

The humanitarian enterprise has traditionally been guided by the twin principles of neutrality and impartiality and the axiom of operational independence. Following the end of the Cold War however, some aid agencies began to re-conceptualize their mission under the broad rubric of a 'new humanitarianism'. According to this position, humanitarian actors should address not only humanitarian needs (e.g. for food or medicine) but also the causes of vulnerability including socio-political and possibly economic structures of violence.

The 'new humanitarianism' involved aid agencies paying closer attention to international human rights and humanitarian law. In the 1990s, debates focused on the right of humanitarian actors to intervene in situations of large-scale and systematic human rights abuses. During the subsequent decade, the debate focused more on the responsibility of states to protect their citizens and on the international community's role in cases where states were unable or unwilling to do so. In these debates however, protective actions remained focused on the level of the sovereign nation-state, or failing this and by default, the international community (including professional humanitarian agencies).

The doctrine of sovereignty accords the State authority within its borders for securing the wellbeing of its citizens. Although the legitimacy of the State may be contested domestically, this has not traditionally affected its 'negative sovereignty' within the international system. Building on the work of the International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty,[4] in 2005 the UN World Summit Outcome Document endorsed the doctrine of the 'Responsibility to Protect' (R2P), according to which international actors may intervene in situations of acute crisis, in order to prevent, mitigate or otherwise

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[3] The text in this sub-section is adapted from the introduction to the first report to come out of this multi-country L2GP initiative: "Conflict and Survival: Self-protection in south-east Burma", Ashley South with Malin Perhult and Nils Carstensen, Chatham House, London, September 2010.

[4] ICISS, The Responsibility to Protect: Report of the International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty (December 2001).

respond to widespread rights violations.[5] This doctrine has been contested (especially by some non-Western states), and has not yet been universally accepted as part of international customary law. Indeed, recent developments – such as the government of Sri Lanka's invoking the language of protection, while restricting the rights of displaced people during and after its military victory over the LTTE 'Tamil Tigers' – indicate that states may be willing to subvert R2P to their own ends.[6]

The R2P doctrine relates solely to activities approved by the UN Security Council, and by extension to the actions of states and their agents the international humanitarian system (UN agencies and selected international NGOs). However, elements within the human rights and activist communities have sought to mobilize the R2P doctrine in order to encourage and justify a broad range of rights based interventions, including on the part of non-state actors, such as NGOs. However, protection remains an activity undertaken primarily by outsiders, on behalf of vulnerable communities, especially in cases where the State is unable or unwilling to act or is itself a perpetrator of abuse (including through violent resource extraction). International human rights and humanitarian law (including customary law, and doctrines such as the R2P) provide little recognition for the protective activities of vulnerable communities – the very people whose lack of protection is in question – or other 'non system actors', such as civil society, political and armed groups.

To a significant degree, this prioritization of State and external agency has been an operational necessity especially in emergency situations where addressing immediate needs and the effective distribution of large-scale resources is a humanitarian priority. Nevertheless, opportunities exist to better understand and relate to the views and needs of a range of nonsystem actors, especially the affected communities themselves, in relation to assistance and protection concerns.

According to the most widely accepted definition, humanitarian protection aims to limit or mitigate the impacts of abuses and 'encompasses all activities aimed at obtaining full respect for the rights of the individual in accordance with the letter and the spirit of

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[5] The R2P doctrine endorses intervention (i.e. the violation of State sovereignty) in four instances: 1) threat and/or acts of genocide; 2) war crimes; 3) crimes against humanity; and 4) ethnic cleansing: Gareth Evans, The Responsibility to Protect: ending mass atrocity crimes once and for all (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2008).

[6] Ranesh Venugopal (ed.), Civilian protection in Sri Lanka under threat (Oxford University, Refugee Studies Centre, Working Paper No.58).

the relevant bodies of law (i.e. international human rights law, international humanitarian law and refugee law)'.[7] Although aid agencies may endeavour to elicit beneficiaries' participation in their programming (as articulated in various standard–setting exercises, e.g. the Humanitarian Accountability[8] and SPHERE projects[9]), aid interventions generally remain focused on international actors. There is however a growing awareness that such approaches are insufficient inasmuch as they do not empower communities and tend to ignore local agency (what people do to protect themselves).[10]

Affected communities and other non–system actors (e.g. civil society groups and affected communities) are rarely consulted regarding the overall design of projects, while the range of strategies they adopt, in order to cope with threats to their safety and dignity, is often overlooked. External interventions which fail to recognize and support indigenous efforts may inadvertently undermine existing coping mechanisms and disempower local communities. This is particularly unfortunate in situations where vulnerable populations are inaccessible to mainstream international actors.

This consideration is reinforced by the implications of the shifting geo–strategic balance of power. The global economic crisis has accelerated processes of change, whereby financial – and ultimately political – power is shifting away from the European and North

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[7] ICRC/Sylvie Caverzasio (ed), Strengthening Protection in War: A Search for Professional Standards (ICRC Geneva 2001).

[8] The Steering Committee for Humanitarian Response's peer review of 'Accountability to Disaster–affected Persons' (2009) calls for "acknowledging, making visible and diminishing the power imbalance between organizations and disaster–affected persons; involving affected persons meaningfully in key decisions and processes that influence their lives; building relationships with affected persons that are characterized by dignity and respect": Forced Migration Review (Refugee Studies Centre, Oxford University, No.35 – June 2010: 50–52).

[9] The SPHERE Project, Humanitarian Charter and Minimum Standards in Humanitarian Response, 3rd Edition, 2011.

[10] Recent developments in community–based protection are discussed in Humanitarian Practice Network (Overseas Development Institute), Humanitarian Exchange (No.26, March 2010). See especially Kate Berry and Sherryl Reddys' article on ActionAid's community–based protection manual. This approach starts in a critique of mainstream humanitarian protection, which "often fails to recognize and respond to protection problems that exist at individual, family, social network and community levels; frequently fails to involve the community – beyond initial assessment – in the design, development and evaluation of humanitarian response." ActionAid seeks to involve communities, not simply as informants and beneficiaries, but in the analysis of need and program design, recognising that local people are usually already involved in a range of practices that can be labelled protection. (Safety with Dignity: integrating community–based protection into humanitarian programming – HPN/ODI Network Paper No.68 March 2010.)

American states which have dominated world politics for most of the past two centuries. These dramatic changes will have significant impacts in many sectors, including on development and humanitarian activities. The declining economic and strategic power of the West may mean that in the future less financial and political capital will be available to back international interventions based on notions of human rights (derived ultimately from the European enlightenment, and associated with Western state power). This is not to deny the legitimacy of liberal-democratic values, but to recognize their historical contingency (and therefore limited universal applicability), and declining capital.

1.2 Methodology

The Zimbabwe portion of this multi-country initiative conducted research in three different parts of the country: Harare (with a focus on poor 'high-density' suburbs and peri-urban settlements), Mashonaland East (both urban and rural areas), and Matabeleland North (again, both urban and rural areas). These areas were chosen in order to ensure that diverse Zimbabwean contexts were represented in the research. The research was conducted in November and December 2010.

A total of 259 people were interviewed – 189 in individual interviews, and 70 as part of focus group discussions. Individual interviews aimed to be in-depth; they were semi-structured and generally lasted more than an hour. They were supplemented by focus group discussions, which aimed to bring to light issues and perspectives that might be missed in the more structured one-on-one interviews.

There was a fairly even split between men and women interviewees (137 men and 122 women). Interviews were also fairly evenly split between the three different parts of the country: Harare (107 interviews), Mashonaland East (76 interviews) and Matabeleland North (75 interviews). Two focus group discussions were held in each of these three areas, with between 10 and 13 participants in each. About one-third of the interviews were in rural areas, and the other two-thirds in urban and peri-urban areas.

A series of interviews was also conducted with key protection actors and organizations, in Harare and at the local level.

The interviews were conducted by a group of local Zimbabwean researchers assembled for this project, as well as by the author, who was lead consultant for the Zimbabwe phase of the research. The Zimbabwean researchers worked for a local non-governmental organization with extensive experience of conducting research in

these areas of the country. All of the researchers were given extensive training by the author, including at a two-day workshop in Harare, covering the aims of the Local to Global Protection initiative, the specific research methodologies to be used, the development of specific research tools, and issues relating to safety/security and research ethics. The researchers were men and women from diverse backgrounds, but all had a detailed knowledge of the situation in different areas covered by the research. The practicalities and logistics of the research, management of researchers, and guidance on day-to-day research issues, was provided by a locally-hired Zimbabwean research manager. It should also be pointed out that since much of the research was carried out by local Zimbabweans who were themselves part of the communities being studied, the researchers were not immune from the perspectives and biases within those communities. The analysis has been carried out, and conclusions drawn, with due cognizance of this fact.

The researchers adopted a purposive selection process for recruiting interviewees, in order to ensure there was an appropriate balance in terms of age, sex, ethnicity, religion, social status, economic situation, political perspective, and so on. The exception was focus group discussions, where the aim was to facilitate discussion by ensuring cohesive groups who were comfortable to discuss issues openly.

Detailed notes were taken of all interviews. Notes were taken in English, regardless of the language in which the interview was conducted (all researchers were fluent in English, and in the local language in which the interview was conducted). Regular debriefings of the researchers by the lead consultant and the research manager ensured that research objectives were being met, and allowed challenges to be dealt with in an ongoing manner.

The research faced a number of such challenges. It took place at a time when the political temperature in Zimbabwe was increasing – immediately following a high-profile 'outreach process' taking inputs for the drafting of a new Zimbabwean constitution, amid significant divisions within the 'unity government', and with increasing talk of imminent elections.

Most people in Zimbabwe are reluctant – and fearful – to speak openly about sensitive issues, and it is a testament to the skill and experience of the researchers, and their affinity with various communities, that the research was able to elicit detailed and relevant perspectives from a large number of people. It is also a testament to the fortitude of the many Zimbabwean women and men who consented to be interviewed. As one person said:

> I usually don't want to risk my life talking to people like you, but I feel that some things need to be said, though I don't want my name to appear in this research of yours. I distance myself from party politics, but closely watch events and even be in them to gather correct information and to know what's coming and from which direction.
>
> **40-YEAR-OLD MAN, FARMER, MUREHWA, MASHONALAND EAST**

A number of communities were very difficult to access, however. In some places there is a high level of suspicion of people from outside the community. This presented considerable challenges for the researchers, and in some cases it was difficult to conduct in-depth interviews – people would give short, vague, or roundabout answers to questions. This was generally the exception, however.

Many of the interviewees recounted traumatic experiences. Some said that they found sharing their experiences in the interview to be cathartic; others were reluctant to go into too much detail about such experiences. Although an introduction was given before each interview explaining the purpose of the research and giving assurances that interviews would be anonymous and identifying information would not be taken, some interviewees nevertheless had the impression that they were being recruited into an NGO project, and it was necessary to explain that this was a research project and that it would not lead in any direct way to the provision of assistance to individuals or communities.

This research is based on the perceptions of those people who were interviewed. A fairly diverse group of Zimbabweans was included in the study, so that the range of views expressed can be seen as broadly representative. Nevertheless, the danger of any study that reports people's perceptions is that those perceptions can be misinformed or mistaken. In reading this report, it is important to keep in mind that it presents perceptions, not fact – and thus, its analysis of health threats, say, is not intended to be an empirically sound analysis of the health threats facing Zimbabweans, but rather a qualitative look at what health threats people perceive (rightly or wrongly), and what they are doing about them (effective or not).

People's perceptions have not been uncritically repeated. Thus, unverifiable accusations have been deliberately excluded where they could be damaging (for example, claims that a particular organization's beneficiary selection was purposely politically skewed). But at the same time, the whole purpose of a report such as this is to look at perception, not fact, since it is often perceptions that are most important. People's actions and decisions are driven by their beliefs –

beliefs which may or may not be veridical, and which in any case are rarely based on empirically-grounded judgements.

1.3 The situation in Zimbabwe

Zimbabwe was a British colony (known as Southern Rhodesia) from the late-nineteenth century until 1965, when the white-minority government of Ian Smith resisted moves towards decolonization and majority rule by issuing a "unilateral declaration of independence" from Britain. Britain did not recognize Rhodesia's independence, and put in place economic sanctions against the country.

A bloody civil war started, with two key organizations taking up arms against the Smith regime:

○ the Zimbabwe African People's Union (Zapu), whose military wing was known as ZIPRA, and who had their main support base in the Ndebele heartland (Matabeleland); and

○ the Zimbabwe African National Union (Zanu), one of whose leaders was Robert Mugabe, and whose military wing was known as ZANLA.

Although broadly aligned in their political goals, these two organizations often clashed militarily. The formed a political and military alliance in 1976, known as the 'Patriotic Front' (PF).

With the Smith regime under increasing pressure, and following an agreement on the terms of a new independence constitution brokered by the British, elections were held in 1980. The Zanu and Zapu parties competed separately (as 'Zanu-PF' and 'PF-Zapu'). Mugabe's Zanu-PF party won a landslide, and he became Prime Minister of independent Zimbabwe. The country he inherited, described as "a jewel in Africa", had well-developed infrastructure and a strong agricultural and mining base that was the envy of many African countries.

Old divisions between the predominantly Shona Zanu, and the predominantly Ndebele Zapu, quickly resurfaced, however. There was discomfort in Matabeleland with the Zanu-PF election victory, and some violence. This led to the Gukurahundi: a campaign of brutal violence by Zanu-PF to put down any resistance in Matabeleland (and adjacent parts of the Midlands). Between 1982 and 1985, several thousand people were killed, and thousands more abducted or tortured. The violence came to an end when Zanu and Zapu reached an agreement to merge the two parties in 1987, with Mugabe as leader, and retaining the name of his Zanu-PF party. But there has never been a process to address the wounds of the past: many of the victims

remain buried in mass graves, with reburial prohibited, and local people are still haunted by the events.[11]

Soon, however, Mugabe began to face new challenges to his authority, from within his Shona power-base. A painful structural adjustment programme in the early 1990s, combined with a devastating drought, led to increasing rural hardship. Mugabe seized on the issue of land reform to placate his rural supporters and undermine opponents. But while it may have been a shrewd political move, it was to have disastrous consequences for the country and its economy.

Ever since colonial times, land distribution had been highly skewed, with much of the most productive land in the hands of a small number of white commercial farmers. In the 1990s Mugabe's government gave itself increasing control over who land was taken away from, and to whom it was reallocated. This meant it became a lucrative source of economic rents to reward his supporters. And it was also an effective way to punish some of his strongest opponents: the commercial farmers, whom he felt had betrayed his conciliatory gestures at independence by continuing to support opposition candidates, and encouraging their farm workers (who made up a significant proportion of the electorate) to do the same.

By the late-1990s, the economic situation was rapidly deteriorating. The country was running large deficits, had a crushing international debt burden, and investors were becoming spooked by its moves to requisition commercial farmland, which was the economic engine of the country. In the midst of this, Mugabe faced a serious political threat from the War Veterans' Association, which was angered by the government's failure to deliver on earlier compensation pledges (although most of the funds that had been provided were apparently embezzled by the organisation's leaders).

Mugabe's efforts to buy-off the war veterans effectively bankrupted the government, and the currency went into freefall, dragging the broader economy with it. Facing growing opposition to his rule, Mugabe moved to placate the war veterans and rally his traditional support base. A large number of commercial farms were seized by war veterans – or people claiming to be such – as well as corrupt politicians, and there was widespread violence against political opponents, including the trade unions and the opposition MDC.

Zimbabwe continued its economic slide. The decimation of the commercial farming sector, which had accounted for forty per cent of

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[11] For a detailed account of the events, see "Breaking the silence: A report on the disturbances in Matabeleland and the Midlands, 1980–1988", Summary Report, Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace/Legal Resources Foundation, 1999.

export earnings, impacted heavily on the economy, and the reallocated land was mostly underutilised, prompting major domestic food shortages. The population was unused to such a situation: Zimbabwe had been a developed African country, and the population was used to having a good water supply, good electricity, high-quality goods, and a strong agricultural and industrial economy.

But by mid-2008 the country was experiencing one of the worst episodes of hyperinflation in history, officially put at 231 million per cent (and subsequently much higher still), with prices of basic goods doubling every day. Government services collapsed, and a cholera outbreak raged out of control, infecting some 100,000 people and killing over 4000.[12]

Elections were held that year, and even with a high degree of electoral fraud and political violence, the opposition MDC won a parliamentary majority. The elections were marred by serious political violence, predominantly on the part of Zanu-PF. The party established campaigning "bases" across the country; these were the locus of much of the political violence, with opposition activists or supporters taken there to be beaten, humiliated, and in some cases killed – by party youth and "war veterans", with the collusion or assistance of the police and security apparatus. Fears of further violence led the MDC to pull out of the presidential run-off.

A counterpoint:

"We do not condone violence and we do not need it. There was a lot of politically-motivated violence especially in 2008 where people were even shot dead and houses were burned down, and these incidents were perpetrated by members of MDC-T. In view of that, our District should remain vigilant and alert. That's why we have to mobilize ourselves and form "bases" where the youths are being trained by the war vets. We even advocate for the soldiers and police to participate, especially during election periods."

