Country Analysis: Zimbabwe

March 2026

Executive Summary

Zimbabwe is navigating a complex development landscape as it pursues its ambition of attaining upper-middle-income status by 2030 (Vision 2030) through successive National Development Strategies—NDS1 (2021–2025) and NDS2 (2026–2030)—aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the African Union Agenda 2063, and the Southern African Development Community (SADC) Vision 2050. While the economy grew by an estimated 6.6% in 2025, supported by improved agricultural performance, strong mining output, and sustained diaspora remittance inflows, the broader growth trajectory remains constrained by persistent structural challenges and complex systemic interdependencies that continue to limit the pace and inclusiveness of development progress.

Key Challenges and Risks:
Macroeconomic Vulnerabilities and Structural Constraints: Erratic economic growth, high public debt (US$23.4 billion, equivalent to 44.7% of GDP), and a substantial SDG financing gap—estimated at approximately US$5.0 billion annually through 2030—continue to constrain fiscal space and limit investment in development priorities. The economy remains vulnerable to external and climate-related shocks, while structural challenges such as pervasive informality (accounting for 76.1% of total business establishments and 85.5% of total employment) and low productivity further undermine domestic resource mobilisation, competitiveness, and inclusive economic transformation.

Persistent Poverty, Inequalities and Human Capital Constraints: High poverty (42% in 2023), pervasive malnutrition (27% child stunting), high youth unemployment (41.2%), and deep-seated gender inequalities persist. Human capital is further eroded by brain drain and underfunded social services. Zimbabwe continues to face significant sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) challenges. Maternal mortality remains high, estimated at 212 deaths per 100,000 live births in 2023-24. Teenage pregnancy is widespread, affecting 23.7% of adolescent girls, while child marriage remains prevalent, with 33.2% of women aged 15–24 having been married before the age of 18.

Climate Vulnerability: Zimbabwe remains highly vulnerable to climate-induced shocks, including recurrent droughts, floods, and cyclones, which continue to undermine agricultural productivity, water security, infrastructure, and livelihoods. Environmental degradation—particularly land degradation, deforestation, and growing water scarcity—further compounds these risks. According to De Waal et al. (2024), the economic costs of climate change are projected to rise significantly over time and could reach nearly 5% of GDP annually by 2050.

Governance and Institutional Gaps: Despite progress in public financial management, governance performance is uneven. High levels of perceived corruption—reflected in a score of 22 out of 100 and a ranking of 157 out of 180 countries on the 2025 Transparency International Corruption Perceptions Index—undermine public confidence, distort resource allocation, deter investment, and weaken service delivery. Illicit financial flows (IFFs) further exacerbate these challenges. Ensuring the protection and promotion of human rights remains an important priority, particularly in relation to civic space, accountability mechanisms, and the inclusion of vulnerable and marginalised groups.

Intersectionality and Multiple Vulnerabilities: Vulnerability in Zimbabwe is often shaped by multiple and overlapping forms of disadvantage rather than by a single factor. Women and girls with disabilities, for example, may face compounded barriers, including higher risks of gender-based violence, lower educational attainment, and reduced access to sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) information and services. Some legal provisions, policy gaps, and implementation challenges continue to affect equitable access to services for certain population groups, including adolescent girls, persons with disabilities, and LGBTI persons. Addressing these barriers, alongside improving disaggregated data and targeted programming, is important for advancing the Leave No One Behind principle.

Systemic Interconnections: These challenges are deeply intertwined, forming "vicious cycles" such as the Poverty-Informality Trap, the Climate Vulnerability-Agriculture-Food Security Loop, and the Debt and Financing Constraint Loop. For instance, climate shocks exacerbate food insecurity and poverty, while limited formal job opportunities drive informality, which in turn limits revenue for public investment.

