(online) = ISSN 2285 – 3642
ISSN-L = 2285 – 3642
Journal of Economic Development, Environment and People
Volume 11, Issue 4, 2022

URL: http://jedep.spiruharet.ro
e-mail: office_jedep@spiruharet.ro

ASSESSING ECONOMIC POLICIES IN ZIMBABWE: THE GROWTH WITH EQUITY POLICY 1981

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Abstract: *There are various economic policies implemented in Zimbabwe to improve the socio-economic standards of the nation. The current article only focuses on the Growth with Equity Policy. The article assesses that the pre-independence policies in Zimbabwe were biased towards enrichment of the minority colonial regime. In Zimbabwe when it gained independence, a number of economic policies were put into place with an emphasis on equity-based socioeconomic growth. In order to correct historical inequities and promote social justice and inclusion for all Zimbabweans, it was also intended to offer parity and balance. Nevertheless, despite the Zimbabwean government's implementation of several economic measures since 1980, the country's economic status deteriorated and is continuing deteriorating as a result of adverse economic indicators.There ought to be something that has not yet been identified that has led to some Zimbabwean policies being abandoned soon after conception or midway through their life span, while others seem to have achieved less than expected. The findings are critical for the Government of Zimbabwe to advise the stakeholders accordingly on the principal factors that need to be done that will ultimately lead to the attainment of the desired goals. The study recommends areas which might need change management.*

Key words: Economic policies, Growth with Equity Policy, Socio-economic development, Qualitative research, Zimbabwe.

JEL code: H50; N17; O11

How to cite: Mutenga, M. and Vyas-Doorgapersad, S. (2022). ASSESSING ECONOMIC POLICIES IN ZIMBABWE: THE GROWTH WITH EQUITY POLICY 1981. *Journal of Economic Development, Environment and People, 11*(4). doi: 10.26458/jedep.v11i4.786

1. Introduction

In 1980, the Southern Rhodesia country was renamed Zimbabwe after the black indigenous people gained independence from the white settlers. The Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU-PF) was the political party which won the elections and formed the new government. Immediately, the anti-Rhodesia sanctions were lifted (Green & Khadani, 1986:1059-1060). The new government inherited a well-developed, highly diversified and prosperous agriculture and lucrative mining sector. In the immediate post-independence period rapid growth in GDP was achieved, amounting to 11% in 1980 and 12% in 1981

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in real terms. Economic growth was far higher than in most African countries averaging about 4% per annum, including all the Sub-Saharan countries (Sibanda & Makwata, 2017:5).

In Zimbabwe, post-independence policies performed in various ways. According to Gibbon (1995:7-8), Zimbabwe's social and economic policies in the post-colonial era, can be grouped into following phases, such as, the first phase, from independence to 1982 was accompanied by an economic boom and characterised by twin phenomena of the adoption of redistributive policies and a high level of mutual suspicion between government and capital. A second phase, from 1982 to around 1986, contained two major economic recessions, a check on redistributive policies and continuing cool relations between government and capital. The third phase, dating from 1986 to 1990 involved the resumption of a degree of economic growth and the downplaying of redistribution. The fourth, that of structural adjustment began in 1990 and has been marked by a very severe drought and economic contraction, an implicit rejection of re-distributivism and liberal economic policies (Gibbon, 1995:7-8). From 1995 many more phases were also observed and in particular, 1995-2000 marked the beginning of economic decline characterised by economic shocks induced by the 1997 unplanned pay outs to Veterans of the Liberation War and the cost of engaging in the civil war in the Democratic Republic of Congo. A sixth phase can be added, and this covers 2000-2008 which was highlighted by the chaotic fast-track land redistribution programme and the emergence of vibrant opposition politics which sent the ruling party into panic mode and the unprecedented hyperinflation period which culminated into the discontinuation of the Zimbabwe dollar. Between 2009 and 2012 the country recorded tremendous economic growth of 5.4%, 9.6%, 10.6% and 4.4% in that order which was a big relief after a decline of 17.7% in 2008 and that coincided with the Inclusive Government which saw ZANU-PF and Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) formations working together (Sibanda & Makwata, 2017:3-4). Unfortunately, as highlighted by Sibanda and Makwata (2017:3), since 2013 to date when the Inclusive government was replaced by a wholly ZANU-PF government the country has been slowly reversing those gains as highlighted by slow growth rates of 4.5%, 3.5% and 1.5% for 2013, 2014 and 2015 respectively, company closures, rising unemployment and rampant street vending as people struggle to survive punctuated with the recent wave of demonstrations in 2016 as people vented their frustrations with the government. In 2016 the economy contracted by 0.3% according to the International Monetary Fund.