ZANU-PF SENATOR, INTERVIEWED AS PART OF THE PRESENT RESEARCH

This economic and political crisis led to a power-sharing agreement, and a "government of national unity" with Mugabe as President, and MDC leader Morgan Tsvangirai as Prime Minister (Arthur Mutambara, head of a smaller MDC faction, was appointed Deputy Prime Minister). Ministerial portfolios were shared among the parties, but Mugabe maintained a firm grip on the State security apparatus. Hyperinflation was brought to an end by scrapping the Zimbabwe dollar, and making several foreign currencies (including the US dollar and South African rand) legal tender.

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[12] See "Zimbabwe cholera update", Situation Report No. 22, UNOCHA, 31 July 2009.

The unity government succeeded in halting the economic decline and providing temporary relief from the political crisis, but while Zanu–PF continues to control most of the levers or power and violence, the future remains uncertain.

2. PROTECTION THREATS IN ZIMBABWE

2.1 Overview

In Zimbabwe, the political crisis has had a profound impact on all aspects of life. It is therefore not surprising to find that people identify a mixture of political and livelihoods issues as the key threats that they face.

The particular threats that people identified can be characterized according to two criteria, depending on whether the particular threat relates to livelihoods or security, and whether the source of the threat is internal to the group (household, community), or external. This is illustrated in the following diagram, with some examples:

The present research looked at all four types of threat, represented by the four quadrants in this diagram.

As in many crisis situations around the world, ordinary people have their main focus on day–to–day survival, and often feel remote from the political currents ultimately affecting their lives. At the same time, the crisis in Zimbabwe has been so recent, and with such major consequences for the people of the country, that there is an acute recognition that proximal impacts are the result of political forces. A common response when people were asked to identify the main threat that they faced was "politics"; but a little further probing revealed that in most cases it was the livelihoods impacts that were most acutely felt and the cause of greatest concern.

In addition, it is clear that politics and livelihoods interact in complex ways. A person who identifies forced attendance at political rallies as a key protection issue may be concerned about the threat of political violence, but they are just as likely to be concerned that the time spent engaging in such an activity is time that they cannot spend working for their survival. Another person pointed out the economic cost associated with political violence:

> When they come to beat you up, they first break down your door, and maybe smash your windows. Cuts and bruises can heal, but doors and windows need to be replaced, and this is very expensive.
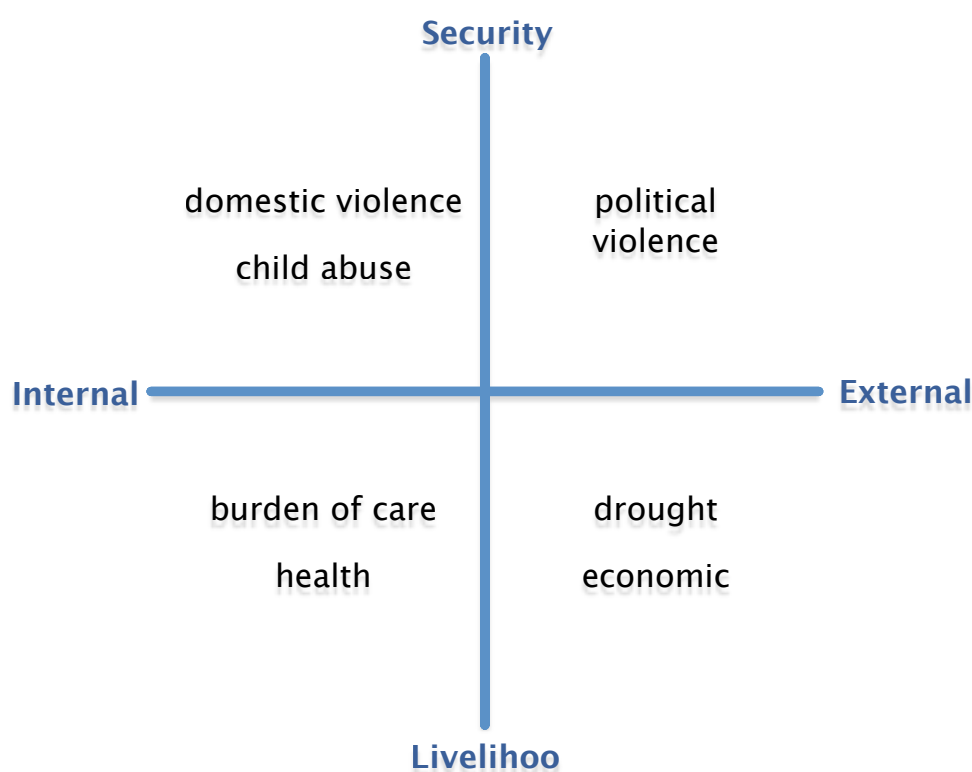
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32–YEAR–OLD VENDOR, MARONDERA, MASHONALAND EAST

The health impact of politicians?

"Whenever there is an election people are not free to conduct their day to day business because of being forced to go and attend political gatherings by politicians. By so doing our daily curriculum is disrupted. Instead of tending to our livestock and fields we are busy chanting political slogans, singing words of praise to 'His Excellency the First Secretary of Zanu–PF, the Commander in Chief of the Armed Forces, the President of Zimbabwe, Honourable R. G. Mugabe'. Production grinds to a halt. Yields dwindle and that spells hunger. Hunger spells malnutrition and vitamin deficiency, making us susceptible to any number of diseases, increasing the mortality rate … self–reliance disappears, and dignity disappears. In the end, people survive through stealing, prostitution and thuggery. The health situation, economic hardships and social ills are caused by politicians, directly or indirectly."

72–YEAR–OLD WIDOW, VILLAGE HEALTH WORKER, MUTOKO, MASHONALAND EAST

It can be seen that particularly traumatic past events have a big impact

Security

domestic violence

child abuse

political violence

Internal ———————————————————— **External**

burden of care

health

drought

economic

Livelihoo

on people's contemporary protection concerns. Three particular events stand out in this regard:

- o the political violence associated with the 2008 elections (the impact of which was felt all over the country);

- ○ the cholera epidemic of 2008–2009 (which hit most parts of the country, with the exception of Matabeleland, which was largely spared[13]); and

- ○ the Gukurahundi massacres in the 1980s in Matabeleland (and some parts of the Midlands).

Across Zimbabwe, people's worries about the future are to a significant extent based on their experiences of these past events. An understanding of this is important when considering the protection concerns discussed below.

Not all threats were related to the political/economic crisis in the country; some related to more universal social themes, and some to the kind of personal difficulties that could arise in any context. Others were very specific to the socio-cultural setting – for example, fear of avenging spirits, or of possession by demons, on which more later.

2.2 Livelihoods

> Our livelihoods now depend on external factors, not on how hard we work.
> **58-YEAR-OLD SUBSISTENCE FARMER, MATABELELAND NORTH**

While many of the people interviewed for this research were worried about potential violence, discussed in a later sub-section, the overwhelming concern of almost everyone was daily survival. Politics was never far from many people's minds, but it was often the livelihood impact that most concerned them.[14] For example, the biggest complaint that people had about having to attend Zanu-PF rallies was the time this took up, keeping people away from fields or daily work, thereby affecting their ability to survive.

The economic collapse that accompanied the political crisis has affected almost everyone in the country. In urban areas, industry and commerce has shut down, leading to extremely high unemployment. In rural areas, the ill-conceived land reform program has devastated the rural economy, leaving tens of thousands of farm workers out of work, and leading to a shortfall in food production. The cost of living has soared.

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[13] The exception was the border district of Beitbridge, in Matabeleland South, which was one of the worst-affected areas in the country.

[14] In the United Nations Development Programme's 2010 World Development Report, Zimbabwe was ranked last on human development (169th of 169 countries surveyed, with an HDI score of 0.140).

Wages are not reflecting the cost of living. I'm one of the lucky ones who has a job, but my salary is not enough to pay for essential items for my family.

MIDDLE-AGED MAN, FORKLIFT DRIVER, HARARE

I get a reasonable salary: US$180 per month. But it is eaten up by $40 electricity charges, $30 water rates, and the rest goes on food, clothing and transport to and from work at $2 per day, as well as the cost of sending my two children to primary school (uniforms, fees).

CLEANING LADY, MARONDERA, MASHONALAND EAST

The hyperinflation of 2007–2009, which led to a total collapse in the formal sector economy, came to an end after "dollarization" in April 2009 (that is, suspension of the Zimbabwe dollar and introduction of foreign currencies – mainly, US dollar and South African rand – as legal tender). This has led to some increase in economic activity, but has created its own challenges. To increase the circulation of dollars in the economy, Zimbabwe needs to run a trade surplus, but that is difficult when production has almost ground to a halt. Thus, a common complaint was that dollars are hard to come by, particularly in rural areas, even if one has goods to sell. This has led to an increase in barter trade – farmers even reported paying their hospital charges and their children's school fees in peanuts (literally). Lack of change is another problem created by dollarization. There are paper notes in circulation, but no US dollar coins. This has had an effect on consumers and vendors alike.

The lack of coins makes it very difficult. The kombis take half a dollar for a trip, and if you give them a dollar, they give change in rand, but less than half a dollar. It also throws my household budget off, because when buying things from shops and vendors, you have to buy things you don't need to make the total up to a dollar.

HOUSEWIFE, EPWORTH, HARARE

I bake bread and sell it to passers-by. But I often lose customers, because I cannot give them change and they don't want to buy two loaves.

**50-YEAR-OLD SELF-EMPLOYED WOMAN,
HWANGE, MATABELELAND NORTH**

One of the factors contributing to increased living costs is lack of electricity. There been a serious decline in generation capacity and in the transmission system, leading to a breakdown of supplies. Lack of power implies additional costs for households: they now have to buy firewood or paraffin for cooking and candles for lighting; they can no longer buy perishable items in bulk, because their refrigerators and

freezers no longer function, adding cost; they now have to pay to recharge electrical devices, such as mobile phones. There are also serious costs to businesses, who must rely on generators (which can be prohibitively expensive) or do without power – either way, consumers face higher costs or lower-quality services.

> I can't make ends meet any more as a shoe repairer because of power cuts, since electricity is needed for machines such as grinders. I tried shifting to hand tools, but it takes much longer, so I am able to earn much less.
>
> **SHOE REPAIRER, HARARE**

> I own a butchery and bottle store, but the business is going bad because of long power cuts, sometimes for several days at a time. This means I am scared to slaughter an animal [because the meat won't keep], and the beer at the store is not cold and people won't buy it. It is not just me but all businesses that rely on electricity that are suffering.
>
> **42-YEAR-OLD BUSINESSMAN, MUREHWA, MASHONALAND EAST**

But on top of this, there has also been a breakdown in the administration of the electricity utility. Electricity meters are often not read, and no bills are sent for several months. Then, suddenly, an extremely high bill arrives, along with the threat of being cut off if it is not paid. These high bills might in some cases be because of a mistake, or of electricity theft; but in many cases it seems to be the result of many months of estimated readings, which bear no relation to actual usage.

This means that many people (mostly those in urban areas) have to negotiate to pay electricity bills in instalments – so they end up paying very expensive electricity bills, while also bearing the cost of regular lengthy power cuts. The same applies to municipal water supplies: there is often no water, but households still have to pay a monthly charge or they are cut off. This is an important revenue stream for local councils, without which they will not be able to resume the provision of essential services. But as one interviewee aptly put it: "We pay a lot of money to the council every month, but not for services – we pay for cholera, rats and blackouts."

A number of people complained that even mortuary services had collapsed, in part due to the lack of electricity needed for cold storage. Because the mortuaries were not functioning, people were forced to rely on expensive private funeral parlours.

> It costs $15 just for a plot of land at the cemetery – without any undertaker or gravedigger. If you are going to die, better make

sure you have $15 first. If not, the family has to sell the coffin, and the dead person is buried just wrapped in cloth, without a funeral service. The saying is now: "dead at 8am, buried by 2pm", because mortuary fees are far too expensive for most people to afford. Some people are even going to the graveyard at night, and secretly burying the dead in shallow graves, to avoid the $15 fee.

YOUNG MAN, UNEMPLOYED, EPWORTH, HARARE

Politics has the potential to have a serious impact on livelihoods, in numerous ways. Both sides of the political divide have tended to use economic tools to further their agendas – to reward their supporters, or punish their opponents.

I have to join Zanu–PF and pay money to them. If I don't, they will beat me and then allocate my market stall to someone else. So I join them although I know in my heart that I'm not one of them. But I just want to be left alone to sell my things at the market.

34–YEAR–OLD MAN, MARKET STALL HOLDER, HARARE

At Park Street Market one day, 20 kombis came and about a hundred people jumped out and just started grabbing things from the stalls. They were MDC supporters, taking revenge because the market stalls are allocated by Zanu–PF.

TRADER, DOWNTOWN HARARE

Another example of politics impacting on livelihoods, frequently mentioned in interviews in urban areas, was politically–motivated destruction of houses as 'illegal settlements'. The most notorious case was "Operation Murambatsvina" (literally, "drive out the trash"), which started in 2005 and led to 700,000 people losing their homes or livelihoods (or both), according to United Nations estimates.[15] The operation started in Harare, and went on to affect most major cities. But it is a tactic also used on a smaller scale to punish perceived opposition supporters.

During the 2008 elections, and at other times, people in Epworth have been forced to burn down their own houses. They are told to do it themselves, so that the perpetrators cannot be held accountable. And people do it – in this way, they can save some belongings, and themselves! So it's better than waiting for someone to come in the middle of the night and set your house on fire.

24–YEAR–OLD MAN, SMALL BUSINESS OWNER, EPWORTH, HARARE

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[15] See "Report of the Fact–Finding Mission to Zimbabwe to assess the Scope and Impact of Operation Murambatsvina by the UN Special Envoy on Human Settlements Issues in Zimbabwe Mrs. Anna Kajumulo Tibaijuka", available at ww2.unhabitat.org/documents/ZimbabweReport.pdf (accessed 15 April 2011).

Other examples of politics affecting livelihoods that were mentioned in interviews include: politicized job recruitment, where private sector companies controlled by a political party or its members will only give jobs to their own party members; allocation of community land, which is done by local councils in some cases for the benefit of their own party members; and the use of the law enforcement and criminal justice system (generally regarded as being controlled by Zanu-PF) for political purposes, for example by evicting MDC activists or seizing their property.

Economic sanctions as a livelihoods threat?

The economic sanctions imposed by Western countries were frequently mentioned as having a negative impact on livelihoods. Whether such impact is real or not, the perception certainly exists, and not only among Zanu-PF supporters.

"Sanctions have affected us terribly. This is not a recent phenomenon, it goes back to the Smith regime and Unilateral Declaration of Independence. But back then the sanctions didn't cause pain. Now the sanctions are very painful."

58-YEAR-OLD MAN, FORMER WAREHOUSE MANAGER, HIGHFIELD, HARARE (HE IS HIGHLY CRITICAL OF ZANU-PF)

"The major threat we face is political interference by the West. These countries just work hand-in-hand with MDC to make our situation worse with things like sanctions."

60-YEAR-OLD MAN, FARMER, MUREHWA, MASHONALAND EAST

"Now we are under sanctions, and the people should not expect much from the government. We encourage people to make use of the God-given resource of soil to do agriculture so that they learn to be self-reliant. We must be our own employers rather than wanting to be employed by somebody. That time is over."

ZANU-PF SENATOR

There is a particular set of livelihoods threats facing those in rural areas. Many of these are longstanding issues, while others relate to the political and economic crisis in the country. In many areas, there are no irrigation systems, and agriculture is reliant on rain. In such circumstances, one of the major threats that concerned people was erratic rainfall and drought.[16]

> Drought has contributed a lot to poverty and hunger. Land parcels are getting smaller and smaller, and because of poor industrial performance, everyone is resorting to farming. This has resulted in land fragmentation, inefficiencies and poor yields. But

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[16] It has been suggested that drought has sometimes been used by Zimbabwean leaders as a convenient excuse for political failures. For example, a severe drought in 2001 was blamed as a key factor in the post-2000 economic collapse, even though the economy continued its rapid decline after the drought ended. Nevertheless, insufficient or erratic rainfall is a serious problem in parts of the country, in particular Matabeleland and Masvingo provinces (see "Drought Prone Areas of Zimbabwe", map by UNOCHA, available at ochaonline.un.org/OchaLinkClick.aspx?link=ocha&docid=34949, accessed 25 May 2011).

even if we get good rains at present, people out here can't afford the inputs, hence perennial hunger and poverty.

ZANU–PF COUNCILLOR IN A RURAL PART OF MASHONALAND EAST

Other concerns related to the shortage or high cost of inputs, and the often corrupt way in which they were distributed.

The rains have already begun to fall, but we have not received our farming inputs yet. We were told to go to the Grain Marketing Board (GMB) to buy seed maize at a subsidised price of $5, but when I went there I was told to get a GMB card from my local leaders. I returned to GMB with the card, but by then there was a long queue and I waited in line the whole day, but did not get to buy the seed. However, some people with nice 4x4s were loading large quantities of seed into their cars. Then those of us still in line were told that the seed was finished. It was painful to see that rich people got all the seed. They are going to stock it in their shops and sell it to us poor people for $10. So the rich will get richer, and we will get poorer.

37–YEAR–OLD MAN, SUBSISTENCE FARMER,
MUREHWA, MASHONALAND EAST

Farmers also expressed concern about the damaged road network, particularly in rural areas, which made it difficult and expensive to transport goods to market.

