



LEDRIZ:

**Unions Create Democratic Space
in Zimbabwe**

ZIMBABWE: A Political and Economic Snapshot



Since winning independence from the United Kingdom in 1980, Zimbabwe has only known one man at the head of its government: Robert Mugabe. Over the last three decades, President Mugabe and his party, Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU-PF), have consolidated power in the country.

During this period, Zimbabweans have seen rebellion, a costly war abroad, government repression, flawed elections, social unrest, chaotic decision-making, economic crises and, for many, increasing poverty. Structural adjustment programs and other economic policies pushed thousands of workers into the informal economy, swelling the ranks of the urban poor. Clumsy land reform decimated a robust agriculture sector—once a main source of export income—and brought, as a consequence, nearly two decades of internationally imposed sanctions. Fiscal austerity measures **led resource-rich Zimbabwe to an economic meltdown**. And by July 2008, year-on-year inflation stood at 231 million percent.

Dissent in Zimbabwe—by politicians, rights activists and working people—is commonly met with harassment, heavy-handed suppression or outright violence. The Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions (ZCTU) became increasingly and vocally opposed to the government in the 1990s and has played a critical civil-society role as an opposing voice to punishing policies. The ZCTU's ability to operate and affect policy is often constrained through the arrests of its leaders, disruptions of its meetings and banning of marches.

Yet workers have continued to seek a say in the policies that weigh on their lives and livelihoods. In 1999, a formal opposition movement gained momentum through the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC), a political party led by former trade union leader Morgan Tsvangirai. The Mugabe government in 2008, following a campaign of election-related violence and under pressure from internal upheaval and international sanctions, agreed to a power-sharing arrangement with the MDC. Tsvangirai was sworn in as prime minister, and the parties agreed to produce a draft constitution, followed by free and fair presidential elections. Voters approved the long-delayed new constitution in March 2013.

While the economy is showing some improvement, the country still faces sanctions, a majority of the workforce is under- or unemployed, poverty persists and Zimbabwe's long-term president remains in office.



Trade Unions Create Democratic Space in Zimbabwe

Given the severity of the political and economic constraints in Zimbabwe, the country seems an unlikely place for trade unions and their progressive allies to move democracy forward. Indeed, progress is relative in a country subject to corruption and politically motivated violence. Still unions persist as a voice of workers and the poor.

By recognizing the limits of the political system and shifting focus to economic strategies, Zimbabwean trade unions and their coalition partners have created an opening in the public sphere for the concerns of working people to be heard—and are highlighting issues feeding into the nation's poverty crisis. They are doing so through direct engagement with multiple levels of government and with business leaders in Zimbabwe, primarily in conjunction with a unique research institute that has won the trust of workers, lawmakers and business leaders.

LEDRIZ: Research Spearheads Action

ZCTU recognized the need for an alternate and pro-poor economic model in 1991, the year the government began implementing an economic structural adjustment program (ESAP) without consultation with key stakeholders, including workers.

As a matter of course, ZCTU and its affiliates began criticizing the government for taking a top-down approach, and for being insensitive to the needs of ordinary Zimbabweans. It also adopted a complementary but unusual response: ZCTU created an economic policy department and hired economist Dr. Godfrey Kanyenze to head it.

The goal of the department was to involve labor actively in a search for economic growth alternatives, and to help labor contribute to economic policy formation, engage with policy-makers and advocate for workers. In 1996, ZCTU published *Beyond ESAP: Framework for a Long-Term Development Strategy for Zimbabwe*. The book and its authors marked a new era for the labor movement, where unions went beyond criticizing government policies to providing specific policy alternatives at macro and sectoral levels. With up-to-date economic data and analysis, the book and its authors helped fill an unusual demand: the search for objective information on the economy.

In 2003, the ZCTU's economic office became an independent think tank, the progressive Labor and Economic Development Research Institute of Zimbabwe (LEDRIZ). Today, it is leading the way voice on socioeconomic rights and development. LEDRIZ has developed a reputation as Zimbabwe's premiere economic research and policy organization, and its work has helped shape government strategies and union capacity. Its 10-member board includes six representatives from the trade union movement and four independent researchers.

Kanyenze describes the organization's goal as enabling working people and trade unionists to influence government policies.

"If the government then invites us directly to work with them so we can influence the policies directly, then that is



From left: **Naome Chakanya**, LEDRIZ economist and senior researcher; **John Mufukare**, executive director of the Employers' Confederation of Zimbabwe (EMCOZ); and ZCTU General Secretary **Japhet Moyo**.

Photos: Macpherson Photographers



LEDRIZ: A RESOURCE FOR WORKERS, EMPLOYERS, GOVERNMENT:
LEDRIZ offers a model for how to engage in constructive and fact-based policy discussions that support workers and their interests.