Strategic Pathways and Opportunities: To disrupt these cycles and accelerate progress, the analysis identifies the following critical pathways:

1. **Debt Resolution and Innovative Financing:** Urgent action is needed to resolve debt distress, unlock concessional finance, and leverage innovative instruments (e.g., blended finance, SDG-linked bonds) and diaspora investment.
2. **Transition to Formality:** Strategically support the formalization of the economy to boost productivity, expand the tax base, and create decent work opportunities.
3. **Climate-resilient infrastructure and utilities:** Accelerating the SDGs in Zimbabwe will require expanding and modernising climate-resilient infrastructure and utilities to improve energy, water, transport, and digital connectivity while supporting inclusive growth and resilience.
4. **Enhance Human Capital and Strengthen Social Protection:** Investing in health, education, nutrition, and skills—particularly technical and digital skills—will boost productivity and harness Zimbabwe's youthful population. Expanding inclusive and shock-responsive social protection will reduce poverty and vulnerability while ensuring development gains leave no one behind.
5. **Climate-Smart Agriculture:** Prioritize investments in climate-smart agriculture to build resilience, enhance food security, and drive green growth.
6. **Inclusive Governance and Gender Equality:** Strengthen institutions, combat corruption, strengthen promotion and protection of fundamental rights including widening civic space, and promoting gender equality and inclusion to ensure equitable development.

Outlook: Zimbabwe's future trajectory hinges on a choice between a "Stalled Transition" characterized by incremental reforms and volatile growth, or an "Optimistic Transformation" towards a "Green and Digital Leap" by resolving key constraints and making decisive investments. Failure to address these systemic issues risks a "Fractured Resilience" scenario, leading to economic contraction and further societal fragmentation.

Recommendation: UN policy and programme advocacy, along with the next Zimbabwe UN Sustainable Development Cooperation (2027-2030), must acknowledge the interconnectedness of Zimbabwe's challenges. To effectively support the successful implementation of NDS2 (2026-2030) and the SDGs in Zimbabwe, it is critical to prioritize coordinated, multi-sectoral interventions across the strategic pathways. Emphasizing strong financing, enhancing stakeholder partnerships, and adhering to inclusive development principles are vital for supporting the country to realize its development aspiration outlined in the national Vision 2030 to become upper middle-income society.

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Acronyms

AfCFTA: African Continental Free Trade Area
AfDB: African Development Bank (Group)
AU: African Union
CBOs: Community-Based Organizations
CEDAW: Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women
CERD: Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination
CESCR: Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights
CLDs: Causal Loop Diagrams
COMESA: Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa
CRC: Convention on the Rights of the Child
CRPD: Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
CSOs: Civil Society Organizations
EWIs: Early Warning Indicators
FAO: Food and Agriculture Organization
FDI: Foreign Direct Investment
GBV: Gender-Based Violence
GCF: Green Climate Fund
GDP: Gross Domestic Product
GHG: Greenhouse Gas
GPI: Global Peace Index
HDI: Human Development Index
HIV: Human Immunodeficiency Virus
ICH: Intangible Cultural Heritage
ICCPR: International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights
ICESCR: International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights
ICT: Information and Communication Technology
IFIs: International Financial Institutions
IMF: International Monetary Fund
INFF: Integrated National Financing Framework
IOM: International Organization for Migration
IPC: Integrated Food Security Phase Classification
J-PRMS: UN Zimbabwe Joint Partnerships and Resource Mobilization Strategy
KAZA: Kavango–Zambezi (as in KAZA TFCA)
LGBTQI: Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Intersex
LNOB: Leave No One Behind
MMR: Maternal Mortality Ratio
MOFEDIP: Ministry of Finance, Economic Development and Investment Promotion
MSMEs: Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises
MWh: Megawatt-hour
NDCs: Nationally Determined Contributions
NDS: National Development Strategy (appears as NDS1, NDS2)
NEET: Not in Education, Employment or Training
NPRC: National Peace and Reconciliation Commission
ODA: Official Development Assistance
OHCHR: Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights
PPPs: Public-Private Partnerships
PVO: Private Voluntary Organisations
RBZ: Reserve Bank of Zimbabwe
RISDP: Regional Indicative Strategic Development Plan
SADC: Southern African Development Community
SAPP: Southern African Power Pool
SDG: Sustainable Development Goal (also SDGs for plural)
SOE: State-Owned Enterprise
SRHR: Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights
STEEP: Social, Technological, Economic, Environmental, and Political
TFCAs: Transfrontier Conservation Areas
TSP: Transitional Stabilization Programme
UHC: Universal Health Coverage
UMIC: Upper-Middle-Income Country
UN: United Nations
UNESCO: United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNFPA: United Nations Population Fund
UNIDO: United Nations Industrial Development Organization
UNSDCF: United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework
UPR: Universal Periodic Review
USD: United States Dollar
WASH: Water, Sanitation and Hygiene
WEF: Water-Energy-Food
WFP: World Food Programme
WHO: World Health Organization
ZGC: Zimbabwe Gender Commission
ZHRC: Zimbabwe Human Rights Commission
ZiG: Zimbabwe Gold (national currency)
ZIMSTAT: Zimbabwe National Statistics Agency
ZMC: Zimbabwe Media Commission