A particular issue for those living near to national parks is the threat from wild animals. Elephants trample crops, crocodiles attack cattle drinking from rivers, leopards and lions kill livestock, and all of these animals pose a threat to humans, especially when they try to protect their livelihoods.

Many of us survive through urban farming. But the animals from the nearby national park come and eat the produce before harvest. I also make bread and sell it, but baboons come into the house and steal the bread if I leave the door open. I can't always have the door closed because of the heat from the oven, and also because if the door is closed people will not know that I have bread to sell. We once complained to the national parks service, and they came to patrol just once, but never again.

50–YEAR–OLD SELF–EMPLOYED WOMAN,
HWANGE, MATABELELAND NORTH

There are many and varied threats to livelihoods, but the overwhelming problem facing the vast majority of people in Zimbabwe is simply finding a way to make ends meet in the new economic reality that they are facing. It is clear that many people are still adjusting to this new reality. Unlike in countries where there has been little formal

economic activity for many years, most Zimbabweans still describe themselves as "unemployed" and still have expectations of future employment in the formal sector. They thus tend to focus on short-term stop-gap measures to survive.

2.3 Health

The economic collapse in Zimbabwe has led to a collapse in health and education services. It has also hit the delivery of municipal services, including supplies of electricity and water, which (in addition to the big impact on livelihoods, discussed above) also has a major impact on health.

A key issue has been the breakdown in municipal supplies of clean water. In most urban areas, the water infrastructure was quite developed, with piped municipal water to most houses, and flush toilets. When the water system broke down, there were few alternatives in place. Combined with breakdowns in urban sewage systems, this led to a devastating outbreak of cholera in 2008-2009 (and to ongoing prevalence of other water-borne diseases). After huge efforts by aid organizations and government, the epidemic was brought under control, and some improvements have subsequently been made to water and sewage infrastructure in some areas. However, fear of another outbreak of cholera was a major concern for the majority of people interviewed, particularly in urban areas.

> We've just got used to living without running water and reliable electricity, with rivers of sewage outside our door for our children to play in.
>
> **32-YEAR-OLD SINGLE MOTHER, HIGHFIELD, HARARE**

> The only water that you see flowing in Harare is coming out of broken sewer pipes!
>
> **42-YEAR-OLD MAN, KOMBI DRIVER, GLENVIEW, HARARE**

> In the past, there was a very serious cholera outbreak here. Boreholes were drilled at that time, but they have not been maintained, so there are not enough. Many people are using open toilets, and now that the rains are returning, sewage will again be flowing in the streets. We are very scared that cholera will return.
>
> **24-YEAR-OLD MAN, SMALL BUSINESS OWNER, EPWORTH, HARARE**

Erratic electricity supplies have also impacted on the availability of water. Without electricity at the pumping stations, municipal water supplies stop. And in many areas, communal (and private) boreholes rely on electric pumps.

> The water supply is erratic – days on, days off. People depend on boreholes, but they have mostly run dry or broken down. Borehole water is safer than municipal water, since they don't always have the treatment chemicals, which come from Zambia. There is a lack of money to buy them, and corruption. So usually only a sand filter is used.
>
> **32–YEAR–OLD MAN, PLUMBER/COUNCIL SEWAGE WORKER, GLEN NORAH, HARARE**

The decline in health services themselves have obviously had a big impact on people's health.[17] Hospitals and clinics have had major difficulties as a result of electricity shortages and lack of running water. And as in many other sectors, the health services have lost large numbers of qualified staff, who have found work in other countries, or who spend much of their work time moonlighting. Those who remain in the system struggle to make ends meet, with most not having received their proper salaries for many months; many resort to charging fees for services that should be free, and to various forms of corruption (such as selling medicines and other supplies); there have also been regular strikes by doctors and nurses demanding payment of salaries, which have impacted services. Patients face increased healthcare costs, and must in addition often purchase the drugs and supplies needed for their treatment – and those requiring operations are even asked to bring water and diesel (for generators).

> State hospitals only do the diagnosis; doctors then refer the patient to their private practice or to private clinics for treatment, which is expensive. And of course, in many cases the reason why those hospitals cannot provide treatment is that the doctors have stolen the drugs for use in private practice or to sell to clinics.
>
> **42–YEAR–OLD HEALTH PROFESSIONAL, HARARE**

> Children under five and people over 65 qualify for free care at hospitals. If they show up at a hospital, they don't have to pay.[18] But although the system is there, lack of funds means it doesn't work in practice. These people will find when they get to the hospital that they can't get the care they need – the machine is not working, the specialist is not there, and so on. Maybe true, maybe an excuse.

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[17] Zimbabwe has in recent years had some of the lowest health indicators in the world. Life expectancy at birth is 49 (among the lowest of all countries) and the adult mortality rate is 606 per 1000 (the second–highest of all countries). (Data from the World Health Organization's World Health Statistics 2011.) For an account of the alarming decline in Zimbabwe's health system in recent years, see Andrew Meldrum, "Zimbabwe's health–care system struggles on", The Lancet, 371: 1059–1060 (2008).

[18] The government is supposed to pay the hospital to cover the costs, but in practice this doesn't happen at the moment.

Zimbabwe has very high prevalence of HIV/AIDS (in the recent past, it had one of the worst epidemics in the world), so people are understandably concerned about the threats associated with living with the disease, or becoming infected. Those interviewees who indicated that they were HIV-positive reported a much improved availability of CD4-count machines,[19] and were mostly receiving necessary treatment for free, but this did not extend to other medical costs.[20]

> We cannot afford the $50 maternity fee charged by the government clinic. If you register late, you have to pay an additional "late fee" even though the reason for registering late in the first place is lack of money!

> Orphans living with AIDS receive ARVs and food rations from the clinic. However, when they start to get better through treatment, they are removed from food rations, so that those who are more sick may benefit. This often causes problems – families who have taken in these orphans rely on the rations [to reduce the burden of looking after the child by supplementing the food basket of the whole family]. In some cases they are thrown out of the house, or are not well looked after.
>
> **30-YEAR-OLD SINGLE MOTHER LIVING WITH AIDS, HARARE**

There were also concerns that political developments might impact on care. Thus, support to the healthcare system by international agencies was dependent on humanitarian space. Some interviewees were worried that heightened political tensions might lead to some organizations having their operations closed down, or being forced to withdraw from some areas, as had happened in 2008.

In many rural areas, malaria is a major problem, and many people had concerns about the threat from the disease, and the difficulty of getting diagnosis and treatment – which was costly, and often required travel over long distances to access health services.

Another threat that people often mentioned was the risk of death or injury as a result of road accidents. Zimbabwe's roads are notoriously dangerous, particularly for kombi passengers — in part, as one interviewee put it, "because of young inexperienced drivers some with

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[19] The CD-4 count is a diagnostic test used by medical professionals to assess the immune systems of HIV patients, decide when to start them on antiretroviral treatment, and determine the efficacy of such treatment.

[20] No one was asked about their HIV status during any of the interviews, but a number of people gave such information in the course of interviews.

no licenses, and driving unroadworthy vehicles at high speed, all fuelled by police corruption".

2.4 Violence

> Given the culture of violence that is entrenched in Zimbabwean society, it's surprising that there hasn't been more political violence.
> **HEAD OF A MAJOR INTERNATIONAL AID ORGANIZATION IN ZIMBABWE**

The threat of violence was a recurring theme in the interviews. There is a widespread fear in Zimbabwe of political violence; but just as important is the high level of societal violence.

The use of violence as a political tool has been a feature of Mugabe's rule (as it was also a feature of the Smith regime before him). While parts of the country experienced extreme violence in the immediate post-independence period – the Gukurahundi massacres in the 1980s – political violence increased significantly from 2000, and reached its peak during the presidential run-off in 2008. As a result in particular of the 2008 events, many people have a great fear of elections and the violence that they may bring.

These fears are particularly acute at the present moment. While political violence can occur at any time, the levels of violence are synchronized with the political calendar. The research took place in a period of increased political tensions, around the time of a constitutional outreach process, and with the prospect of elections in 2011 hanging in the air. Since around the time that the research began, Zanu-PF politicians have been actively reminding people of what happened in 2008, increasing the tempo of political activity and rallies, and giving every indication that, in recognition of the party's declining popular support, intimidation would be one of the party's main election strategies. But Zanu-PF certainly doesn't have a monopoly on political violence. Many people also expressed fear of violence by MDC supporters.

> The situation has become more stressful now that there are rumours we will have elections. Zanu-PF youths are now going door-to-door registering peoples names as a means to intimidate them. They will then force us to buy Party cards or wear Party t-shirts. On the other side, MDC youths take to the streets, singing and creating disturbances.
> **31-YEAR-OLD STREET VENDOR, HARARE**

> My job as a social worker is a major threat to my life. In 2008, Zanu-PF used council premises as torture bases; and then MDC

thought that we council workers allowed them to do so, and threatened us. When MDC took control of the council, they wanted to show Zanu-PF that they too were powerful, and also used the council premises for nefarious activities. The staff are caught in the middle, and under suspicion from both sides.

39-YEAR-OLD WOMAN, SOCIAL WORKER, HARARE

The MDC is also a very violent party. In the 2008 run-off, Zanu-PF first targeted the MDC 'assassins' who would move around wherever there were by-elections. The difference is that MDC violence is not State-sponsored, so there is less impunity. During Gukurahundi, some Zanu women were going around burning the houses in Harare of Zapu supporters and prominent Ndebele people. These women are now in the MDC. I don't believe you become less violent just because you change political party.

LOCAL NGO WORKER, HARARE

It was clear from the interviews that the great majority of political violence is by or in support of Zanu-PF. The perpetrators of violence include organized militias of 'war veterans', and members of the security forces. But most typically, violence comes at the hands of gangs of youth. These gangs are organized by politicians from both sides of the political divide, but they have been a particular hallmark of Zanu-PF. With extremely high levels of youth unemployment, incentives to participate in political violence are typically minimal: a small amount of cash, or a few bottles of beer.

Political hooliganism and threats are actually coming from our own youths, sponsored by outsiders who take advantage of their unemployment.

**40-YEAR-OLD FARMER, MUREWA,
MASHONALAND EAST**

There is almost full youth unemployment, so they don't even have the hope of finding work. If anyone brings in a few dollars, or buys them beer, they can use them for anything. This is not only being done by government/Zanu-PF, but also by other parties. They rouse them to a frenzy with the help of beer.

RETIRED MAGISTRATE, MATABELELAND NORTH

But one youth leader was of the view that it was too easy to put all the blame on the instigators:

Let's not just blame politicians for corrupting the youth. We youth must blame ourselves. We are old enough and responsible enough to take decisions ourselves.

19-YEAR-OLD MAN, YOUTH LEADER, HARARE

These violent political periods are characterized by high levels of impunity. While some people reported that certain local leaders tried to ensure that political violence would not get out of hand – by ensuring a police presence at rallies, for example – in general, the police turn a blind eye to violence by or on behalf of Zanu–PF. As one person put it: "You could be killed in front of a police officer without the killer being arrested. You could even be killed in a police station. The police would say 'This is a political matter; we don't involve ourselves in politics'."

However, much of the violence is only peripherally related to politics; and politics and the impunity it confers is often used as a convenient cover for something else: settling old scores, gaining commercial advantage, or plain corruption and opportunism.

How political is political violence?

"You know, there are people in my community making money from political violence. I despise these conflict entrepreneurs, who make a business out of organizing political violence for others."

37–YEAR–OLD WOMAN, HARARE

"It is not just people in political parties but also anyone who bears a grudge against you, who can find a way to turn it into a political issue and organize political gangs to beat you up."

32–YEAR–OLD MAN, HARARE

"During election times, my main enemies are members of my extended family, who are jealous because I own a business. They make wild accusations that I must have received financing from MDC. … I know that because of this I'm a target for assault by Zanu–PF, and this is caused by my own relatives."

BUSINESSMAN, UZUMBA, MASHONALAND EAST

Thus, while much violence is framed as "political violence", the reality is more complex. Moreover, given the levels of violence in Zimbabwean society, most threats of violence were not related to politics. It is an open question whether increased levels of political violence have led to increased violence in society, or whether political violence is a reflection of a deeper societal problem. There may be some truth in both scenarios.

Thus, for example, some people interviewed saw a risk that youth radicalization could lead to other violent acts in the community.

> It is very sad. These youths are only used for a short time [for violent political activities] and then dumped. They are just given alcohol or drugs as incentives. Most of them are married, and because they are drunk or high on drugs, they beat up their wives – simply because they are used to harassing people and beating up people.
>
> **35-YEAR-OLD SECURITY GUARD, CALEDONIA, HARARE**

And while there is no doubt that domestic violence is a longstanding societal problem, the view of many individuals, and of organizations working on the issue, is that the problem has been exacerbated by recent events, particularly the economic collapse. As one Harare housewife put it, "women are being battered by stressed husbands who are working all day for peanuts". Another person, pointing to the high levels of societal violence and discrimination against women, noted that "for women in Zimbabwe, violence is continuous; for men, it is limited to election time".

Rape and sexual violence are also serious problems. Many cases seem to be related to the collapse of traditional social structures. There are now many child-headed households, because parents have died (in particular as a result of the HIV/AIDS epidemic), or have had to move away from home for work (in particular as illegal migrant workers in neighbouring countries), and these children are particularly vulnerable. Said one social worker: "Fathers are even raping their kids; mothers are afraid to leave the children with the father." Street children are also very vulnerable to all kinds of abuse, particularly rape and sexual abuse.

Girl children are particularly vulnerable, but it was noted that there is a general tendency in Zimbabwean society to overlook the risks to boy children.

> Boy children are also vulnerable sexual abuse, but this is not recognized or understood by most communities, and is very hidden. There is little awareness of paedophilia, and most people are incredulous: "what would anyone want to do with a young boy?", they say.
>
> **RETIRED MAGISTRATE, MATABELELAND NORTH**

Other situations described by interviewees where they faced a risk of rape included collecting firewood in the forest (the recent electricity shortages having created a huge market for firewood), and when girls are taken to "bases" to cook for the party activists there (who are mostly youths). In the latter case, it should be mentioned that some people thought that some such allegations may be political propaganda, and some others cautioned that not all girls who returned

from a base with a sexually-transmitted disease, or pregnant, had necessarily been raped, although that might be the explanation given to family members.

Teachers were particular targets at times of political violence, because they were regarded in general as sympathetic to the MDC, and because they had a strong influence over youth, a key political battle-ground. At times of political tension, violence against teachers could be sudden, extreme, and perpetrated by parents of the children they taught, and by their pupils themselves.

A headmaster's perspective on political violence against teachers

"When the MDC was formed, teachers were accused of spreading MDC information to the rural population. My own experience was not uncommon: people came and assaulted the whole staff of the school, and one of my teachers died. I was acting headmaster of the school at the time, so I was accused of not controlling my teachers, some of whom were accused of being members of the MDC. My response was that there were no rules against teachers joining the MDC, so there was nothing I could do. In the end, I had to flee for my life. Such violence affected all schools, but the intensity varied depending on the community in question. Those who assaulted my teachers included students from the school – typically the rowdy ones, who already had grudges against the teachers. It was local Zanu-PF people who instigated the attacks. It was the result of indoctrination – these are very poor communities, bribery was used, or people were given beer. But it was still hard for me to make sense of what happened. There was a sudden and dramatic change in atmosphere, like an evil spirit had possessed the community. There were students pointing at teachers they didn't like and denouncing them. Parents were also doing it – if the teacher wouldn't buy beer for them, the teacher would become their enemy. Many parents sympathised with the teachers, but were so afraid that they couldn't protect us. Fear was strongly instilled in the community. It wasn't because we were preaching politics. Teachers wouldn't say a word about politics in the classrooms – and any attempt to discuss the violence that was happening would also be seen as political. At that time I was not politically involved at all, but as a result of my experiences, I became an active member of the opposition, after I had to flee from my teaching job."

41-YEAR-OLD MAN, FORMER HEADMASTER, HIGHFIELD, HARARE

Lastly, a number of people – students, parents and teachers – spoke of the risk of children suffering violence at the hands of their schoolteachers, as a result of the rather extreme and antiquated methods of discipline still practised widely in Zimbabwe's schools. Sexual abuse of children by teachers was another concern raised by several people. Getting to school carried its own risks. In remote areas, children often had to walk long distances to school. This caused many difficulties, and also exposed them to the risks of violence – particularly, in the case of girls, to the risk of rape. (One way to deal with long distances to school was "bush boarding" – where students would stay during the week in informal settlements near to the school. But these informal settlements had their own risks, including rape.)

Historical roots of political violence?

Zimbabwe was born of a violent guerrilla struggle, perhaps creating inextricable links between politics and violence.

yes

"There was a war that created the country, then there came political violence. Governance was top-down, with no consultation. Politicians tried to get their way by force, rather than fostering understanding. The problem is that once politicians start engaging in intimidation, people stop offering their views and ideas."

58-YEAR-OLD MAN, FORMER WAREHOUSE MANAGER, HIGHFIELD, HARARE

no

"I don't believe that there is a link between revolutionary violence and the political violence of today. The immediate post-independence period, 1980–82, was so harmonious. The country managed to adjust from a war situation to a peace situation, and the situation normalized. The problems started with the leadership, and their corruption."