According to Basheka and Vyas-Doorgaperspad (2015:208; Mutenga & Vyas-Doorapersad, 2021:151), "in recent years, governments in Africa have been under increasing pressure to demonstrate their relevance because citizens are demanding better delivery of public services. In response to these numerous calls for an enhanced level of efficiency and a general improvement in service delivery, governments are designing and implementing a number of new and/or amended public policies". Consequently, post-independence Zimbabwe attempted to address some of these issues through a number of country-specific initiatives. The policies were crafted to address these imbalances and meet the expectations of the majority by creating administrative structures with the aim of delivering development as part of the national agenda. The literature reviewed therefore raised a concern such as: why economic policies performed differently in various phases. It is thus the aim of this longitudinal study to highlight the determinants and critical success factors for effective implementation of economic policies in Zimbabwe, exploring each policy individually.

2. Research Methodology

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The study is qualitative that is “typically used in the humanities and social sciences. It is conducted to grasp experiences, concepts, or opinions, gather a comprehensive understanding of a problem, or generate new ideas for research” (Bhandari, 2020:1; Vyas-Doorgapersad & Masibigiri, 2022:131). The study utilised secondary qualitative data collection method wherby information was gathered through the analysis of published documents, such as books and articles. Data was analysed through conceptual and content analysis. Conceptual analysis according to Auriacombe (2012, adapted by Mutenga, 2021:27) needs to indicate which interpretations of concepts, theories, phenomena and variables the researcher believes to be most valid, and it must be supported by evidence. Downe-Wamboldt (1992:314) explains that as a research method, content analysis represents a systematic and objective means of describing any phenomena under study The documents that content analysts investigate includes newspapers, letters, and communiques, and speeches. The content analysis was employed in this study to critically assess the implementation of national economic policy.

3. Economic Status Of Southern African Development Community (SADC)

The Southern African region is characterised by unacceptably high levels of unemployment, poverty and inequality. In several Southern African countries, such as Zimbabwe and Swaziland, poverty and inequality are on the increase (Jaffee, 2014:21). ZimStat (2017:19) indicates that “as at 2017, in Zimbabwe 70.5 percent of households were poor and having limited access to essential services, which is an indicator of disparities being observed. Rural individual poverty increased from 84.3 percent in 2011/12 to 86.0 percent in 2017. Extreme poverty among the population increased from 22.5 percent in 2011/12 to 29.3 percent in 2017. The International Labour Organisation (ILO) in a policy brief, entitled ‘Inequality in Southern Africa: Options for Redress’(n.d.:1), further confirmed that even agricultural economies such as Malawi and resource-rich countries such as Namibia, South Africa and Angola have been unable to significantly reduce wealth gaps and the rates of poverty and unemployment. Most “SADC countries managed to achieve some progress in the period immediately after independence, usually through expanded social services, to reach most of the population which had been deliberately neglected under colonial rule. However, there was no systematic transformation of economic structures, and the typical African enclave economy persists until today. This enclave economy is typically characterised by a relatively small and well-resourced formal sector that operates in isolation from a large, growing and poverty-stricken informal economy and the communal subsistence economy” (ILO, n.d.:1). This situation shows Zimbabwe, a case under study, is in crisis that served as one of the drivers and/ or determinants for socio-economic policies in the region.