1.0 Introduction

This chapter outlines the fundamental aspects of the Country Analysis: Zimbabwe 2025, detailing its overarching purpose, the breadth of its coverage, and the systematic methodology employed to achieve its objectives.

1.1 Purpose of the Analysis

The core objective of this Country Analysis is to offer a comprehensive, data-driven examination of Zimbabwe's progress, challenges, and opportunities on its path toward sustainable development. It serves as a foundational evidence base to inform the strategic prioritization, Theory of Change, and Results Framework of the forthcoming United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNSDCF). More broadly, the analysis aims to:

- **Advance National Aspirations:** Act as a call for coordinated, strategic, and transformative action to advance Zimbabwe's national development aspirations, as articulated in Vision 2030, the National Development Strategy 1 (NDS1, 2021–2025), and the National Development Strategy 2 (NDS2, 2026–2030).
- **Inform Strategic Priorities:** Provide critical insights to guide strategic priorities and partnerships under the new Cooperation Framework.
- **Identify Priority Areas:** Pinpoint areas where collective action can generate the greatest impact for sustainable development.
- **Address Complex Challenges:** Delineate Zimbabwe's development prospects amidst a complex and interlinked set of challenges, ranging from global poly-crises to domestic systemic issues and social inequalities, while recognizing its significant latent potential.
- **Support Transformative Action:** Inspire transformative action by all partners to realize Zimbabwe's vision of a prosperous, empowered, and inclusive society where sustainable development is a reality for all.

1.2 Scope of the Analysis

The analysis encompasses a broad and integrated examination of Zimbabwe's development landscape, focusing on the year 2025 as a benchmark and informing the 2026-2030 planning cycle. Its scope is structured around the five pillars (Five Ps) of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs): **People, Planet, Prosperity, Peace, and Partnership**, reflecting Zimbabwe's specific development context and priorities. Key areas covered include:

- **Development Progress, Challenges, and Opportunities:** A comprehensive assessment of Zimbabwe's trajectory towards sustainable development, highlighting both achievements and persistent structural constraints.
- **Cross-cutting Development Challenges:** Examination of pervasive issues such as deep-seated inequalities, high levels of poverty and informality, macroeconomic vulnerabilities and structural constraints, climate-related shocks, limited fiscal space, compounded by public expenditure inefficiencies and resource leakages, governance and institutional challenges, and service delivery challenges.
- **National Frameworks and Global Agendas:** Alignment with national development strategies (NDS 1 and NDS 2), Vision 2030, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and the African Union's Agenda 2063.
- **Key Transitions:** Consideration of six critical transitions: energy, food systems, digital connectivity, education, climate action, and social protection.

- **Stakeholder Context:** Analysis of the roles and capacities of various stakeholders, including government, private sector, civil society, and development partners.
- **Financing for Development:** A review of the financing landscape, including domestic resource mobilization, external financing, and existing gaps.