Employers: “The biggest danger to employers in Zimbabwe is HIV taking the youngest and the brightest,” says employers’ association leader John Mufukare. He touts a LEDRIZ study showing how worker-employer cooperation helps mitigate the epidemic’s spread and impact.

Workers: LEDRIZ’s 2009 research on the impact of Chinese investment in Africa showed that rather than create jobs for Zimbabwean workers, China imported workers for its factories and engaged in industrial relations practices that undermine workers’ well-being. Says LEDRIZ economist Naome Chakanya: “Our government should be more strategic in what it accepts as development.”

Government: “We basically cover almost every government department because development by its very nature is multisectoral,” says LEDRIZ Director Godfrey Kanyenze. In just one such example, LEDRIZ produced a detailed report on employment opportunities (the Zimbabwe National Employment Policy Framework, ZiNEPF) at the request of the Ministry of Labor and the Ministry of Youth, in collaboration with the International Labor Organization (ILO).

even better,” says Kanyenze. LEDRIZ’s research is disseminated and used by unions, civil society, government and the private sector.

When ZCTU leadership created LEDRIZ, it transformed the department into an economic think tank legally independent of ZCTU to broaden accessibility to its research and ensure its credibility among government officials and employers. While its initial research and policy work focused on capacity building in the labor movement, demand for its work quickly grew “from the government and also even from the employers,” says Kanyenze.

John Mufukare, executive director of the Employers’ Confederation of Zimbabwe (EMCOZ), says that employers rely on LEDRIZ’s research, especially labor market analyses.

“We have several government institutions dedicated to collecting data. But it’s not good enough,” says Mufukare. “LEDRIZ is more professional. Its data is reliable and reputable.” EMCOZ represents 54 employer organizations registered with the Zimbabwe Ministry of Labor.

LEDRIZ complements ZIMSTAT, the primary government entity responsible for economic data. ZIMSTAT’s analyses are released years late, and both employers and trade unionists agree that its information can serve political purposes. ZCTU General Secretary Japhet Moyo says accurate economic data is crucial to achieve mutually agreeable collective bargaining

outcomes. LEDRIZ provides data such as “comparisons on economic growth, sector performances, original trends, data on incomes, what CEOs are earning compared to workers,” Moyo says. “This information is very effective in collective bargaining.”

Uniting Labor, Employers and Government

Even before its genesis as an independent think tank, ZCTU’s economic policy department in 1998 took a big step toward uniting the nation’s stakeholders when it spearheaded the Tripartite Negotiating Forum (TNF). Employers, government officials and labor leaders are equally represented on the 39-member forum. The only organization of its kind today in Zimbabwe, its economic policy recommendations are driven by LEDRIZ’s research and analysis. Both employers and union leaders are actively lobbying Parliament to make the forum a permanent and independent secretariat. The goal, says EMCOZ’s Mufukare, is “social dialogue with legal standing.”

LEDRIZ has carried on and expanded upon these efforts to cultivate dialogue among business, labor and the government, and has achieved concrete goals through a variety of projects. One example involves its work on an issue that often draws controversy, and even unrest, in other nations: restructuring state-owned enterprises. LEDRIZ’s participation in the process not only ensured that restructuring preserved jobs and maintained or created efficient delivery of crucial services to citizens. Its efforts secured buy-in from all parties.

In 2008, LEDRIZ found that as state-owned enterprises had been restructured, workers—who had no input in shaping the process—suffered as full-time jobs were eliminated and operations were closed. LEDRIZ convened two conferences, bringing together government ministers, representatives of companies and workers. Naome Chakanya, LEDRIZ economist and senior researcher, says workers discussed how the restructuring processes “could be made more socially sensitive.”

The outcome was the “2011 National Framework Agreement on Restructuring of State Enterprises and Parastatals in Zimbabwe.” Chakanya and others describe the process of developing the framework as “revolutionary” because, for the first time and three decades into restructuring, the Zimbabwean government and employers engaged in a dialogue with workers.

Chakanya, who works extensively on restructuring issues and the privatization of state-owned enterprises, says prior to the



framework agreement, the government saw labor as “very arrogant and delaying the processes of restructuring.”

That is why “it was very exciting” to see how LEDRIZ’s work changed that harsh view, she says. “It was an eye-opener to see that social dialogue is possible.”

LEDRIZ’s leadership in the restructuring process also has drawn praise from employers running state-owned operations or privatized state enterprises. Says Mufukare, “LEDRIZ has done very good work in the area of restructuring of parastatals. They kept us in. We totally agree with them and with the solutions they suggest.”