40-YEAR-OLD MAN, FORMER HISTORY TEACHER, HIGHFIELD, HARARE

2.5 Social issues

Those who are marginalized are easily forgotten, neglected or exploited by society.

COMMUNITY WORKER, MARONDERA, MASHONALAND EAST

Crime was identified as a major issue of concern. While it was seen as a longstanding problem, many people were of the view that levels of crime had significantly increased as a result of the recent economic crisis in the country – and many noted that, as economic conditions had now improved somewhat, levels of crime had reduced to some degree.

Various factors that increased the vulnerability to crime were mentioned. For example, power cuts meant that street lights rarely functioned, increasing the risk of mugging on the streets after dark. In combination with a lack of lights in houses, this also increased the risk of burglary. The growth of urban farming was said to have aided muggers – with roadside maize plantations giving them a convenient place to hide. Some other innovative criminal techniques were also mentioned:

At night time, people with white clothes are asking for lifts then robbing people [white clothes are worn by members of apostolic sects, who often pray by the roadsides, and at night]. Maybe it is criminals dressed up, or maybe it is real sect members, we are not sure.

29-YEAR-OLD MAN, SECURITY GUARD, EPWORTH, HARARE

In rural areas, theft of livestock (cattle and draught animals) was identified as a particular problem. In some areas of Matabeleland North (Binga and Hwange), farmers accused armed gangs operating out of neighbouring Zambia of stealing their animals, taking them

back to Zambia across the Zambezi river, making it difficult for the police to prevent.

The quality of policing was also seen to have declined, leading to more crime, particularly petty crime. Two factors were seen as contributing to this. First was the decline in the capacity of police, due to lack of resources (staff, vehicles, financial resources). A common comment of interviewees was "if you report a crime to the police, they tell you to bring the suspect to the police station, and only then can they take action". Second was police corruption, which had increased as police officers – like all public servants – struggled to find ways to make ends meet. This meant that, in the view of many, the law was applied selectively, and bribery of police by offenders had become commonplace. In some cases, it was suggested that police were directly or indirectly involved in racketeering. Or as one interviewee bluntly put it: "behind every illegal activity one can find a policeman involved in some way".

Police protection?

A group of farmers [in Mashonaland East] invited the police to set up a police post on their farms. The police were to get free food and other essentials, in return for dealing with the problem of thieves cutting down trees on the properties and stealing farm produce. But the police became the thieves themselves: at first, they confiscated the goods from the thieves and then resold them; in the end, they were the ones who organized and controlled the thefts.

(As told to one of the project researchers in the course of the research.)

Alcohol and drug abuse was another key concern, with alcoholism regarded as a major problem. Illegal alcohol in particular was seen as having serious social as well as health effects. Home-distilled spirits known as kachasu were seen as a particular problem, because they contain wide variations in alcohol content (between 10 and 70 per cent), which could lead to alcohol poisoning, and which also often contained potentially lethal additives intended to produce narcotic effects. Cheap and potent cane spirits known as kenge were also seen as a problem (they sell for around $4 per litre and contain around 40 per cent alcohol), as were cheap imported spirits sold in plastic bottles (such as 'Zed' from Zambia).

However, some people declined to characterize these products as problematic, noting that they were important income earners for the people operating backyard stills and the people selling the alcohol. Not surprisingly, people offering such a viewpoint were mostly involved in the illegal alcohol business themselves, or had family members who were.

The political and economic crisis has certainly had effects on the dynamics within communities. However, there were varying views expressed as to the nature and extent of these effects. Many people referred to a feeling of distrust within communities, as a result of political polarization and fear of informants. Political violence in particular was seen as very divisive for communities, over and above its immediate effects. As one church pastor from Harare said: "violence begets violence – now, if we see people who hold different political views from ours, we fight them". Others pointed out that pre-existing divisions within communities facilitated political violence, with one former CIO (intelligence) officer suggesting that "the situation will only change when the whole community says 'no' with one voice".

Socio-economic threats as dividers or connectors?

"There are many problems we face for our survival, but these also provide an opportunity to bring everyone together in solving issues related to security and welfare of the whole community."

30-YEAR-OLD MAN, BINGA, MATABELELAND NORTH

"Community cohesion is the most important thing in dealing with the challenges we face, but people are divided because of varying levels of desperation. Everyone is looking after themselves, or jealous of what others have."

32-YEAR-OLD WOMAN, BINGA, MATABELELAND NORTH

Zimbabwe's multiple crises have taken a heavy toll on the population, and together with a breakdown in social services and the welfare safety-net that they provide, have left communities with a heavy burden of care.

This burden is particularly acute due to the fact that in many communities there are very few working-age people left. The legacy of a devastating HIV/AIDS epidemic is a major factor – by 2006, government statistics showed that almost one-quarter of children in Zimbabwe were orphans, primarily as a result of AIDS.[21] But the economic crisis has also contributed. Breadwinners have been forced to migrate domestically or internationally in search of jobs or income, often leaving children behind in the care of extended family. Migrant workers in neighbouring countries often find themselves living on the margins, without proper paperwork or stable employment, and in such circumstances children are typically sent back to Zimbabwe to be cared for by grandparents. Many village communities are made up mostly of widows, retired people, and children.

> My family has lost a lot of relatives. Most of the adult men have died from AIDS, and so there is only one adult man to look after the whole extended family.

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[21] See John Donnelly, "Number of orphans spikes as Zimbabwe crises deepen. Rise in HIV, fall of economy cited", Boston Globe, 18 July 2007.

The burden of care thus falls disproportionately on grandparents, and on children themselves, with a large number of child-headed households. But in a context of impoverishment and a collapse in health and social services, these children are often not well cared for.

> I am 16, and I have looked after my younger brothers and sisters since I was 12, when my parents died from AIDS. At first, our aunt stayed with us, but then she went to South Africa to look for work, and we have never heard from her since. I survive by renting out the spare rooms in my house, and selling vegetables, but it is not enough to send my siblings to school, and we can only eat two meals per day.
>
> **16-YEAR-OLD GIRL, HARARE**

It is not surprising that, according to credible members of several communities, the challenges faced by child-headed households often leads these children to engage in prostitution and illegal activities. Boy children are also vulnerable to abuse and child labour, especially orphans. If boy children are adopted, they are reportedly often made to work for their keep, and rarely get to attend school. Such boys, according to one community worker, "work without pay, and are often beaten".

There has also been an increase in the numbers of street children. According to community workers, boys outnumber girls on the streets, but girls are particularly vulnerable on the streets, especially to rape (especially by other street children) and predatory sexual abuse.

The elderly face particular hardships. As noted, they often carry the burden of care for grandchildren, while having limited income-generating opportunities. Pensioners get minimal pensions, on the order of $20 per month. Also, those who were living in worker housing (the case for many State and private-sector employees) must vacate their houses after retirement, and so have to start paying rent, water rates, and electricity charges.

One disabled man's story

"I am a paraplegic who has been in a wheelchair for 22 years, living with my father.

"I am unemployed, with 4 children. My 16-year-old daughter had to drop out of school in 2008 when she was in Form 1 [first year of secondary school]. She is now working as a housemaid for a woman in the city centre, earning $40 per month, and saving up so she can return to school. My other daughter was doing Grade 1 [first year of primary school] at a Catholic school in Caledonia transit camp, but the school was closed down due to a problem with the war veterans in the camp, and the staff were arrested. The school moved to Avondale, but I could not afford the transport costs for her.

"It is my wife who is the breadwinner for our family. To get some income, I repair radios. I don't have formal training, but have learned from watching others. But now business is bad, because of the availability of cheap Chinese radios, so few people now want to repair their old radios.

"Transport is my biggest challenge, as I have to pay twice the normal fare on the kombis because of the extra space taken up by my wheelchair; otherwise I have to wait a long time for a driver kind enough to board me at the normal fare.

"I have received some outside assistance, but not much.[22] One NGO installed a rainwater collection tank at our house, which has helped a lot with water."

44-YEAR-OLD PARAPLEGIC MAN, HARARE

Many people expressed concern about the issue of access to identity documents. Particularly in rural areas, people noted that it was costly and time-consuming to travel to government offices in the cities to renew or replace documents. An increasing number of people have no access to documents at all. In large part, this is a result of the recent increase in unregistered births – because people can no longer afford the maternity fees levied by clinics and government midwives, and choose to have unattended home births instead, which can make it more difficult to obtain a birth certificate.

There are also communities who have long had difficulties obtaining official documentation. Descendents of migrants from Malawi, Zambia and Mozambique have unclear citizenship status, even though many are second- or third-generation. Illiteracy and political marginalization has meant that many have never regularized their status. They make up a large proportion of the agricultural labour force, and were particularly affected by the decline in the farming sector resulting from the land reallocation program and farm invasions. (From 1953 until 1963, Britain consolidated two existing colonies into a semi-independent "Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland" – comprising the present day Zimbabwe, Zambia and Malawi. During this time, many Malawians in particular settled in other parts of the Federation, seeking better economic opportunities.)

I am not entitled to vote. My parents are from Malawi and I am considered an 'alien' on my national identification card. But this doesn't mean I'm unaffected by politics. I'm not allowed to vote, but I am forced to buy a Zanu-PF party card for $2 and pay a monthly $1 fee. We are sometimes forced to chant party slogans, and must now wave our party card when we do so to show that we have signed up.

45-YEAR-OLD WOMAN, EPWORTH, HARARE

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[22] Under Zimbabwe's Public Assistance Scheme, vulnerable people are supposed to be given monthly benefits. But now only the indigent qualify, not the poor. It is mainly elderly people who get these payments, but it is very little, perhaps $25 per month.

The wrong sort of war veteran?

"My husband is a disabled war veteran. He was disabled after the war in a work accident. He does not get the same level of support as other veterans. Maybe it is because he is not active in political violence and farm invasions. Or maybe it is because this is a minority area, and he was a ZIPRA cadre. Now he is being told he cannot even vote because his parents are from Malawi – even though he spent seven years fighting for this country's independence!"

50–YEAR–OLD SELF–EMPLOYED WOMAN, HWANGE, MATABELELAND NORTH

Language issues also play a part. People in Matabeleland North, in particular, complained that most State employees sent to their area only speak Shona, not the Ndebele language used in this region. This meant, for example, that birth registration staff often misspelt Ndebele names, leading to mistakes on birth certificates and identity cards that were difficult and expensive to correct. Language difficulties also affected school children, since the first years of primary education are supposed to be in a child's first language, but in many schools the teachers could not speak Ndebele. People complained that many health staff and police officers similarly did not speak Ndebele, making it difficult for many local people to interact with them.

Individual protection issues

Along with the many challenges facing Zimbabwean communities – many a result of, or exacerbated by, recent political, social and economic trends – there were also concerns expressed that related more to the vicissitudes of personal circumstance than to the situation in the country.

"My life has turned sour, because everyone in the community is pointing fingers at me. It is because I cannot have children. I have had no children since I was married; now I am old and it is too late. I am insulted by my husband's parents and humiliated by members of the community."

49–YEAR–OLD WOMAN, HARARE

"I am a traditional healer. The main livelihood threat I face is lack of herbs. People in the community are setting veld fires, resulting in a shortage of herbs. I now have to travel long distances in search of herbs to treat sick people in the village. Traditional healers should be protected by the government because they help everyone when sick. They should be given money equivalent to what the Chiefs are earning."

MIDDLE–AGED WOMAN, TRADITIONAL HEALER, UZUMBA, MASHONALAND EAST

2.6 Cultural and religious beliefs

Many of the concerns expressed by people interviewed for this research would not fit on any standard protection questionnaire. As in any country, the traditional and spiritual beliefs that make up the cultural and religious background were highly relevant to people's everyday lives, and to how they conceptualized and prioritized the challenges that they face.

Particularly striking were the relevance of both traditional and contemporary spiritual belief–systems for protection: witchcraft and

religious sects. International actors tend to treat such matters as novelties or curiosities, without doing any serious investigation of how significant a role they play in protection issues. In the Zimbabwe context at least, these issues are highly relevant both as threats (discussed here), and in shaping responses to threats (discussed in the next section).

High-profile views on witchcraft[23]

"Witchcraft is not an area that lends itself to police scrutiny. How do you verify an evil spell? This is a matter of spiritual faith, not a matter of empirical evidence."
ZIMBABWE REPUBLIC POLICE SPOKESMAN WAYNE BUDZIJENA

"Witchcraft and tokoloshi [demons or goblins][24] are making a comeback. It's obvious the cause is economic. The worse the economy gets, the more political tension there is in society, the more frustrated and frightened people get. They turn to witchcraft to gain riches or to hurt their enemies."
GORDON CHAVUNDUKA, CHAIRMAN OF THE ZIMBABWE NATIONAL TRADITIONAL HEALERS ASSOCIATION

"The strongly held conviction of belief in witchcraft and traditional healers … cannot be wished away. We should amend the century-old Witchcraft Suppression Act in keeping with the popular thinking and beliefs of the majority in this country." [this has now been done]
JUSTICE MAPHIOS CHEDA, HIGH COURT JUDGE

"I've never seen a tokoloshi, I've never had a tokoloshi attack me, but I've heard all the stories like everyone else. I don't believe or disbelieve. It's difficult for outsiders to understand, but African daily life relies heavily on the spirit world, for good or evil."
PROFESSOR WELSHMAN NCUBE, MINISTER OF INDUSTRY AND COMMERCE (MDC-M), AND LEGAL SCHOLAR

In 2006, Zimbabwe lifted the ban on the practice of witchcraft contained in the colonial-era Witchcraft Suppression Act of 1899 (which also made it a crime to accuse someone of being a witch or wizard). The amended legislation legalizes practices that had previously been banned, but which were still commonplace – such as casting bones to tell the future, divination, speaking with the dead, and using muti (traditional powders and fetishes) to influence events. However, it was made a criminal offence to hire a witch or assist in the commission of witchcraft with an intent to harm others; it also provides protection for people "groundlessly" accused of being witches or of practising witchcraft.

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[23] These quotations are taken from a media article on amendments to witchcraft legislation in Zimbabwe. (Lebo Nkatazo, "Zimbabwe outlaws practise of witchcraft", NewZimbabwe.com, 24 April 2006.)

[24] The tokoloshi is a short, hairy, dwarf-like creature from Bantu folklore. It is a mischievous and sometimes evil spirit that can become invisible by swallowing a pebble. Tokoloshi may be controlled by witches and used to cause trouble for others. At its least harmful a tokoloshi can be used to scare children, but its power extends to causing illness and even death upon the victim.

It is clear from the present research that belief in witchcraft remains widespread in Zimbabwe, particularly in rural areas.

> There are many diseases in the community – HIV, malaria, TB, but also many other mysterious ailments. They are probably caused by witchcraft, especially those that affect young children. Traditional healers and witch-doctors and apostolic prophets give potions to cure the diseases caused by witchcraft.
> **37-YEAR-OLD MAN, SUBSISTENCE FARMER, MUREHWA, MASHONALAND EAST**

One community worker described the following situation, which they considered to be a type of scenario that was "not uncommon" in their experience. A farmer might be working hard in his fields and providing well for his family. But his impressive maize crop attracts the jealousy of his lazy, heavy-drinking neighbour, whose own maize field consists of a few stunted plants. So the neighbour accuses the man of being a witch, who has cast a spell on him. This spell means that at night he becomes a zombie under the control of the witch, made to till the witch's fields. He knows this must be true, because every morning he wakes up exhausted, without the strength to work in his own fields. The neighbour adds that the witch is also employing tokoloshi [goblins] to secretly replant all his maize seedlings in the witch's fields, as a comparison of the two plots will prove. The headman resolves to settle this matter by employing the services of a witch-hunter or traditional healer, who will conduct a ceremony in front of all the village to identify any witches among them. Subjective methods mean that the whole process is open to abuse. If the farmer is identified as a witch, he will have to pay compensation and go through a public exorcism, and had better make sure his maize crop fails next time, otherwise it may be assumed that the exorcism did not work.

Many protection issues were mentioned as sometimes having a dimension of witchcraft or traditional belief: a belief by some that rape is caused by evil spirits, and therefore that rapists are not responsible for their actions; the rape of children (believed by some to cure HIV infection, as well as an element of some black magic rituals); rape of men by women and women by men (at the behest of a witch-doctor, to solve a personal or business problem of the rapist);[25] murder (to obtain body-parts for rituals or potions). It is difficult to estimate the real extent of such practices; they are hardly everyday occurrences in the experience of most people, but at the same time most people believe them to occur, and Zimbabwean newspapers report cases such

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[25] Several men interviewed during the present research expressed a fear of being raped by women. This practice has allegedly been on the increase, linked to witchcraft, with numerous cases reported in the local media (see, for example, "Rapist women strike in Chetugu", The Herald, 25 April 2011).

as this on an almost daily basis. They certainly cannot be dismissed as curiosities in any examination of protection issues.

'Avenging spirits' as a protection issue

A number of years ago, four shop owners in the rural district of Honde Valley paid 12 people to murder a local man for the purpose of obtaining his body parts for use in a ritual. According to traditional belief, human body parts – especially the genitals – can be used as a charm to lure people to buy a vendor's goods. The aim of the ritual was thus to ensure the prosperity of the shop owners in the competitive field of retail business.