1.3 Overall Analytical Approach

The Country Analysis adopts a rigorous, evidence-based, and forward-looking approach, rooted in **systems thinking and an integrated methodology**. This approach is aligned with UN Analytical Function Guidelines and is centered on the empowerment of people, incorporating **gender-responsive and human rights-based principles**. The methodology involves several interconnected steps:

i. **Diagnostic Detailed Assessment:** The analysis begins with a thorough diagnostic assessment of key development challenges and opportunities across the five pillars of People, Planet, Prosperity, Peace, and Partnerships. This involves drawing on empirical evidence and diagnostic tools to generate actionable policy insights.

ii. **Risk Analysis:** A detailed risk analysis identifies potential threats that could derail progress, covering economic, climatic, social, and governance-related vulnerabilities. This includes a multi-dimensional risk matrix to assess likelihood and impact.

iii. **Stakeholder Mapping:** A comprehensive stakeholder analysis is conducted to map the dynamics, power relations, and capacities of key actors, informing potential pathways for collaboration and change.

iv. **Multi-Stakeholder Engagement: Methodology and Impact**
The Country Analysis was informed by a comprehensive stakeholder engagement process designed to ensure broad participation, transparency, and national ownership. A multi-stakeholder validation workshop, held on 24–25 February 2026, brought together representatives from Government, United Nations entities, development partners, civil society organisations, independent commissions, organisations of persons with disabilities, youth and women's groups, the private sector, academia, and the media. The workshop provided an opportunity to validate the analysis, strengthen a shared understanding of the country's development challenges and opportunities, and build consensus on key priorities for the next Cooperation Framework.
The validation workshop was complemented by sector-specific consultations with Government institutions, development partners, civil society organisations, the private sector, and academia, as well as focused discussions with women, young people, persons with disabilities, and other groups at risk of being left behind. Consultations with business associations, micro, small and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs), and larger firms explored issues related to the investment climate, private sector development, structural transformation, employment, and financing for the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).
Stakeholder feedback was systematically incorporated into the analysis, helping to validate the evidence base, refine development priorities, and identify potential acceleration pathways. The consultation process also benefited from local knowledge and diverse perspectives, strengthening the relevance and credibility of the Country Analysis. While the consultation process sought to promote inclusive participation, challenges remained, including resource constraints and the need to further strengthen the participation of groups at risk of being left behind. Looking ahead, the Cooperation Framework should build on this foundation by establishing regular stakeholder engagement mechanisms, strengthening feedback and accountability processes, and

investing in the capacity of stakeholders to participate effectively throughout implementation, monitoring, and evaluation.

v. **Financing Landscape:** A dedicated financing for development analysis scrutinizes the financial envelope, mapping resource flows and identifying gaps to align national development ambitions with fiscal realities.

vi. **Identification of SDG Acceleration Pathways:** Synthesizing insights from the above, the analysis culminates in identifying strategic SDG Acceleration Pathways. These are high-impact interventions with the greatest potential to catalyse multiplicative progress across multiple SDGs, focusing on leverage points to disrupt negative feedback loops and generate positive cascading effects.

vii. **Leave No One Behind (LNOB) Principle:** The analysis integrates the LNOB principle by identifying population groups most at risk of being left behind (e.g., women and girls, children, youth, persons with disabilities, rural communities, informal settlement residents) and outlining interventions tailored to their needs.

viii. **Systemic and Integrated Framework:** The analysis is designed to foster a holistic understanding of interconnected barriers and enablers of progress, moving beyond isolated interventions to support coherent, evidence-based prioritisation for the next Cooperation Framework. Its findings are grounded in robust analytical methodologies and extensive stakeholder consultations, including engagement with vulnerable and marginalised groups—such as persons with disabilities—to ensure credibility and relevance. A multi-stakeholder validation workshop was convened from 24–25 February 2026 at the UN Zimbabwe Country Offices, bringing together a broad range of stakeholders, including United Nations agencies, the Government of Zimbabwe, bilateral development partners, civil society organisations (CSOs), Zimbabwe Independent Commissions, organisations of persons with disabilities (OPDs), youth and women's organisations, the private sector, academia, and the media. The workshop provided an opportunity to review and validate key findings, strengthen a shared understanding of Zimbabwe's development challenges and opportunities, and build consensus on strategic priorities and potential acceleration pathways toward Vision 2030 and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Particular emphasis was placed on inclusive participation, ensuring that the perspectives and priorities of women, youth, and persons with disabilities informed the analysis and were reflected in its conclusions.