As higlighted by ILO (n.d.:1), a third of SADC residents live in extreme poverty, while 40% of the labor force is either jobless or underemployed. More than 60% of the population lacks access to a sufficient quantity of clean water. Urban regions, families headed by women, and young people in particular are experiencing higher than average rates of poverty. ILO (n.d.:1) adds that, Seven SADC nations fall into the medium HDI category and six are in the low HDI category when compared to the Human Development Index (HDI), which takes into account factors including life expectancy, education, and living conditions. Despite the fact that the majority of the nations in the area have middle incomes, the region nonetheless has some of the worst levels of income disparity in the whole globe (ILO, n.d.:1). With white people making up around 5% of the population and owning more than 80% of the land in South Africa, for example, the allocation of resources and income is racially prejudiced and extremely skewed. Too many people in

Southern Africa still don't understand what social mobility and equitable opportunity are. The region is characterised by continuing gender disparities in traditional behaviors, labor market discrimination, and unequal access to social services and economic resources like land (ILO, n.d.:1-2). In a nutshell the economic policies in the SADC did not meet their intended targets. The policies have failed to address the real fundamental problems. Sustainable economic and human development growth is still lacking in most of the SADC countries. It is further highlighted by Mutenga (2021:84) citing Bond (2000:183) that realising the devastating effects of the Structural Adjustment Programme, the government embarked on policy reversals. These included enacting selective price controls, raising tariffs, requiring import licenses for certain goods, delaying the completion of regional liberalization goals, fixing exchange rates, closing foreign currency accounts, implementing new export incentives, and imposing new levies on tobacco and consumer goods. It is further stated by Bond (2000:183; Mutenga, 2021:84) that the late morning of November 14, 1997, when foreign currency speculators withdrew from the country and the Zimbabwe dollar lost 74% of its value over the course of four hours, was likely the precise time the Zimbabwean economy started to fall apart broadly. To deal with such challenges and to improve the socio-economic standards of the nation, Zimbabwe implemented various economic policies. The article focuses on the Growth with Equity Policy.

4. Growth With Equity Policy 1981

Within one year of independence, the GoZ issued an economic policy statement known as *Growth with Equity Policy (1981)*, which provided the framework for overall sectoral policies that the government intended to pursue in the short, medium and long terms. This policy asserted government's desire to develop the country guided by socialist and democratic principles in the allocation and distribution of resources and social benefits (Zhou & Zvoushe, 2012:214; Mutenga & Vyas-Doorgapersad, 2021:151). The major areas of achievements were that social services became free and accessible to the majority. The policy was abandoned because of unsustainable levels of recurrent expenditure which led to increases in inflation (World Bank [WB], 2013). The Growth with Equity Policy (GWEP) was launched in 1981. The technocrats in the newly independent state in the early 1980s designed economic and social *policies* with the overall objective of achieving what was termed '*growth with equity policy* through planned change', in order to arrest a situation of '*growth* with widening inequalities' (Sachikonye, 2003:217). Soon after independence there was an urgency to rebuild the country. As such, policies became the domain of the technocrats. Dogan (1975:5) points to the crucial role of the ministerial bureaucracy and top civil servants in policy formulation. The final decision on a specific policy remains in the realm of the responsible institutions (mainly the President, cabinet, ministers and parliament).

The government had an urgent need to address these problems as was espoused in the Zimbabwe Conference on Reconstruction and Development (ZIMCORD, 1981:1). The ZIMCORD included commitments made by Britain (former colonial masters) at Lancaster House Conference to mobilise the support of the international community to assist the government and people of an independent Zimbabwe with financial and technical resources for land resettlement, rural and agricultural development Zimbabwe, and rapid economic development (ZIMCORD, 1981:1). Local skill development and full-time work were hampered by these measures, particularly for Black people. Additionally, a racial and urban/rural zoning electoral system limited vertical and horizontal population migrations, which hampered or skewed national labor mobility and skill acquisition.These policies, devices and practices inevitably led to racial polarisation, confrontation,

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ISSN-L = 2285 – 3642
Journal of Economic Development, Environment and People
Volume 11, Issue 4, 2022

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the war of liberation and consequent loss of life, and general destruction and disruption of the social and economic infrastructure (GWEP 1981:1). During the democratic dispensation after the end of war, the country, dedicated to reconciliation, according to the information compiled from the documents of the GWEP (1981:1), had to undertake the task of resettlement and rehabilitation, as well as embarking on a deliberate programme of restructuring and developing the economic and social fabric in order to achieve sustained, balanced and equitable economic growth and development.