Some years after the ritual murder, the families of the 12 killers reported some mysterious happenings. A turkey kept by one family was said to have grown human breasts. Extended family members of the killers, if they spoke of the killing, would die in strange circumstances. Policemen who handled the murder case, and who were allegedly bribed by the businessmen, were said to have died. A huge python was said to have appeared in the cooking hearth of one family, but disappeared when villagers were called to help kill it.

The Shona people believe that there is a link between the dead and the living. When a person dies, it is only the body that perishes while the spirit lives on – protecting their family, and in some instances avenging their death. It is believed that when an innocent person is murdered, their spirit will haunt the murderer and their family. Many tragedies will befall them until the avenging spirit of the murder victim is appeased.

The avenging spirit is appeased by the person responsible for the murder. Custom dictates that if the victim is an unmarried woman, the murderer should give livestock and grain to the victim's family as compensation – the rationale being that this replaces the roora (bride price) that the family would have received from her marriage, had she not died.

If the victim is male, however, payment is in the form of a virgin. That is, the family of the murderer should hand over to the victim's family a virgin, who will become a wife to one of the family members and bear children for the family. In some instances the virgin is not assigned to any particular man in the victim's family, but is available for sexual intercourse with any of them, for the purpose of procreation. The rationale is that in a traditional patriarchal society, men ensure the perpetuation of the family name through their sons. Thus, if a person murders an unmarried man, they have by implication led to the demise of the victim's name; the virgin given to appease the spirit is intended to bear the sons that the victim would have had if he had not died.

And so it was that after experiencing those mysterious happenings, one by one the people involved in the murder each began sending a young virgin from their own extended family to the family of the victim, in order to appease the avenging spirit. All the girls were under 16 and still in school when they were handed over; most were orphans. As the number of girls surpassed the number of men in the victim's family, it was resolved that each of the girls would have her own hut, and any male member of the family could visit her there for sex. This arrangement would continue until the girls had each borne a son, after which they would be free to return to their families and continue with their lives.

Four of the girls were rescued by police after an intervention by a local women's rights NGO. They were very fearful of the plight of their families, as they had been led to believe that their personal sacrifice was the only way to protect their families from harm. After extensive counselling and rehabilitation, the girls were returned to their families. But reports suggest that the families secretly handed them over once more to the victim's family, who are holding them under guard.

Although kuripa ngozi, or virgin pledging, is punishable under Zimbabwe's Domestic Violence Act, the practice is rampant throughout the country. No one has ever been prosecuted for such an offence.

(As told to one of the project researchers prior to the commencement of the research.)

Contemporary belief systems can also have protection impacts. Over the last several years in Zimbabwe, there has been a rapid increase in the number of religious sects and 'apostolic churches', and membership of such groups has been growing quickly – with some estimates suggesting that it may have reached 3 million or more (one-quarter of the population).[26] There are mixed views about this trend among the general community, particularly as some of the practices of these sects are controversial (such as polygamy, underage marriage and shunning of conventional medical treatment).

> Churches are mushrooming in my area – 'Mapostori' apostolic sects, invading every open space and making noise at night. I think something should be done and they should be allocated a space to worship their God, not everywhere.
>
> **38 YEAR–OLD HOUSEWIFE, HARARE**

> I think the rise of apostolic churches is a good thing. They are a positive channel for people's time and energy, and they can become more motivated to face their hardships.
>
> **18 YEAR OLD MAN, UNEMPLOYED, EPWORTH, HARARE**

Several views were expressed about the reason for the growth in the number of these groups, and the number of followers. It was suggested that since many people these days are not gainfully employed, and have nothing to occupy them, the apostolic churches were attractive: "They do a lot of dancing, there is energy. Also, there are girls there, so it's an opportunity for the youth to find love." Some felt that it was also an expression of frustration towards the other, more formal churches, which are seen as too docile. The apostolic leaders "can pray for you and change your fortunes or luck". Others suggested that since this was a new phenomenon which was not rooted in traditions, it was a phase that would inevitably pass.

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[26] See "God 'will heal Zimbabwe cholera'", News24.com, 27 January 2006.

> The reason for the increasing number of these sects is that they offer people guidance and power, and promise them a way out of their troubles – the more people there are who face troubles and have no gainful employment, the more these sects will grow. And since they offer power and money to the leaders, everyone wants to be a leader, which is why squabbles break out and there are so many splits.
>
> **29–YEAR–OLD MAN, TEACHER, MACHEKE, MASHONALAND EAST**

However, many people pointed out that some of the practices of some of these groups can have negative protection consequences. For example, there was a widespread feeling that many of the leaders were driven more by the pursuit of profit than spiritual motives. A blurring of the lines between some of these groups and traditional healers or witch–doctors was noted. For example, some Batonga community leaders complained that the community had lost almost all of its cows after the arrival of apostolic churches. (The Batonga are a Bantu ethnic group in Matabeleland, who are mostly subsistence farmers.) Church leaders were promoting their goblin–removal services, payment for which was taken in the form of a cow, since this was not a cash economy. "So people now say, if you want to buy a cow, go and see the apostolic prophet, who always has plenty." (Another member of the community complained that these people were not even competent to do the job, recounting one case where a prophet had allegedly taken payment for dealing with an infestation of goblins, but had then sat outside in his car, powerless, while goblins terrorized people in the house.)

Concerns were also raised about some of the doctrines or practices of these sects (the most well–known being the Johane Marange apostolic sect).[27] Typically, doctrine is that men are supposed to have numerous wives. But this creates major livelihoods challenges: wives have to struggle to support themselves and their children, as the husband is in no position – and indeed has no doctrinal obligation – to support them. Families sometimes live in overcrowded and unsanitary conditions.

Compounding this is the fact that followers are prohibited from seeking conventional medical treatment or going to hospitals and clinics, being instructed to pray to God to cure them of disease. During the recent cholera outbreak, this created a particular epidemiological threat: apostolic communities tended to have high rates of transmission, and very low rates of treatment.[28]

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[27] Other major sects are the African Apostolic Church and Johane Masowe WeChishanu.

[28] "God 'will heal Zimbabwe cholera'", News24.com, 27 January 2006.

Abusive practices are also reported towards girls. Some sects say that girls must not be educated. Also, polygamy creates a shortage of eligible brides, and many underage girls are married to sect leaders.[29] Such marriages often take place without the consent or free choice of the girl, and in contravention of Zimbabwean law on child marriage:

> Typically, it is a case of 'I had a dream that I should marry that girl over there'. And then the prophet declares that it's a message from God, and announces that they are married. Single girls shouldn't go to such meetings!
>
> **LEADER OF A LOCAL COMMUNITY ORGANIZATION, HARARE**

The Johane Marange sect is particularly notorious, but others have a range of doctrines and practices of the same sort.

3. SELF-PROTECTION STRATEGIES

> Our survival strategies are partly effective, but they make us live very difficult and dangerous lives.
>
> **32-YEAR-OLD MAN, SPRAY OPERATOR, BINGA, MATABELELAND NORTH**

Individuals and communities develop sophisticated strategies for responding to the various threats that they face. This section provides an overview of the various strategies that emerged from the research.

These strategies are not always very effective, since there is often no good solution for responding to grave threats. And in some cases, the strategies themselves lead to other problems, or 'secondary threats'. It is often the case that impossible trade-offs must be made: for example, between health and economic survival (when taking on 'dirty and dangerous' jobs), or economic survival and physical security (when supporting oneself through illegal activities, say, or fleeing from political violence).

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[29] See "The tragedy of Johane Marange's child brides", The Herald (Zimbabwe), 31 January 2011.

3.1 Political threats and political violence

> If Zanu–PF targets you, there is nothing you can do to protect yourself.
>
> FORMER CIO OFFICER, HARARE

Responses to political threats and political violence take many forms, which fall into four broad categories:[30]

- ○ Mitigating – taking steps to reduce the severity of the threat

- ○ Managing – taking steps to reduce the impact of the threat

- ○ Avoiding – taking steps to evade the threat completely

- ○ Confronting – taking steps to tackle or fight the threat

These are discussed and elaborated on below, with some consideration of the perceived effectiveness of these strategies, and the potential negative consequences of adopting them ('secondary threats').

Mitigating the threat
To reduce the severity of political threats, people may adopt a strategy of political engagement or one of political neutrality.

Engagement is seen as one way to gain protection. People who are part of the more powerful political party in a given area often feel that they are protected; but in a polarized political context where violence is used by all sides, it was no guarantee of safety or privilege.

> As for security, I have nothing to fear, because I am a Zanu–PF coordinator and my party is in control of everything, even the local police station. But I sometimes face annoyances – for example, I am not allowed to go into a local bar, as it is controlled by MDC youth.
>
> **45–YEAR–OLD MAN, VENDOR AND ZANU–PF COORDINATOR, HARARE**

Those who do not agree with a particular party's views may nevertheless pretend to embrace them, or at least comply with the demands of the party, as a strategy to mitigate political threats. As was often noted, doing so did not prevent the person from voting against the party in elections.

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[30] Cf. the typology provided in section 2.2 of "Conflict and Survival: Self–protection in south–east Burma", Ashley South with Malin Perhult and Nils Carstensen, Chatham House, London, September 2010.

Views on compliance as a protection strategy

"There is a difference between fear and respect; I fear them. As a survival strategy I offered to use my acting skills for Zanu–PF's election campaign in 2008. That's how I protect myself, by joining their campaign team."

31–YEAR–OLD MAN, SECURITY GUARD AND PART–TIME ACTOR, HARARE

"In 2008 everyone became a coward. You could see everyone putting on Zanu–PF headgear, as if they were married to Zanu–PF. You could be killed if you did not comply."

28–YEAR–OLD MAN, PASTOR, HARARE

"Like toothless dogs, we protect ourselves by doing all that we are forced to do by Zanu–PF, for example attending their meetings, closing our shops if they tell us to, buying party cards…we do whatever they say, but we do not vote for them at election time."

25–YEAR–OLD BUSINESSWOMAN, UZUMBA, MASHONALAND EAST

Indeed, many people reported that they buy membership cards for all the main parties, so that when confronted by members of any party, they are able to produce that party's political membership card. It was noted, however, that once you had a party card, you were registered with the party, and it was more likely that you would be forced to attend rallies or take part in other political activities (this applied to Zanu–PF; no one interviewed spoke of being forced to attend an MDC rally or other activities). While there were many benefits of a compliance strategy, it could be a double–edged sword:

> Obtaining a stand [land to build a house] requires one to have a Zanu–PF party card. That card gets you many things, but it is bad in the long run – a 5–year–old child shouldn't have to go to a rally and sing party slogans all night! But parents can't say no because they have received a stand, and it could be taken away.
> **25–YEAR–OLD BUSINESSMAN, EPWORTH, HARARE**

Some of those interviewed were prepared to go further. A few people said that they had a deliberate strategy of befriending those committing violence. And one man admitted that he and some friends had joined a group of Zanu–PF youth who were engaged in political violence "so that they would not threaten us".

As was pointed out, however, such strategies carry risks. First, it takes a lot of time to engage in such political activities and attend rallies, reducing income–earning opportunities. And there are more serious risks. One MDC activist noted that it would be dangerous for him to pretend to sympathize with Zanu–PF and join their rallies, because if his MDC role was ever discovered, he would be treated as a spy, and likely be badly beaten. Another risk of adopting a compliance strategy is that it can be a slippery slope. Attending a rally may seem innocuous enough, but what if one is then called on to denounce friends and colleagues? Or if one is selected to be on the party's local

campaign team? Or take a local leadership role? Or participate in political violence?

As a variation of the compliance strategy, one person interviewed said that they had successfully feigned repentance:

> Previously, at the time of the 2008 elections, I was a monitor for the local human rights NGO ZimRights. This was known about, and my house was no. 1 on the list of properties to be destroyed by the local Zanu-PF group. But immediately after the election I "repented": I went to them and handed in my ZimRights t-shirt and made a big show of how sorry I was, and said "I repent", and then it was ok.
>
> **MAN IN HIS 20S, HARARE**

An extreme example of compliance – destroying one's own house on the orders of party youths, in order to at least be able to save lives and possessions – was mentioned in section 2.2 above.

The alternative to compliance is political neutrality, either in fact or in appearance. This can involve carefully hiding one's political affiliation, or claiming that one is not involved in politics or not a member of any party.

> My fellow family members are against me due to my position as a headman. I protect myself by carrying out my duties professionally, giving fair treatment to my villagers, and not getting too involved in politics. I usually spend my time hunting in the bush with some other men, avoiding politics.
>
> **VILLAGE HEADMAN AND ZANU-PF MEMBER, MASHONALAND EAST**

While claiming political neutrality was mentioned as a common coping strategy, it was not seen as very effective. In a politically polarized context, neutrality or silence on political issues is often regarded with suspicion – 'if you are not with us, you are against us'. Said one person: "neutrality is not an option; they probe you so to see which box you should be put in". Other people reported that they had been beaten for saying they did not belong to any political party. It is in any case difficult to avoid becoming entangled in party politics.

> As a pastor I must be neutral and apolitical, but it is very difficult. Both Zanu-PF and MDC expect me to attend their rallies, when in fact I should attend neither. In 2008 it was particularly difficult. One woman in my congregation is married to the new [MDC] MP, so every time he accompanied his wife to church, members of Zanu-PF assumed that he had come to address the congregation. Zanu-PF leaders therefore demanded that I also give them the

opportunity to do so, and I had to agree, otherwise the church could have been closed.

<div align="right">**CHURCH PASTOR, HARARE**</div>

I am a member of the Johane Masowe apostolic church and a gifted healer. Our religious days are Friday and Sunday, so when there are political rallies I'm usually at church. This has led to me being branded an opposition supporter. Therefore, whenever there are political meetings on other days, I always try to go, in order to protect my name.

<div align="right">**ELDERLY WOMAN, FAITH HEALER, GLENVIEW, HARARE**</div>

If one is to remain apolitical, it is necessary to maintain a low profile. One woman in rural Matabeleland, when asked how she coped with political threats, replied: "I have big ears, big eyes, and a small mouth".

Managing the threat

Apart from taking action to reduce the severity of the threat, it is also possible to try and reduce its impact. A number of different types of strategy were used in this regard.

The first type of strategy involved coordinating with others. What some referred to as the "buddy system" is a strategy of moving around in groups, particularly at night or at times of heightened political tension, on the basis that groups of people are less likely to be attacked than individuals. This system was seen as relatively effective, and less confrontational (and therefore less dangerous) than fighting back.

Another system, the "whistle system", involves carrying a whistle or other loud alarm device which can be sounded in case of trouble. This was often combined with community awareness activities – in a context where the threat was likely to come from outside the community – so that people would know the meaning of the alarm and would come to help. Local community organizations in some areas have been providing training on community security strategies such as the "buddy system" and "whistle system".

But one person gave a warning that it was necessary to think carefully about such strategies:

At the time of the 2008 elections, some MDC activists tried a "comfort in numbers" scheme. The idea was that prominent activists would live together in one house in Chitungwiza, rather than being scattered and vulnerable. It didn't work, because the house ended up being a focal point for political activity. It was petrol-bombed, with many dying including innocent family members of the activists, such as children who had come to stay.

<div align="center">52</div>

LOCAL NGO WORKER, HARARE

Information sharing was seen as an important way of being alerted to possible threats, giving time to put in place the above strategies to manage the threat. People formed protection groups to warn each other of threats, for example by using mobile phones to send coded SMS alerts to the group. In some cases, this was linked to a "compliance" strategy: joining the political activities of a particular party in order to have better information on potential threats and advance warning of what was coming.

When facing a potential threat, another strategy was to seek the intervention of power-holders or mediators: by approaching traditional leaders for help, seeking protection from one's political party, or seeking the intervention of church leaders. The police, who people would turn to in cases of crime, were not generally seen as a source of protection from State-sanctioned political violence (that is, violence by Zanu-PF); in cases of violence by MDC, however, they were much more likely in intervene.

> If the person who is supposed to protect you is fighting against you, who do you turn to?
> **51-YEAR-OLD WIDOW, VICTIM OF MURAMBATSVINA, HARARE**

One possibility, mentioned by a number of people, was for communities or individuals to bribe power-holders or the police to provide protection, or pay protection fees to those perpetrating the violence. While there are obvious risks of creating an economy of violence, these strategies appeared to be not uncommon, are were regarded as rather effective, the constraint being individual poverty and lack of community resources.

A noticeable reaction to political polarization and violence, recent and historical, is that communities have become more suspicious of outsiders or strangers. Asked how his community dealt with political violence, one villager in Matabeleland North responded: "when a person from outside the community comes to a fellow's house in a car, all the neighbours will go and congregate at his house so that the fellow will be ashamed and the stranger will leave".

Avoiding the threat

Another possibility is to avoid the threat completely, by hiding or fleeing. Victims or potential victims of political violence reported taking refuge in churches, and people talked of hiding indoors during demonstrations, or when expected to attend political rallies. Those who wanted to retain political neutrality spoke of keeping away from anyone involved in politics, and even avoiding activities where many people gather (and in the case of school and university students,

staying home at times of political tension). Many people said that these days they keep to a small circle of close friends.

When keeping a low profile or hiding were ineffective, the other option was to flee. An MDC politician who was badly beaten in 2008 indicated that he had plans to go to South Africa with his family at the time of the next election. Other prominent activists indicated that at times of tension or violence they would go to stay with friends or relatives in other parts of the country, where they were not known. In general, rural areas were seen as more dangerous, so a common strategy was to move from these areas to Harare or Bulawayo to avoid violence (but provincial towns such as Marondera and Lupane were not regarded as safe).