Educating and Engaging Workers

LEDRIZ has recognized that an educated workforce is the precursor of an engaged workforce, and that fundamental to achieving progress in poverty alleviation is the empowerment and involvement of working people and the poor in the process. One of LEDRIZ’s biggest contributions in this area is its Economic Literacy and Rights training.

Through the training, LEDRIZ explores with workers how they should hold the government accountable for providing a return on their tax dollars by providing, at a minimum, clean water and sanitation, stable electricity, food security, basic health care, education, public transportation, housing and sound infrastructure. Workers learn to recognize the connection between democracy and good governance. LEDRIZ multiplies its impact by holding train-the-trainer programs on economic literacy and rights for ZCTU affiliates.

“This is a big part of what we do,” says Chakanya. “Workers are beginning to appreciate that they pay taxes and in return they should receive services.” LEDRIZ also encourages ZCTU and its affiliates to join forces with peer organizations to maximize their reach. Says Kanyenze, “We realized on our own we cannot actually influence the change. To influence policies, we need a critical mass.”

LEDRIZ worked with the International Labor Organization (ILO) on Zimbabwe’s *Decent Work Country Program Internal Review, 2009–2011*. Government, business and trade unionists accepted the *Internal Review’s* recommendations in 2012, which called for strengthening tripartite dialogue to address key needs including infrastructure investment and rehabilitation, waste management, maternity protection, access to health care for informal workers and

gender equality. Business leader Mufukare says the three stakeholders will take the report to the Zimbabwe cabinet, and from there, to Parliament.

In 2011, LEDRIZ co-authored *Beyond the Enclave: Towards a Pro-Poor and Inclusive Development Strategy for Zimbabwe* with the advocacy group Alternatives to Neo-Liberalism in Southern Africa (ANSA). The lengthy study—based on detailed economic data and analysis—looks at the contradiction of how a resource-rich country like Zimbabwe can suffer from endemic poverty. Its authors propose development policies formulated with broad-based stakeholder participation.

Beyond the Enclave was released nationally at an event attended by representatives of President Mugabe and Prime Minister Tsvangirai. Other government officials participated in the launch, along with trade union leaders, employers and representatives of organizations such as universities and faith groups. The wide range of participants highlighted LEDRIZ's credibility and the far-reaching success of its coalition-building strategy, which has paved the way for concrete achievements amid economic and political chaos.

Further, as part of its efforts to raise citizens' awareness of democratic rights, LEDRIZ in 2012 published a popular version of *Beyond the Enclave* streamlined and specifically designed for worker-based trainings. This version brings economic theory to the grassroots and provides a means for speaking to powerful interests in terms that all parties can understand.

As evidence of the respect LEDRIZ has gained, Zimbabwe's national budget for 2013, published November 2012, reflects the terminology of and draws extensively from "*Beyond the Enclave*." Indeed, the budget's subtitle is: "*Beyond the Enclave: Unleashing Zimbabwe's Economic Growth Potential*."

"While there will likely be challenges with the implementation (of the budget)," says Kanyenze, "impacting the narrative is a useful starting point."

GOING FORWARD: Taking the Argument for Citizen's Economic Rights on the Road

Inside Zimbabwe, LEDRIZ plans more programs to expand its grassroots outreach. "Not just to be talking economist to economist, or economist to government agency, but to create pressure from underneath and using ZCTU structures to do that," says Kanyenze.

On a broader scale, LEDRIZ will work directly with regional and global economic policy organizations to promote recognition of citizens' economic rights. With the ILO in Botswana, Lesotho, Swaziland and Namibia, LEDRIZ will provide technical assistance to help trade unions and other progressive groups move their agendas more successfully in national tripartite structures. And LEDRIZ will continue to work with regional and global pro-democracy and human rights organizations such as the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative [<http://eiti.org/>] and the Open Society Initiative for Southern Africa (OSISA) [<http://osisa.org/>].

LEDRIZ is a member of the African Labor Research Network (ALRN), which brings together research institutions linked to national trade union federations and their research departments across Africa and covers Benin, Ghana, Kenya, Malawi, Nigeria, Namibia, South Africa, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe. Its core mandate "is to promote collaborative policy-oriented research for the African labor movement on common challenges." In addition, LEDRIZ houses the Alternatives to Neo-Liberalism in Southern Africa (ANSA) project, an initiative of the ZCTU and the Southern African Trade Union Coordination Council (SATUCC).

"Africa is such a beautiful place and unfortunately it has been destroyed by human beings. We are trying to intervene so we can make a difference," Kanyenze says. "We cannot ask for someone else to do this for us. We must do it ourselves."