The issue of land and rural development was at the centre of the GWEP. About four million people lived on the limited and generally inferior land in the traditional black areas, whilst only about 5000 commercial farmers controlled most the generally more fertile half of the agricultural land in the country. Land redistribution was therefore essential to relieve pressure where considerable human overcrowding and overgrazing had resulted in depletion of the soil. Government planned to embark on a Land Acquisition Policy (ZIMCORD, 1981:3). Thus, commercial land, according to the ZIMCORD (1981:37), which was underutilised was intended to be purchased by government to further redistribute it to Zimbabweans who were made homeless during war. Land in commercial areas that was being farmed productively was not going to be diverted from its use and ownership. ZIMCORD (1981:2) further emphasised that vigorous measures were also required to restore war-damaged infrastructure to a usable condition. Full rehabilitation infrastructure was considered as urgent. These included schools, hospitals, water supplies, cattle dip tanks, telecommunication equipment, irrigation equipment, rural businesses, roads, amongst others. As a stop- gap until the output of new and expanded training institutions, there was a need to fill the critical skills required, using professional and technical personnel from abroad in many sectors (ZIMCORD, 1981:2). The Government's primary objective was to achieve equitable economic growth and development (ZIMCORD, 1981:1). In pursuing this objective, the Government of Zimbabwe aimed at achieving the following objectives (GWEP, 1981:2), amongst others:

- Establish progressively a society founded on socialist, democratic and egalitarian principles which are inherent in the policies and measures enunciated herein;
- Achieve a sustained high rate of economic growth and speedy development in order to raise incomes and standards of living of all our people and expand productive employment of rural peasants and urban workers, especially the former;
- A more equitable distribution of income and income earning opportunities across racial groups;
- Develop and restructure the economy in ways which will produce rural development, desired changes in patterns of consumption, technology, exports, etc., and in ways consistent with the most desirable use and conservation of our natural resources and the environment;
- End imperialist exploitation, and achieve greater and more equitable degrees of ownership of natural resources including land; promote participation in, and ownership of, a significant portion of the economy by nationals and the State; and
- Create and maintain high levels of employment for Zimbabweans in all sectors and at all levels of skill and responsibility and redress the historical racial imbalance in skilled employment (GWEP 1981:2).

A budget of $3, 898 billion (private and public) gross investments was required for the planning period. The budget was broken down as follows (ZIMCORD, 1981:10): contributions from the public sector ($1,118 billion); foreign capital inflows ($2,302 billion); and external assistance (grants/or soft loans) ($0.478 billion). The assessment, "by the Government of Zimbabwe, of the resource requirements for post-

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war recovery and land settlement and rural/agricultural development and technical assistance was indeed foreseen at the Lancaster House Conference (1979), enormous and well beyond the capacity of Zimbabwe/or a single donor. The GWEP indicated the need for formulating and implementing a national development plan. In this regard, Government was expected to formulate a three-year transitional plan which was expected to be launched in July 1981" (ZIMCORD, 1981:2). The positive impact of the plan is stated in Table 1 highlighting the increase in the education expenditure for socio-economic development in Zimbabwe.

Table1: Economic Indicators: Growth with Equity Policy (1981)

Economic Indicator	1980 Baseline Data	1981	1982	1983	1984	1985
Total Government Revenue and Grants (Z$ million)	$ 675	$ 949	$ 1 365	$ 1 781	$ 1 997	$ 2 212
Government Expenditure on Education (Z$ million) / % of total Government Expenditure	$ 99 14.9%	$ 144 19.2%	$ 260 25.8%	$ 300 26.4%	$ 363 27.2%	$ 447 28.7%
Government Expenditure on Health (Z$ million)	$54 8.1%	$70 9.3%	$95 9.4%	$106 9.3%	$128 9.5%	$164 10.5%
Government Expenditure on Housing and Community amenities (Z$ million)	$26 3.9%	$35 4.6%	$34 3.4%	$53 4.7%	$46 3.4%	$53 3.4%
Total Government Consumption Expenditure (Z$ million)	$663	$750	$1 007	$1 138	$1 334	$1 559
Government Expenditure to GDP ratio	31%	29%	32%	36%	41%	32%
Budget Deficit (Z$ million)	$-375	$-335	$-317	$-466	$-630	$-711
Government Debt (Z$ million)	$1 840.2	$2 095	$2478.6	$2 850.3	$3 744	$4 638.6
GDP Growth (%)	10.8%	13.5%	3.3%	1.3%	-2.2%	10.6 %
Inflation Rate (%)	10.3 %	13.6%	17.4%	14.4 %	12.4 %	15.6%
Current a/c Deficit to GDP (%)	-4.9%	-10.9%	-11.6%	-8.9%	-1.8%	-1.9%
General Government (GFCF) (Z$ million)	63.9	99.7	169.9	195.4	234.9	266.5
Exports (Z$ million)	909	972	968	1 150	1 453	1 596
Imports (Z$ million)	809	1 018	1 082	1 062	1 201	1 447
Private Investment (GFCF)	$464	$730	869	1 043	950	1 033
Private Investment to GDP %	13%	16.47%	16.72%	16.53%	14.84%	11.36%
Total GFCF	$ 528	$ 830	$1 039	$1 238	$ 1 185	$ 1 300