However, short of going into permanent exile, such strategies can never be fully effective. It was noted that violence can occur unexpectedly, leaving no time to flee. It was also pointed out that moving away at times of violence was financially risky, because it left property vulnerable – "but life is more important than property". And at some point, it will be necessary to return.

> We stay alert and informed so that when we hear of possible attacks from war veterans we flee from our homes with our children. But we still live with fear as the attacker will still be there; we will always have to return home at some point and face the risk again.
>
> **MDC ACTIVIST, RURAL MASHONALAND EAST**

Confronting the threat

> If we organize as a community to fight back against political violence, it can be effective. When they see us united, they are scared.
>
> **25-YEAR-OLD MAN, TSHOLOTSHO, MATABELELAND NORTH**

A final possibility available to people is to resist violence, fight back, or retaliate. This was seen as a potentially effective strategy, but also an extremely dangerous one that few people were willing to adopt. In particular, resistance or retaliation to State-sponsored violence risked a response from agents of the State.

> Retaliation to political violence is risky, as the police may arrest you, not even considering that you may have been trying to defend yourself, since there is selective application of the law.
>
> **MIDDLE-AGED MAN, MDC ACTIVIST, MARONDERA, MASHONALAND EAST**

> In 2008 there was a lot of political violence, and there were some revenge attacks on the perpetrators. We tried to form groups to fight back, but this was exposed, and then we faced worse

troubles. The problem is that people are offered big money to give information on such activities.

18–YEAR–OLD MAN, UNEMPLOYED, EPWORTH, HARARE

Much also depended on the local context. High-profile party activists who were being specifically targeted felt they were in a poor position to fight back. But people who were targeted more at random, as part of more generalized intimidation campaigns, felt themselves to be in a somewhat better position – if the perpetrators knew they were likely to face physical resistance, they may rather choose softer targets.

To protect myself from political violence, I'm going to hang some axes in my house. That makes me feel safer, but in fact the best way to protect yourself is to support Zanu–PF.

37–YEAR–OLD MAN, SUBSISTENCE FARMER, MUREHWA, MASHONALAND EAST

One opposition activist, however, spoke of how he had been successful in preventing attacks against MDC people in his area by threatening violence.

My strategy in 2008 was to resist if thugs came for me. In fact they never did, but I was prepared to defend myself physically. They attacked the defenceless, usually at night. I kept an axe by the door, and warned them in advance that I would use it if attacked. I knew most of those violent Zanu–PF people. Once they abducted a friend of mine. I went to the leader of that group and told him: "any further abductions, and you will be the first target for revenge". So he agreed to a truce. The truce held, but you could never depend on it. There weren't many revenge attacks, but people would sometimes retaliate when pushed into a corner.

40–YEAR–OLD MAN, MDC ORGANIZER, HARARE

Asked if the MDC ever initiated political violence, he had this to say:

I am not aware of any attack initiated by MDC. Zanu–PF has lost support, and fear is all they have left. Violence is used to force people to support them. MDC violence is different – the purpose is to send a message to Zanu–PF that we are also strong.

3.2 Social, economic and health threats

Responses to non-political threats were of a different kind to responses to political threats, although there are clearly some overlaps – both because there is an interaction between politics and livelihoods, and because similar strategies sometimes apply to both – for example, internal movement and international migration can be a response to livelihoods threats as well as political threats.

It was also clear that strategies for coping with such threats were still evolving, due to the recent nature of the decline in socio-economic conditions. This meant that in many cases, expectations did not match the realities – for example, expectations of employment in the formal economy, and expectations of certain levels of service-delivery from the State. Although such expectations may be misplaced given the situation, and undoubtedly have some impact on the nature of the coping strategies that people are adopting, they are keeping pressure on the government to deliver – with a potentially positive impact.

Communities were coming together in various ways to meet the challenges that they faced. Individuals were supporting each other in various ways, for example by sharing food at times of shortage. Several people reported forming community 'clubs' for different purposes. For example, burial clubs to provide funerals, handicraft clubs to provide income (using existing community skills to make soap, Vaseline, candles, brooms from grass and so on, for sale). Sometimes it was just a question of a group of women "meeting together to share experiences and comfort each other on domestic issues".

Livelihoods and economic survival
There were four key ways in which people tried to make ends meet:

- o Resorting to subsistence strategies and bartering

- o Entering the informal economy

- o Migrating in search of job opportunities

- o Resorting to 'negative' or illegal strategies

Subsistence strategies are very much in evidence across Zimbabwe. In the poor 'high-density' suburbs of Harare, maize and other food crops can be seen growing along the roadsides, in vacant plots, and on every other available piece of land. This urban farming, while often illegal, provides essential food at a time when work and cash is hard to come by. And in rural areas, almost everyone is growing food for their families, on their own land, communal land, or illegally wherever they can.

> For the community, subsistence is the main fall-back, and this relies on availability of environmental resources; it's not an easy thing to rely on subsistence, rains are erratic, and inputs too costly.
>
> **BUSINESSMAN, RURAL PART OF MASHONALAND EAST**

The main challenge is that many people do not have access to land for agriculture. In urban areas where housing is already dense, such agriculture is usually illegal – on land that the person does not own (often it is council land). Since there is no formal system for using such land, there is a great deal of insecurity. Although it is not as chaotic as it appears – locals generally know which plot belongs to which person – there are several risks.

Theft of produce is a common problem – the first produce to ripen is often stolen. It is not possible to put a fence around a plot that one does not own and has no permission to farm – and one can hardly complain to the police about theft. Strategies for protecting crops include physically guarding them (individually, or as part of informal community protection groups), or taking advantage of superstitious beliefs.

> To protect my market garden, I tie threatening objects to the crops, or [black or red] coloured pieces of cloth so that people will suspect that I am using muti [magic]. But belief in this is dying down slowly, and desperation can overcome people's fears.
> **40–YEAR–OLD MAN, FORMER TEACHER, HIGHFIELD, HARARE**

Since it contravenes bylaws to plant crops on public land, there is also a risk that the local council will destroy the crops at any time without notice. This had been done regularly in Harare in the past, but since the beginning of the economic problems, the councils have been more understanding and generally do not destroy crops any longer.

> The problem with urban farming is that the council has not formalized it. People dig everywhere, but crops are not protected. Although the council doesn't destroy crops these days, they should do more to regulate the practice – for example, by allocating large pieces of vacant land to communities for farming, especially for the benefit of vulnerable groups.
> **24–YEAR–OLD MAN, GLENVIEW, HARARE**

Urban community farming has been successfully done in a few cases. One group of unemployed people in a poor suburb of Harare said they approached the council, who allocated them a piece of land for a community garden, the produce of which is shared among the families in the group. But as is the case with any scarce resource, it is not long before political interests seek to control it.

> Now public spaces are used as a party campaign tool, by the party leaders. They have the influence to dissuade the council from destroying crops, or prompting them to do so, or are able to informally 'allocate' land to supporters of their party.
> **40–YEAR–OLD UNEMPLOYED MAN, GLENVIEW, HARARE**

The breakdown in the formal economy and the increasing reliance by a large segment of the population on subsistence agriculture has led to increasing land clearance and deforestation in many areas. And there can be other systemic problems:

> There is poor agricultural planning as a result of subsistence agriculture taking over from commercial agriculture. As a result, all over the country mostly the same produce is being produced mostly at the same time. This results in the market being flooded with produce at certain times, so farmers fail to make a profit.
> **40-YEAR-OLD MAN, COMMUNITY IRRIGATION SCHEME HEAD, MASHONALAND EAST**

Some long-time farmers even reported difficulties, because of aggressive 'middle-men' at wholesale markets:

> Now I face problems when I go to sell my produce at Mbare Musika.[31] The middle-men just grab your produce when you arrive, and refuse to give it back to you until you accept their offer price. Then they re-sell it in front of your eyes for several times what they paid you.
> **60-YEAR-OLD MAN, FARMER, MUREHWA, MASHONALAND EAST**

Subsistence agriculture and urban farming is often combined with barter trade – exchanging a surplus of one product for something else that is needed. For example, people in Mashonaland East reported a standard 'exchange rate' of one bucket of maize for one packet of sugar. Such trades can also be a useful way to get around shortages of hard currency. Many rural parts of Zimbabwe are now essentially operating as non-cash economies.

Bartering within communities is seen in some cases as preferable to external commercial trade. In several rural areas, people reported being cheated by commercial buyers, or receiving low farm-gate prices due to the added costs imposed by poor road infrastructure, or because lack of electricity meant that there was a high rate of spoilage of perishable goods in storage warehouses. One community near the Zambezi river reported that they had had to shift from selling fresh fish to less-profitable dried fish, because of such spoilage issues.

In many cases, it is not possible for families to meet more than a small percentage of their food needs through subsistence agriculture and urban farming. In many rural areas, land is in short supply or is not very fertile, inputs are scarce and expensive, and rains unreliable. Some people resorted to supplementing their diet with wild fruits and

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[31] Mbare Musika is the largest wholesale fruit and vegetable market in Zimbabwe, in the Harare suburb of Mbare.

roots, hunting game, and fishing. These strategies could all be dangerous: collecting wild foodstuffs required knowledge and preparation skills, as some items could be poisonous, or dangerous if not prepared correctly. Hunting game is illegal in most cases, and fishing (particularly in the larger rivers) is not only illegal, but also carries a risk of drowning or being attacked by crocodiles – particularly when such activities are done as a last resort by inexperienced people, in unstable canoes with poor knowledge of currents and other dangers.

When all else failed, people had to resort to frugality: eating less (or less nutritious) food, and skipping meals. Slang terminology has even evolved for meal skipping; thus, people would use the codes 011, 101 and 001, where '0' designates a missed meal. Hence, "we're eating one–zero–one" means that the person or family is having breakfast and dinner, but skipping lunch.

> We only have one meal per day, in the evenings. Every night I go to sleep with no idea of what I will feed my family tomorrow.
> **50–YEAR–OLD MAN, MARONDERA, MASHONALAND EAST**

Few people are able to survive from subsistence agriculture and bartering alone, and this is particularly the case in densely–populated urban and peri–urban areas, of course. As a result, given the collapse of the formal sector, a large proportion of people are trying to eek out a living in the informal economy. The range of activities is huge (see box).

Income–generating activities reported by interviewees

Selling vegetables or other provisions at the road–side; working as a casual labourer; making mud bricks; making peanut butter;[32] gathering firewood for sale; renting spare rooms to lodgers; buying and selling used electrical items; crocheting; dressmaking; selling second–hand clothes; buying and selling mobile phone top–up cards; craft activities such as traditional basket–making; taking in laundry; mending clothes; shoe–repair; baking bread; catching and selling fish; minor mechanical repairs; minor electrical repairs.

A very common strategy, particularly for women, is to become an informal vendor, selling vegetables or other products at the roadside. By buying products from cheaper areas or wholesale markets, then selling them in residential areas, it is possible to make a very modest income. It is usually difficult to undercut the prices of shops and supermarkets, but these vendors survive by selling in convenient locations (closer to people's houses, and at bus stops and roadsides) at the same price as commercial establishments. In some cases it is

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[32] Peanuts are widely grown in Zimbabwe, and many people use a course, artisanal peanut butter as a nutritious addition to main meals.

possible for vendors to undercut formal establishments – for example, people make a living by selling cheap, illegal alcohol outside bars, and cheap, poor quality bread outside supermarkets. Informal vendors also have lower overheads:

> I am a vegetable vendor. I sell my produce at a market stall, for which I pay rent every month to the city council. The problem I face is all those black–market vendors who sell at the side of the road without paying any rent, making it difficult to compete.
>
> **45–YEAR–OLD STALLHOLDER, HARARE**

Vendors also sometimes sell products such as cooking oil or sugar in smaller quantities than shops, which is an advantage for people living day–to–day, who can only afford to buy very small quantities at a time.

But competition is very tight. As one vendor put it: "now everyone is trying to sell something, so it is very hard to make a living that way". Also, there are many risks associated with informal vending. Such activities are illegal without a "hawker's licence", and there is a risk that the municipal police will confiscate produce and levy fines. In some cases, the stated purpose is to enforce quality–control and sanitation bylaws (for example, selling old bread or selling products on the ground next to open sewers). But many people were sceptical, claiming that the police confiscated items for their own personal use. Said one vendor:

> We have set up an early–warning system among vendors, so that we know when the police are coming. Then, I throw all my goods away, so at least the police won't benefit from them, only from the fine that I will have to pay in any case.
>
> **MIDDLE–AGED WOMAN, INFORMAL VENDOR, HARARE**

Another typical income–generation strategy, particularly for men, is to seek work as a casual labourer, doing odd jobs or other piece–work. This is difficult in a context where few have the money to pay for such work, and many are seeking it. Pay is very low, but it can be enough to put some food on the table that day.

Limited opportunities and low pay in both the formal and informal sectors has meant that movement and migration are key strategies for economic survival. When the land reform process led to the collapse of farming jobs and the rural economy, many rural workers moved to the cities in search of opportunities. But as the broader economy declined, industry closed and unemployment rose, opportunities were few and living conditions difficult and expensive. Often seen as opposition supporters, such internally–displaced people have regularly faced harassment, or worse, from the authorities – most notoriously,

Operation Murambatsvina, but also other systematic abuses.[33] The direction of movement may even have started to reverse.

> Everyone has been moving to cities, but it doesn't really help. Urban areas are over-populated. Now, some people are starting to move back to rural areas.
> **24-YEAR-OLD MAN, GLENVIEW, HARARE**

Many people are going to neighbouring countries in search of better opportunities. For some, movement is temporary. There are many Zimbabweans engaged in what is known as "border hopping": trading goods to and from neighbouring countries such as South Africa, Botswana and Zambia. During the height of the economic crisis, during the hyperinflationary period, such informal trading was a key mechanism for many goods to enter Zimbabwe. Continued market inefficiencies have led to high prices in Zimbabwe, which can potentially support large profit margins by traders. Particularly for people living in areas close to Zimbabwe's borders, border hopping is an important means of survival.

> I lost my job in 2000 when the firm I worked for shut down. I then made ends meet by buying and selling. I would go between Zimbabwe and Botswana, taking peanuts and traditional cloth to sell, and bringing back anything and everything – it was a time of scarcity in Zimbabwe. Such 'border hopping' has now become a Zimbabwe tradition, everyone is doing it. There are hawkers everywhere, selling everything, but there is no manufacturing any more, not even sweets.
> **58-YEAR-OLD MAN, FORMER WAREHOUSE MANAGER, HIGHFIELD, HARARE**

But many are migrating in search of work. Passports were previously expensive to obtain, but in recent years the process has become easier and less expensive. The numbers of migrants are huge, with at least 3 million Zimbabweans thought to have left the country in recent years (one-quarter of the population).[34] The largest number have gone to South Africa, but many have travelled to other neighbouring countries, or further afield. Doctors, university lecturers and other professionals

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[33] For example, many displaced former farm workers took up informal gold-panning in Mashonaland. In late-2006, Operation Chikorokoza Chapera ("No Illegal Panning") destroyed the homes of thousands of gold-panners. (Part of the reason may also have been that such activities denied the government revenue, and was a way to enforce its monopoly on gold extraction.)

[34] Because most of this migration is undocumented/illegal, precise figures are difficult to ascertain. Estimates of Zimbabwean migration to South Africa – the main destination for Zimbabwean migrants – since 2000 range from 1 to 5 million (see Tara Polzer, "South African Government and Civil Society Responses to Zimbabwean Migration", Southern African Migration Project, Policy Brief No. 22, December 2008). The 3 million figure in the text is the median of these estimates.

have in many cases found professional jobs abroad, but most people, even professionals, find unskilled work.

> Zimbabweans are the best-educated people in Africa, but we have been very poor as a country of making use of this talent. As a result, the best educated people in Africa are now doing all of the menial jobs in third countries.
>
> **MAN IN HIS 50S, FORMER PRINTER, HIGHFIELD, HARARE**

While migration is a very common strategy, it is not necessarily an easy one. Many migrants have a precarious employment situation, often facing legal threats and physical dangers relating to their lack of legal documentation and xenophobic views in host communities.

> After fleeing from my teaching job, I joined the training department of the Zimbabwean operations of a big multinational company. I did this from 2004 to 2006, but the salary was so low that I decided to go to South Africa. There, I couldn't find a professional job, having to do this and that to survive. But I was able to send money back home to my family. Doing odds and ends in South Africa was better than working for a multinational in Zimbabwe! I couldn't move my family with me, as this was too hard to do without proper accommodation in South Africa and a proper job. I returned to Zimbabwe for good in 2008, because I missed my family, and also needed to look after their security. My wife was still working as a teacher, and there were so many problems and so much violence at that time.
>
> **40-YEAR-OLD MAN, FORMER TEACHER, HIGHFIELD, HARARE**

It is possible to earn a better income abroad than in Zimbabwe, but saving money to send home is still very difficult.