Photo: Terry Leung Chi Tak
<http://www.flickr.com/photos/leungchitak/1277486213/>

10 THINGS THAT WORKED

The success of LEDRIZ in reaching across traditional divides, becoming a trusted resource and having real influence on economic policy can be attributed to a variety of factors:

- 1. LEDRIZ Became Independent.** “A trade union is a political animal,” says ZCTU General Secretary Japhet Moyo. “You must not bring politics” into this kind of work.
- 2. LEDRIZ Built Credibility.** Pointing out problems is not sufficient, say LEDRIZ economists. To be taken seriously, any critique must include concrete alternatives.
- 3. LEDRIZ Produces Professional Work.** “The most important thing is the quality of the product... that is the best marketing strategy,” says LEDRIZ Director Godfrey Kanyenze.
- 4. LEDRIZ’s Work Is Useful to Workers, Business and Government.** LEDRIZ produces reports at the request of the government and employers, and regularly publishes research essential to labor and management engaged in collective bargaining negotiations.
- 5. LEDRIZ Limits Overhead.** LEDRIZ operates with four full-time professionals and three support staff. For special projects, LEDRIZ hires expert academics.
- 6. LEDRIZ Cultivates Relationships at Multiple Government Levels.** The organization builds relationships and has become a resource for government staff at all levels.
- 7. LEDRIZ Provides Economic Literacy Training.** James Gondo, an educator with the Communication and Allied Workers Union of Zimbabwe (CASWUZ), is among the workers who rely on LEDRIZ for economic literacy training. “Even though I am trained as an educator, I don’t have the capacity to deal with economics. They are properly qualified.”
- 8. LEDRIZ Engages a Variety of Interest Groups.** “We are conscious about the need to really create a movement of like-minded people: the non-governmental organization (NGO) sector, the churches, women’s organizations, youth organizations,” says Kanyenze.
- 9. LEDRIZ Develops Grassroots Support.** Silas Kuveya, general secretary of the Zimbabwe Textile Workers Union (ZTWU), says his union works with LEDRIZ to raise awareness by educating workers, who in turn will “force those on top to pay attention.”
- 10. LEDRIZ Builds Regional and Global Partnerships.** “LEDRIZ’s other function is advocacy,” says Moyo. LEDRIZ does “a lot of advocacy for workers in the region and also internationally.”

LEDRIZ: Recommendations for Worker Rights Organizations

Ensure that Staff Members Share the Organization's Mission.

"We don't see what we do as work. It's a calling," says LEDRIZ Director Godfrey Kanyenze. "What we have done is to take people whom we have groomed, who grow with the organization, who grow with the institution, who grow with the values and principles of the organization."

Be Fiscally Responsible. Start out small with limited staff members. The ultimate goal—not yet achieved by LEDRIZ—is to become self-sustaining. LEDRIZ receives compensation for projects commissioned by employers and the ILO, and some of its work is funded by international labor-support NGOs, including the Solidarity Center. It also generates revenue from the sale of *Beyond the Enclave*.

Learn from Similar Organizations. Visit similar local organizations and pick from their approaches and structures. Before separating from ZCTU, Kanyenze and others took a close look at South Africa's National Labor and Economic Development Institute (NALEDI) and Namibia's Labor Resource and Research Institute (LaRRI).

Do Not Try to Be Experts in Everything. Use local experts, or area networks, for special projects in areas where your organization does not yet have expertise.

For Trade Unions: Step Outside the Trade Union Box. With their long-standing presence, trade unions are in a good position to build national and local coalitions, which will create momentum for effecting change.

Build Relationships and Work within Regional Structures. It is likely organizations across your region are working on similar issues. Creating partnerships with them will produce mutual synergies.

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RESOURCES

The primary sources for this publication were first-person interviews conducted by the Solidarity Center. Notes on other sources can be found on the Solidarity Center web site, www.solidaritycenter.org

ABOUT THIS SERIES

Working people, regardless of country, want a government that is transparent, representative and accountable to its citizens—and which acts to better all citizens' economic circumstances. Around the world, labor unions and worker organizations play an important role in advocating for fundamental human rights, ensuring the voices and aspirations of workers are part of the national dialogue, and advancing policies that better serve civil society and promote equitable economic growth and humane development. *Catalysts for Change*, an ongoing series produced by the Solidarity Center with the support of the National Endowment for Democracy, features the working people, their unions and activists who are advancing worker rights and greater equity in their societies, often under trying circumstances. Their experience and efforts provide real, transferable lessons for others seeking to effect positive change.

The Solidarity Center's mission is to help build a global labor movement by strengthening the economic and political power of workers around the world through effective, independent and democratic unions.



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