Source: Zimbabwe National Statistics Agency [ZimStat], 1986

The 1984 and 1985 Budget Statements were linked to the objectives of the Growth with Equity Policy (Table 2).

Table 2: National Budget Allocations and other Economic Indicators for the Period 1980-1985

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Government Debt (Z$ million)	$1 840.2	$2 095	$2478.6	$2 850.3	$3 744	$4 638.6

Source: ZimStat, 1986; Budget Statements, 1984/85; National Budget Estimates, 1982/83, 1984/85

The general economic conditions during the 1981 to 1985 period were characterised by a controlled state environment wherein citizens were completely dependent on the government for economic support meaning too much dependency on government for survival by the citizens. The economy was tightly controlled by the state. The economy recovered "significantly in the early years of independence averaging 10 percent growth during 1980-82. This was mainly because the country had inherited one of the most structurally developed economies and effective state systems in Africa" (African Development Bank [AfDB], n.d.:2). The Economic Intelligence Unit (1988:7) reveals that the first two years of independence saw astronomical economic development thanks to the establishment of peace and international legitimacy, as well as extraordinarily strong rains in 1980 and 1981 and the stimulation of domestic demand by significant pay rises. Tables 1 and 2 indicate that government expenditure on education was constantly increasing from 14.9% of GDP in 1980, 26.4% in 1983 to 28.7% in 1985. As a result of high budgetary allocations to education, government was able to implement the free basic primary education for all policy, which resulted in the establishment of more primary and secondary schools. In the health sector, the main thrust was to affect a reasonable balance between the rural and urban population and ensuring equity in service delivery and significantly levelling out rural disparities. From table 1, it is clear that government expenditure increased exponentially from 8.1% in 1980, 9.3% in 1983 to 10.5% in 1985, thereby supporting the development of the health sector. As highlighted by Nyazema (2010:233), there was progress made in the 1980s characterised by adequate financing of the health system and decentralised health management and equity of health services between urban and rural areas, which saw dramatic increases in child survival rates and life expectancy.

Regarding resettlement of indigenous people, very little budget was set aside for this exercise. The average budgetary allocation towards housing and community social amenities was averaging 3.9% over the five years, indicating the same level of resource commitments during the colonial era. According to ZIMCORD (1981), "at the Lancaster House Conference in 1979, Britain made commitments to mobilise the support of the international community to assist the independent Zimbabwe with financial and technical resources for land settlement and rural and agricultural development. However, after independence the promises were not fulfilled which made it difficult for the new Government to implement the resettlement programme". The economy experienced very high growth rates in 1980 and 1981, respectively. Exports grew from Z$ 909 million in 1980 to Z$1596 million in 1985, thereby decreasing the current account deficit from -4.9% to -1.9% of GDP in 1980 and 1985 respectively. It is important to note that the growth of social divisions was not accompanied by the growth of advantageous divisions, as a retreat was sparked toward the end of the policy's lifespan by a number of factors, including decreased demand for Zimbabwean sends out because of an inflated amount of money, a decrease in venture and capital arrangement, severe deficiencies of remote money, and a decrease in speculation and capital arrangement.