> Some 30 to 40 per cent of the youth from this area are in neighbouring countries. I myself was in South Africa. I came back December 2009 because it seemed that the situation in Zimbabwe was improving. Things were very tight in South Africa, it was not so good. It is expensive, and I was only able to get piecework – as a labourer on construction sites and things like that. I managed to send a small amount of money back to family here. But the problem is people imagine that if you've been working in South Africa, you must have come back rich. That's not the case. It costs 1500 rand just to rent a room for the month, but some workers only earn 1500 rand, and some half that, so you end up sharing with 10 people. There is discrimination in getting accommodation: when you say you are Zimbabwean, suddenly people don't want to rent a room to you, or the price goes up.
>
> **24-YEAR-OLD MAN, EPWORTH, HARARE**

And for those left behind, who have in many cases lost their main breadwinner, it can be much more difficult to support themselves, unless they receive regular remittances.

> I am a widow and there is no one to help me. My children have moved away to look for work, leaving me alone to face my hardships.
>
> **ELDERLY WOMAN IN A VILLAGE IN MASHONALAND EAST**

> I find it very difficult to make ends meet and pay for food as well as school fees and uniforms for my son. I have a brother and sister in Botswana who sometimes send money, but it is very little because they say life is not easy for them there.
>
> **32–YEAR–OLD SINGLE MOTHER, HIGHFIELD, HARARE**

Since many migrant workers choose to (or have to) leave their children behind – alone at home, or with relatives – these children are also vulnerable to abuse.

Migrants may in fact end up becoming a burden to their families, for example if they get sick or injured and have to return home. There were anecdotal comments from interviewees about migrant workers contracting HIV as a result of promiscuity while away from families, then infecting their spouses on return visits to Zimbabwe, or returning home sick as a burden.

Successful or not?

How effective are your strategies for coping with economic difficulties?

"Reasonably effective. The fact that we are still alive means that something is working."

or

"Not at all. Despite all our efforts, we still face the same problems as before."

TWO YOUNG MOTHERS, IN SEPARATE INTERVIEWS, MASHONALAND EAST

Finally, apart from illegal migration, there were a whole host of other strategies that involved activities that were either illegal, or otherwise 'negative' in some normative sense. People tended to talk less about these coping mechanisms, for obvious reasons, but all the indications are that they were commonly resorted to.

> A lot of times when people are asked what their survival skills are, they only mention the positive and leave out the negative things like prostitution and criminal activities such as shoplifting, burglary, armed robbery, fraud and drug–dealing.
>
> **CHURCH PASTOR, FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION, HARARE**

Several people mentioned that they were operating illegal/ unregistered businesses from their homes.

> I have an illegal soap-making business at my house. It is not registered, but I am not robbing anyone – except the city council which I am depriving of revenue.
> **19-YEAR-OLD MAN, YOUTH LEADER, HARARE**

The problem was that if the business was successful, it was not possible for it to grow. For unregistered businesses, it is impossible to have large clients, who require paperwork such as tax clearances. Also, there are always some people – family and neighbours – who are aware of these unregistered businesses, and if the authorities find out, they raid the house to extract fines or bribes. Registering businesses is very expensive, however – bylaws are very strict, business taxes very high. As one interviewee put it: "if you start to make money, you are raided and forced to pay fines; this keeps you poor, and it is the reason that roadside vendors will always remain roadside vendors".

Many people reported that prostitution had increased as the economic situation had deteriorated. Much of this was reportedly of an informal nature: women (including married women) offering sexual favours in return for food, and semi-commercial sex work within communities (between neighbours, say, or between university students as a way for girls to meet education costs). More commercial forms of prostitution had also increased and were reportedly more visible: some people noted that roadside vegetable selling was sometimes used as a cover for prostitution, and that many young girls could be seen engaging in sex-work along the intercontinental truck routes that pass through Zimbabwe.

> Truck drivers often use prostitutes, but they may also entice girls into prostitution. A truck driver will pick up a girl he meets during his time in Zimbabwe, and take her in his truck. But the girl will have no documentation, and the driver will leave her at the border post, where many girls are working as prostitutes.
> **VILLAGER IN MASHONALAND EAST, LIVING CLOSE TO A TRUCK ROUTE**

> Parents are partly to blame for the [illegal] activities of the youth. Because of poverty, they cannot look after the kids, who have to fend for themselves. The parents won't ask anything if the kid comes home with money, groceries or new clothes.
> **42-YEAR-OLD BUSINESSMAN, MUREHWA, MASHONALAND EAST**

Other illegal activities that people said they had resorted to included: illegal diamond trading (particularly at the recently-discovered Marange diamond fields); working as a hired 'enforcer' (for criminal or political networks); illegal gold panning (particularly on the Mazowe

and Nyadire rivers in Mashonaland), and diamond prospecting (again, particularly at Marange); engaging in theft and burglary; and working as a black–market money–changer (before the demise of the Zimbabwe dollar).

> We are no longer punished for doing wrong, and this helps us to survive.
>
> **YOUNG UNEMPLOYED MAN, EPWORTH, HARARE**

If there are many people resorting to criminal activities such as theft, burglary and mugging, it follows that there are also victims of such crime. Many people were of the view that crime rates had risen in recent years, and individuals and communities had different strategies for dealing with this. People still rely on the police, but realize that this is not always effective, in particular given the limited resources available to the police, as well as other issues such as corruption and politicization. Other strategies included setting up neighbourhood watch systems (people reported that those thieves they had apprehended during community patrols had been arrested and charged by the police), or lobbying for the establishment of police posts in areas of high crime (in one case, a rural area near the Zambian border, this had been effective in addressing cattle rustling, since prior to the police post being established at a school, people had had to walk over 30 km to the nearest police station to report such crimes). More unorthodox approaches included "using black magic to punish thieves".

Black magic or witchcraft was used more generally as a response to different kinds of threat. Rituals and potions were used to ensure bumper harvests, and good luck more generally. They were also used by witch–doctors to punish those who had wronged them or their clients:

> Members of my family hate me because of my work as a traditional healer, to the extent of arranging to have me be beaten and have my house burned down in 2008. Local politicians also take treatment from traditional healers but don't pay, promising to pay later. And then they send youths to threaten us if we complain. But I brought down bad luck on those who did not pay me, and I retaliated against members of my family, by making them go mad.
>
> **MIDDLE–AGED WOMAN, TRADITIONAL HEALER, UZUMBA, MASHONALAND EAST**

Dealing with the lack of electricity and water

A lack of electricity causes particular problems for cooking and lighting. In response, people are resorting to the use of firewood and paraffin, which are more expensive than electricity. Firewood is easily

collected in most rural areas, but in many urban areas it can be difficult to obtain. Forests near to densely-populated areas are quickly being cleared, meaning that most people have to buy firewood from vendors. This is creating income-generating opportunities for firewood collectors, but this is not always easy or without risk. Vendors have to travel longer and longer distances to obtain wood, and much of the collection is illegal (for example, from private land or national parks). Some people reported that people were now being hassled or arrested if they were caught carrying axes in certain areas. Another difficulty is that firewood cannot easily be used during the rains, as it becomes too wet to burn, and most people cannot afford to stockpile it. At such times, it is necessary to resort to more expensive alternatives such as paraffin.

For lighting, most people use candles, and sometimes paraffin lamps. In addition to the cost involved, there is a fire risk. One man's story highlights the difficulties when electricity and water are not available:

> Just last week my house caught fire, because of a candle in the spare bedroom. When I phoned the town fire brigade to come to my rescue, they told me there was nothing they could do as they had no water.
>
> **60-YEAR-OLD MAN, MARONDERA, MASHONALAND EAST**

The lack of municipal water supplies is a major problem in urban areas, with livelihoods and health implications. People had a range of strategies for obtaining water. Communal boreholes were available in some areas (many were drilled during the cholera epidemic), but people reported that they did not always function – there was a lack of maintenance, some had been vandalized or had essential parts stolen, some had electric pumps which did not work during the frequent power-cuts, and in many cases there was insufficient supply to meet the huge demand. This meant that people often had to travel long distances to find functioning boreholes, and wait in long queues (creating frustration, tensions, and sometimes clashes). This had created an informal commercial market for water, but this was expensive and only an option for those who were better off.

> We are fetching water from boreholes scattered around the township, a very tedious exercise needing patience and endurance in the long queues.
>
> **40-YEAR-OLD MAN, EPWORTH, HARARE**

Younger and younger children are being sent far to collect water from public boreholes. There are long queues also, which means they can spend hours for one trip. They are vulnerable, often returning home without water because it is taken from them by others, or they are repeatedly pushed to the back of the queue. The kids can get beaten by their parents for returning without water, but it may not be their fault. And other members of the family are unable to spend the time to do the job, since they need to earn some money.

17-YEAR-OLD MOTHER OF ONE, HARARE

In addition to boreholes, some organizations have been providing rainwater collection tanks, which can help those fortunate enough to get one – although they usually run dry in the dry periods.

Many people are digging their own backyard wells to obtain water. This can be dangerous for those who are not experienced in such things (the sides of the wells can easily collapse while they are being dug, for example). Backyard boreholes and wells are also not necessarily a cost-free option, and the water authority requires that they be registered and a monthly fee paid (on the basis that all water in Zimbabwe is supposedly the property of the State).

Many of these sources of water are not clean. Most people were aware of this, but had limited options for dealing with it. People rarely reported boiling their water, and cited the cost of doing so (particularly in the absence of electricity), and the time that it took. A few people stated that water purification tablets ("aqua tablets") were widely available on the market at reasonable cost, but only a couple of interviewees reported using them. Mostly, people reported that they tried to practice good hygiene (using water to wash their hands, using covered toilets) to prevent water-borne disease, while essentially trusting that water supplies themselves would be safe.

Finally, some people reported paying bribes to the local authorities in return for services – for example, communities would raise money to pay the council to come and unblock municipal sewage pipes.

Responses to health threats

People reported a number of coping strategies for dealing with health issues. Often, they would resort to traditional medicines rather than relying on conventional medicine and formal health structures. Traditional medicines were seen as less expensive and (particularly in more remote rural areas with limited health infrastructure) more widely available. While some saw this as an effective strategy (a person living with AIDS reported that she and some others had decided to shun conventional treatment, and had set up a herb garden to provide

traditional 'cures'), most people regarded it as a necessity: "they do not always cure the disease, but they can help to some extent". In some cases, people said they relied on witch-doctors, faith healing, and prayer.

Pregnant women often could not afford the $50 registration fee levied by registered clinics (this fee covers all basic check-ups and antenatal care during the pregnancy, but not specialist treatment). More and more people were reportedly turning to unregistered midwives, who typically charge only $25 for their services, half the rate of the State system. Others were having to opt out of antenatal care altogether, relying on traditional birth attendants for the birth itself, or giving birth at home without trained help. These strategies carried the obvious increased risks for mother and baby, and could also lead to difficulties with having the births registered and birth certificates issued.

Some women have even resorted to running away from hospitals after giving birth, without paying medical bills (for example, if they were referred to hospital due to complications, the cost of which is not covered in the standard maternity fee). As a result, in some cases hospitals are reportedly now detaining women who have given birth until they have paid their bills.

Protection from the effects of cheap alcohol?

In the Harare suburb of Highfield, a cheap and potent alcohol mix known as 'Blonco' has become popular. But it is said to have a serious effect on health. Commented one regular Blonco drinker:

"That stuff corrodes your teeth and there are many people who have lost their teeth."

The strategy for dealing with this?

"To save your teeth you have to open your mouth wide and pour the stuff directly down your throat."[35]

4. OVERARCHING THEMES

4.1 Regional and seasonal variations

While the experiences of Zimbabweans interviewed for this research, as presented in the previous two sections, were broadly consistent, there are some regional specificities that are worth noting – related to the particular cultural, political, geographic and historical context.

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[35] Quoted in a local newspaper article. See "Cane spirit promises drinkers 'zing sting'", The Standard (Zimbabwe), 11 August 2010.

Culturally, there are important differences between the Ndebele, who make up the majority in Matabeleland, and the Shona, who make up the majority in the country as a whole. The Ndebele are of Zulu origin, and migrated to Matabeleland in the mid-nineteenth century from what is now South Africa. They are traditionally a warrior people, and mostly cattle herders (although often combined with agriculture).

The historical context was particularly important, with the Gukurahundi massacres still a source of grievance, and something that, 25 years on, was clearly still fresh in people's minds. In part, this is because they know many of the locations of mass graves where their murdered relatives are lying, but have no possibility to re-bury them with proper ceremony.

> Regarding Gukurahundi, sentiments are not generally vindictive (although some want Mugabe to hang). What they really want is for the perpetrators to apologize, so they can move on and mourn their relatives. … They would welcome assistance to re-bury relatives and establish governance in their area that started to be functional and responsive; then they would see the situation as better. But in fact they still see nothing positive happening in their lives.
>
> **HEAD OF LOCAL NGO, BULAWAYO**

The locations of a large proportion of the mass graves are known to local people. There is some furtive reburial, but the authorities are very sensitive on this question – one reason presumably being that systematic reburial would reveal the true numbers of those killed.

There are particular geographical issues in play. Large parts of Matabeleland North are game reserves. This presents a particular set of threats for herders and agriculturalists: elephants and other large game may trample, or eat, crops. Farmers often try to chase them away from their fields, by shouting and beating drums, but this risks death or injury. Lions and other large predators may kill cattle, and protecting them can be risky for the herders.

Within communities, a scarcity of grazing land and waterholes causes conflict. There is also conflict with outsiders. As a minority who have faced discrimination, they have traditionally been suspicious of the State, and have tended to vote for opposition candidates. One strategy that the Mugabe government has used is to bring in Zanu loyalists from other areas and allocate them fertile land.

> This creates conflict: locals resist these settlers, but the settlers are backed by the State. Now Zanu-PF has won a seat because of

the resettlement. But locals are angry: these people have been resettled on land which has the graves of our forefathers.

NDEBELE MAN, COMMUNITY LEADER, MATABELELAND NORTH

A number of people reported that election-related violence in Matabeleland North was particularly brutal – in part for reasons of discrimination, but perhaps also because this was seen as necessary for achieving specific ends.

In the Ndebele culture, people beat each other frequently and severely. This is communal violence, not political, and is not generally regarded as a problem. These are traditional warriors, and they can live with being beaten. But this means that at political "bases", the people realize that a beating is not enough to intimidate these people. Rather, they need to be dehumanized. This is why the treatment at bases in this area has been so bad.

RETIRED MAGISTRATE, MATABELELAND NORTH

Typically, violence within communities is dealt with by traditional mechanisms at a local level. Such customary law is important particularly in rural Zimbabwe, where it governs many aspects of life, including the community's relations with those who are more vulnerable – in a positive way, but also sometimes in a negative way. In looking at the protection environment, it is important to have an understanding of this. Particular protection implications that were mentioned by interviewees included gender issues, and particularly gender-based violence:

A girl is raped, but can't report it to authorities: the community says "we can deal with it". The perpetrator gives a few chickens to the father and suddenly the father and the perpetrator are going to the beer hall together as friends.

HEAD OF LOCAL NGO, BULAWAYO

In the district of Binga in Matabeleland North, the population is predominantly Batonga (whose Tonga language is, like Ndebele and Zulu, a sub-group of Bantu). Binga is particularly remote and hard to access, and because of this, combined with discrimination, it is a particularly underdeveloped area. As in other areas, there is an interaction between local culture and protection issues.

The law says "if you sleep with someone who is under 16, you go to jail". But the Batonga cultural tradition is for girls to marry at 12 to 14. In one training that I gave on the law, a man stood up and said, "Are you saying we can't be married to our wives? Is that what you are telling us?". There was a court case where the magistrate sentenced a man for marrying a 14-year-old. The father of the bride stood up and said: "Magistrate, if you send my

70

son-in-law to jail, there will be no one to look after my daughter. You will have to take care of her yourself, because I won't."

<div align="right">**RETIRED MAGISTRATE, MATABELELAND NORTH**</div>

In addition to regional variations in the threats people face, that are also seasonal variations: for many threats, the time of year (or the time on the political calendar) is key.

For this reason, the particular threats, and the importance that people accorded them, is likely to be influenced in part by the period during which the research was conducted. These are several elements to this. The research took place during the agricultural planting season, which is the time of greatest hunger, when the stocks of food from the last harvest are depleted. Thus, particularly in rural areas (but also to some extent in urban areas), people were particularly focussed on issues relating to food and hunger. Given that it was the planting season, they were also focussed on inputs: seeds, fertilizer and so on. The rains had already started, so it was not a time when people were particularly concerned about imminent drought. The research took place outside the cold season, so the concerns about protection from cold (the cost of heating, blankets, and the difficulties of living on the street in the winter) did not come through strongly.

As regards the political dimension, the research took place at a time of heightened tensions. The constitutional outreach process, which sought the views of communities across the country on the content of the new constitution, had just been completed. This had heightened fears (in some cases, the process had led to polarization of views and in some cases violence), and the fact that some politicians (particularly those form Zanu-PF) were now speaking of the possibility of early elections served to compound those fears.

4.2 Perspectives on vulnerability

One of the issues discussed with interviewees was their perspectives on who in the community was most vulnerable. The different responses (see box) give some indication of the extent of vulnerability in Zimbabwe.

Who is most vulnerable?

activists; breadwinners; child-headed families; children; District Administrators; disabled people; elderly people ("age-related concerns such as health, inability to work for their survival"); everyone ("cholera"); fathers ("since they provide for the family and if anything happens to them the family will suffer, and in order to provide for the family they often have to involve themselves in illegal or dangerous activities"); frail people ("I mean orphans, widows, widowers, the aged, the disabled"); head of the family; men ("since they are attacked more often"); orphans; pensioners; PLWHA; politicians (said by a politician); politicians (said by an ordinary person "because they can be killed any time by their rivals"); poor people

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("vulnerable to everything, and used by rich to fight their political battles", and "as a poor person your choices are limited"); pregnant women ("health costs"); resettled populations and IDPs; social workers (said by a social worker); teachers ("they are labelled as MDC supporters, and are at risk of violence and intimidation"); those involved in politics; those with large herds of cattle; traditional healers (said by a traditional healer); traditional leaders/chiefs ("they have to do what the government/ party says or they are threatened"); unemployed people; village heads ("because they have influence over their villagers, they come under the greatest pressure from politicians, and can face big problems if they don't do as instructed"); voters; widows; women; youth ("who have to do what they are told and who are vulnerable to being used by the community and by politicians").

While part of the reason for the diversity of responses is that people were often reflecting their own personal concerns, it is also the case that different groups are vulnerable to different kinds of threat. As regards livelihoods threats, with the breakdown of social services, everyone had to fend for themselves, leaving those less able to do so at a disadvantage. As one widower said:

> My main concern is food and water; I don't have enough money for food, and there is no woman in the household to fetch water. … we older people find it hard to compete with strong young people to get what we need. It's a harsh environment which hits hardest at the old like me, and others who are vulnerable.
>
> **ELDERLY MAN, MASHONALAND EAST**

As regards politics, everyone who was closely involved was seen to be vulnerable.

As regards social issues, those who society tended to discriminate against or treat badly were seen as particularly vulnerable. Those most commonly mentioned were women and children, particularly girl children.

> Domestic violence is high, but there is nothing to do. If you report your husband to the police, it's automatically divorce – then the family has lost its main breadwinner. So it's better to put up with it.
>
> **HOUSEWIFE, LATE–30S, HARARE**

> Women are most at threat, because the responsibility of feeding the family falls on them. In their pursuit of food, they end up facing different threats, such as rape or being asked for sexual favours in exchange for food, which leads to the further threat of disease. The same predicament applies to children, especially girls.
>
> **OLDER WOMAN, MATABELELAND NORTH**

4.3 The role of authorities

Another issue discussed with interviewees was their views as to how the authorities at different levels contributed – positively or negatively – to protection.

The initial response of the overwhelming majority of interviewees was negative – most of the problems that they faced, they said, were caused directly or indirectly by the government. This has led to distrust of, or avoidance of, the State. It has also led to widespread political disengagement, with politics seen as dangerous, or disreputable.

Are elections necessary?

Matabeleland North
"If elections merely cause violence, why can't we just have a one-party State?"

Harare
"If there are elections, there should be no election campaigns. We've seen 30 years of election gimmicks. Let's have elections with no campaigns!"

Mashonaland East
"It's good to change ministers every few years, so that they don't become too corrupt and too rich. But elections are bad. We should change ministers but we don't need elections."

However, further probing revealed many complexities in this picture.

The colonial period created parallel structures of authority in Zimbabwe: the old, traditional structures of Chiefs and headmen (in rural areas), and a relatively newer system of State authority that was superimposed on it. At independence, the government tried to dismantle the system of dual authority, by stripping the Chiefs of their governance powers and leaving them as symbolic cultural figureheads.[36]

But while the government had initially been suspicious of the power of the Chiefs over rural populations, and took steps to curtail it, they were never fully successful. The chiefs are the traditional custodians of customary law, and wield huge influence. As a former magistrate interviewed for this research said of the Chiefs: "power is in their veins". But it was not merely a question of implementation difficulties:

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[36] The instruments for this included the Zimbabwean Customary Law and Primary Courts Act (1981) and the Chiefs and Headmen Act (1982). For discussion, see Derek Matyszak, "Formal structures of power in rural Zimbabwe", Research and Advocacy Unit (Zimbabwe), 2010; and J. de Visser, N. Steytler & N. Machingauta (eds) Local government reform in Zimbabwe: A policy dialogue, Community Law Centre, University of the Western Cape (South Africa), 2010.

as time passed and Zanu-PF saw its key rural support base eroding, it saw the value of co-opting, rather than attempting to curtail, traditional power. In 2000, the Traditional Leaders Act reinstated many of the powers that had previously been stripped from Chiefs. But it also gave the President power to appoint Chiefs ("with due consideration to the customary principles of succession") and to remove them, and provided for a State allowance or salary to be paid. These changes paved the way for a politicization of the traditional role of Chiefs. As one person in Matabeleland North noted derisively: "Chiefs are now even talking politics at funerals".

The present research indicated that Chiefs are viewed in two ways. In some cases, people viewed them as executing their functions in an efficient and non-partisan way, and therefore as effective leaders of their communities. In other cases, people viewed them as having lost the respect of people, leading them to be openly criticized.

Views on the role of Chiefs, positive and negative

"The problem is that Chiefs are hereditary, it's not based on skill or popularity. It's pot luck. Some Chiefs refused food-for-work programs out of ignorance, which could have helped their community. Another Chief you will find using his official vehicle as a community ambulance."

HOUSEWIFE, MARRIED TO A SENIOR POLICE OFFICER, BINGA, MATABELELAND NORTH

"Traditional leaders have a key role to play. They can resist many things that are going on in communities. For example, they can say to the perpetrators of violence on both sides: "I'm the Chief, I'm not Zanu-PF or MDC, and I'm telling you not to do violence here". But to do so, it's critical that they are non-partisan. If they'd been seen wearing Morgan's head [i.e. wearing an MDC-T t-shirt], they couldn't do this. Chiefs can also do the opposite, pro-actively bringing violence to their areas."

HEAD OF LOCAL NGO, BULAWAYO

"The Chief can declare that he does not want any bloodshed in his area – but this assumes that he has the guts to approach the army headquarters and talk to the commander. Otherwise, the perpetrators may not listen to the Chief."

CHAIRMAN OF A COMMUNITY IRRIGATION SCHEME, MASHONALAND EAST

"The Chiefs generally don't encourage the violence, but they are part of the system – they get vehicles and a salary from the State. If Chiefs try to stop State-sponsored violence, they'll be chased away."

MDC ACTIVIST, MARONDERA, MASHONALAND EAST

In terms of government structures, Zimbabwe is divided into 10 administrative provinces. Rural provinces are made up of districts (57 in total), which are in turn subdivided into wards (1569 in total). Wards are in turn made up of villages (in urban areas the corresponding subdivision is the neighbourhood). Each district is represented by a council, and each ward is represented by an elected councillor. Central

government is represented locally by District Administrators in each of the districts.[37]

Views of government authority structures were generally more negative than views towards traditional structures. Government structures were seen as corrupt, and dominated by Zanu-PF appointees – and those opposition candidates who had been elected as councillors were seen as having little power (or in some cases, little inclination) to push the interests of local people.

Three ordinary people's views on local government authorities

"District Administrators are not soliciting views of people, just sitting in their office talking about the issues of the people without knowing their real concerns or consulting them."

"Councillors are the ones who see what is going on. District Administrators are in a position to do something, but are not effective as they are aligned to certain parties."

"Local authorities mainly protect their political masters and their own interests. They do help to a certain extent on big issues, for example strategies to address cholera outbreaks, or approaching donors to provide aid."

Related to the role of the authorities is the role of the media. A key issue in Zimbabwe has been the role of the State media in promoting a Zanu-PF agenda and disseminating hate speech. The research suggests that this was mostly an urban phenomenon. Access to the media is minimal in rural areas. Newspapers arrive when they are out-of-date, "so are used either for cigarettes or for wrapping something". Access to television is very limited. One political activist, remarking on this, noted: "I enjoy peace only when I'm in the rural areas". This lack of media penetration, several people suggested, was the reason why there was so much focus by Zanu-PF on forcing people to attend its political rallies in rural areas. The main goal was not to recruit people to its cause, but rather, it was the only way to spread its message, including intimidation and hate speech.

Access to radio was more widespread, particularly with the advent of cheap Chinese-made radios, as well as wind-up shortwave radios not requiring electricity or batteries. However, it was noted that since there were now alternative stations (such as Voice of America's 'Studio 7'), fewer people were listening to the State broadcasts. In such a context, in some areas people reported that the authorities were confiscating wind-up radios (which can receive Studio 7), and sometimes arresting the owners. (Similarly, in some suburbs of Harare in 2008, there had been campaigns forcing people to take down

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[37] District Administrators generally have a much less prominent role in Harare than in rural areas, with many in Harare not knowing who their District Administrator is, or even thinking they do not have one.

satellite dishes. In some cases, people reported that they were still too scared to put the dishes back up.)

It was also noted that the problems of biased or inaccurate reporting could run in the other direction. That is, the State media does not only push a Zanu-PF agenda; the journalists also try to impress government or party leaders.

> The gap between press reports and reality on ground is a problem. Some stories are even written from the armchair in a city office, based on rumour. For example, in one case I know of, a State media article said: "people in village X are so unreasonable, they just want to beat up the police". This reporting prompted State-sponsored violence against the villagers. But the truth behind the original incident was that the villagers had tried to restrain drunk police from beating people up.
>
> **RETIRED MAGISTRATE, MATABELELAND NORTH**

4.4 The role of outside actors

In addition to the role of communities themselves in responding to challenges they faced, interviewees were asked to comment on the role of outside actors in addressing their protection concerns. Many referred to the role of local and international NGOs, and church organizations, in providing assistance – everything from food aid and food-for-work programs, to safe water supplies, clothing, blankets, health services and medicines, education support, and so on.

For a significant proportion of interviewees, "relying on NGOs" or "church handouts" was one of the coping mechanisms they referred to. Others joined political parties with the specific expectation (or hope) of receiving such assistance. United Nations agencies were mentioned less often, presumably as a result of the fact that they implement many of their programs through local partners – although some agencies (such as UNICEF and WFP) were mentioned as important sources of support, perhaps because of the scale of their operations and the fact that they had been involved in major crises such as the cholera epidemic and the major food shortages resulting from the land reform program.

Many people indicated that they received support from government. People spoke of having received subsidised agricultural inputs, free health care (for example, the elderly, children and people living with HIV/AIDS), and education support for orphans (through the 'BEAM' initiative). Many such initiatives are supported by UN agencies, and with donor funding. Although the scale of some of these programs is

clearly large, it is also clear that the needs in the country are enormous, and therefore it is not surprising that a significant proportion of people interviewed indicated that they had not received government support, or felt that levels of support were not sufficient.

Some interviewees went further, claiming that international assistance was not reaching the people who need it – because it was stolen, or diverted by the authorities to particular political constituencies. Such claims must be treated with some caution. The perception clearly exists among a (non-negligible) proportion of people, and this in itself is something that it may be important for agencies to address. But assessing the veracity of such perceptions is another matter. That is something best done by strong monitoring and reporting mechanisms, and not by a research project such as this one – which, by design, elicits qualitative, impressionistic information.

Nevertheless, it is possible to make two comments based on the present research which may be relevant in this regard. First is that it would be surprising in a politicized context such as Zimbabwe if such incidents did not occur. It is therefore a possibility that agencies need to be acutely aware of, and in particular to ensure that the monitoring and reporting mechanisms in place are well-designed to pick up on such questions, and that they are rigorously implemented. The diverse local perspectives on the different issues contained in this report may be useful in that regard. Two specific concerns raised by interviewees, by way of example only, are as follows:

> [One organization] located the boreholes they were providing at community centres. This may have seemed like a good idea, but all community centres are controlled by Zanu-PF people. When long queues started forming, they ensured that their supporters got water first.
>
> **COMMUNITY WORKER, HARARE**

> [One organization] was conducting a vulnerability/poverty assessment in Matabeleland North. But the results were not accurate. If people have cattle, for example, it's seen as an asset. But culturally, some cattle are not for consumption or sale. They are spiritual, or a cultural asset that can't be dipped into. Also, having children in South Africa was seen as reducing vulnerability, when in reality it can increase it.
>
> **LOCAL NGO STAFF MEMBER, BULAWAYO**

The other comment relates to targeting. Of those people interviewed for this research, the ones who appeared (subjectively) to be among the most vulnerable also tended to be the ones who reported receiving assistance. For example, people who said they were living with HIV/

AIDS[38] reported that they were receiving related medical care for free, and people who were looking after orphans reported that they had access to the 'BEAM' education support initiative. This does not mean that everyone, or even the majority of people, who were in great need of different forms of support were being assisted, but it does give some indication – however tentative and impressionistic – that targeting of assistance was broadly appropriate. But again, the present study was not designed to give any firm answer that particular question.

As regards the role of outside actors in advocating for political change, most responses were fairly superficial, indicating that the majority of people – and in rural areas, the vast majority – are not following such issues closely. It was generally known that South Africa was playing some sort of mediation role, but there was little knowledge of the details of the Southern African Development Community (SADC) process. Those people who did express views were mostly sceptical of the prospects of such a process, though many recognized that there were good intentions behind it. Most people were aware of Western sanctions, and had heard that "they are harming us"; this is not surprising, given that criticism of these sanctions is a key plank of Zanu-PF's political platform. Most people were of the view that the West was trying its best to help Zimbabweans, many citing humanitarian and other forms of assistance in this regard.

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[38] As stated previously, no one was asked about their HIV status during any of the interviews.

5. CONCLUSIONS

The following table provides a brief summary of the threats and coping strategies identified by the research.

Threat	Coping strategies
Political violence	Cooption (e.g. joining Zanu–PF, befriending those committing violence); compliance (e.g. pretending to support a party's views, or attending its rallies or buying membership cards); political neutrality (in fact or in appearance); threat management (e.g. walking in groups, carrying a loud whistle, information sharing); seeking protection (e.g. from another party, local power holders or mediators); bribery (e.g. paying protection money, or bribing police to provide protection); threat avoidance (e.g. by fleeing or hiding); resistance (e.g. issuing threats, fighting back or retaliating).
Economic deprivation	Community organization (e.g. forming 'clubs', self–help groups, or cooperatives); subsistence strategies (e.g. subsistence agriculture or urban farming, living off the land); barter trade; frugality (eating less expensive food or skipping meals); participating in the informal economy (e.g. informal vending, piece work, cross–border trading); unregistered cottage industries or home businesses; illegal or criminal activities (illicit gold–panning or diamond prospecting/trading, making and selling illicit alcohol, drug dealing, prostitution, shoplifting, burglary, fraud); migration (internal and to neighbouring countries or beyond).
Theft and burglary	Guarding crops (individually or through community protection groups); neighbourhood watch; black magic (e.g. tying threatening symbols or objects to crops, "using magic to punish thieves"); reporting to police (and sometimes bribing them to take action).

Lack of municipal services (electricity, water, etc.)	Use alternative fuels (wood, paraffin); use diesel generators (very expensive); rely on communal boreholes; purchase water; digging backyard wells; bribing local authorities to provide services.
Health threats	Resorting to traditional medicines; relying on witch–doctors and faith healers; using unregistered midwives or traditional birth attendants (cheaper than government clinics); home births without trained help; running away from hospitals after treatment/birth without paying bills.

A number of concluding observations may be relevant.

Real and perceived threats. The threats that people identified, and that are discussed in this report, are perceived threats. Of course, the threats that people perceive are generally well correlated with the actual threats that they face (we wouldn't have survived long as a species were it otherwise). Nevertheless, there can be important divergences. Threat perceptions are mediated by fears and cultural beliefs, neither of which are objective (we may be more scared by the harmless spider in our bathroom than by the potentially deadly electric hairdryer sitting on the edge of the bath).

Recognition of this is important in humanitarian protection, since it is necessary to consider both imagined threats and real threats, as both can have protection implications – fear of witchcraft or of vaccinations, even if they lack rational justification, can have effects that are just a real as fear of violence or of cholera. And people also need to be protected from things that they do not necessarily recognize as threats, but should: water–borne diseases, say, or the risks of falling victim to human trafficking.

A similar consideration applies to the prioritization of threats. Political violence is extremely emotive: even if it physically affects a relatively small proportion of a population, it can instil widespread fear (that, after all, is its raison d'être) as well as indignation. Or to take an extreme example, fear of tokoloshi (goblins) is also highly emotive, and can be very powerful, even though from a rational standpoint there is no real threat. Such issues are particularly relevant when people come to make the difficult trade–offs between different protection concerns: should they flee to protect themselves from potential violence, at a significant cost to livelihood? Should they spend scarce resources on magic charms, at the cost of less food?

What global protection frameworks miss. This report has made an effort to highlight, along with more prosaic threats, the protection dimensions of such things as witchcraft, occult beliefs, and religious sects. This is for two reasons. First, because there is a tendency to dismiss such things as curiosities, whereas – at least in the Zimbabwe context – they can represent real protection issues that should not be ignored. The second reason is that they provide obvious examples of the kinds of culturally-specific issues that tend to be missed in protection assessments. Any global protection framework, however well designed and effectively implemented, will inevitably fail to capture local and cultural phenomena. In some cases, what is missed may be important, in other cases it may not be – but the only way to determine this is to carry out the local-level research and find out. This is something that is rarely done in practice.

Finally, and most importantly, must be the recognition that the impact of external protection interventions will always be relatively minor compared with actions taken by the affected communities and individuals themselves. It is therefore vital for external protection actors to be sensitive to the local context, and to identify and support appropriate local protection strategies as much as possible.