The GWEP followed a top-down approach in its formulation stage, given the urgency of social and economic issues which needed to be attended to soon after independence. Because of this notable practice and belief by citizens, it is important that the public should be subjected to wide consultation before implementation of policies and the policies should address the public needs (Dogan, 1975:5). Since this policy was launched just soon after independence, the majority of citizens had the zeal to develop their livelihoods which had been devastated by a prolonged liberation war (Dogan, 1975:5). The Government of Zimbabwe (GoZ)'s National Budget Statement (NBS) (GoZ, 1984:27-28) reiterates the importance of community participation stating that "government will continue to look towards the increasing participation of local authorities, communities and the community at large to support existing education/health services as well as with regard to planned expansion of these services". It can be specified that the GWEP improved the citizenry's lives through improved education, health and infrastructure. These results are consistent with secondary data where the economic indicators show that there were increased budgetary allocations for education, health and infrastructure during the policy's lifespan. A number of schools, clinics and hospitals were constructed during this policy period in the rural areas and high-density suburbs where the majority of indigenous Zimbabweans reside (Zimbabwe Conference on Reconstruction and Development (ZIMCORD) (1981:3). This led to improvement in social development such as an improved literacy rate, and a low mortality rate, among other indicators. However, growth was not balanced, the productive sectors were lagging behind. The policy did not achieve much in one of its major objectives, that is, resettlement of the indigenous people who had been displaced during the colonial era. The policy budget allocation on resettlement was insignificant. During the colonial era, about four million people lived on the limited and generally inferior land in the traditional black areas whilst only about 5000 commercial farmers controlled most the generally more fertile half of the agricultural land in the country (ZIMCORD, 1981:3). Given that not much was achieved to redress this anomaly, this explains why the policy created negative socio-economic development in the country.

5. Conclusion

The current administration should constantly be honest about socioeconomic growth. To foster an atmosphere that supports progress, significant reforms must be done without fear or favour. Instead of

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ISSN-L = 2285 – 3642
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pursuing the interests of one person or one political party, the policies should be centered on furthering the development of the entire country (cf Vyas-Doorgapersad, 2022:21). Policy inconsistency is a major problem in government to the extent that policy announcements by cabinet ministers were sometimes conflicting; thereby creating confusion in the country. Clarity and uniformity in policies can only be attained if the correct procedures are followed while drafting them, including thorough discussions and the engagement of specialists. Sometimes policy inconsistency rose from political interference with government business. Such exclusionary actions must be avoided as they erode the confidence of the general populace, who wonder whose agenda will be pursued by policies. Political conflicts in the country have weakened bureaucratic and economic efficiency and alienated foreign relations. The political crisis adversely affects the country's image internationally. This is particularly evident in the tourism sector and investors who are very sensitive to political stability. Many countries in the past issued several travel warnings against Zimbabwe, thereby negatively affecting the tourism sector, foreign direct inflows, and the entire country's economic growth. The bulk of the population was depressed, which fuelled international competition and political restraint. The informal economy has taken the place of the traditional economy. Zimbabwe have always yielded contested results since the formation of the main opposition party, Movement for Democratic Change (MDC). The issues of elections being rigged, whether perceived or real, curtail all developmental efforts in the country. This study urges the country to conduct elections which yield undisputed results. Failure to do this leads to perpetual civil unrest which deters investors and thereby plunges the nation into a further economic abyss.

Two economic transformation and growth plans; namely the *Transitional National Development Plan (1982/83–1984/85)* and the *First Five-Year National Development Plan (1986-90)* were formulated in line with the broad policy objective of GWEP firmly rooted in socialist and egalitarian principles. These policies will be assessed to form part of future publications. These assessments are imperative, and the rationale is that policy implementation in Zimbabwe has not been subject to enough scholarly attention among policy analysts. General efforts by scholars have been directed at the broad policy cycle and gaps remain in policy implementation. In the case of Zimbabwe, the government has barely documented information detailing how each of the above policies have performed. The information available in the public domain is scanty and fragmented. No compendium of information was ever developed by government which will make it possible to see the success, failures, lessons learnt of each policy. This and future articles therefore seek to gather information to close policy implementation gaps in Zimbabwe. This longitudinal study therefore aims to identify principal factors that, when followed in Zimbabwe, will make a policy achieve its intended goals.

Note: The article is based on a completed unpublished PhD Thesis titled: Mutenga, M. 2020. The determinants of Zimbabwe's economic policies on socio-economic development:1980-2015 at UJ under the supervision of Prof S Vyas-Doorgapersad. Unpublished Thesis. Johannesburg: University of Johannesburg.

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