2.0 Analytical Framework and Guiding Principles

This chapter outlines the comprehensive analytical framework and guiding principles adopted for the Zimbabwe Country Analysis, ensuring a robust, evidence-based, and integrated assessment of the nation's development trajectory.

Grounded in international best practices and aligned with the UN Analytical Function Guidelines, the methodology leverages a systemic approach to unpack complex challenges and identify strategic pathways for sustainable development.

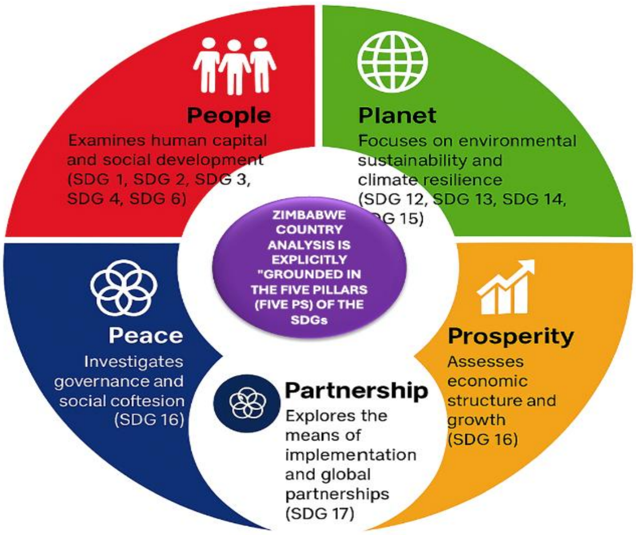
Key tools employed include the Five Ps of the Sustainable Development Goals, the Leave No One Behind (LNOB) principle, Systems Thinking, Social, Technological, Economic, Environmental, and Political (STEEP) analysis, the PowerCube, and Causal Loop Diagrams, each contributing a unique lens to data application and interpretation.

The analytical framework applied ensures that the analysis moves beyond mere data compilation to provide a nuanced understanding of Zimbabwe's development challenges and opportunities, offering strategic insights to inform the next UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework.

2.1 The Five Ps: People, Planet, Prosperity, Peace, and Partnership

The Zimbabwe Country Analysis is explicitly "grounded in the five pillars (Five Ps) of the Sustainable Development Goals—People, Peace, Planet, Prosperity and Partnership—reflecting Zimbabwe's development context and priorities. This framework serves as the overarching structure for assessing national development, ensuring a holistic understanding that encompasses social, environmental, economic, governance, and collaborative dimensions.

Each of the Five Ps forms a distinct thematic area for in-depth situational analysis within the document:



Data is systematically collected and interpreted for each 'P' to identify progress, challenges, and opportunities. For example, under 'People', the analysis uses data on the Human Development Index (HDI), poverty rates, maternal mortality, and school enrolment to evaluate human well-being and social equity. Under 'Planet', climate vulnerability indices, GHG emissions, and water access rates inform the assessment of environmental health. For 'Prosperity', economic growth figures, informality rates, and Gini coefficients reveal economic performance and income distribution. The 'Peace' pillar utilizes indicators like the Global Peace Index and budget transparency scores to gauge stability and governance quality. Finally, 'Partnership' data on diaspora remittances, Foreign Direct Investment (FDI), and Official Development Assistance (ODA) quantifies external support and collaboration effectiveness. This granular interpretation within each P allows for targeted interventions and policy recommendations.

2.2 Leave No One Behind (LNOB)

The principle of "Leaving No One Behind" (LNOB) is central to Zimbabwe's development journey and the analysis, emphasizing that progress must be inclusive and reach the most marginalized populations. The LNOB principle is integrated throughout the analysis, particularly in identifying vulnerable population groups and assessing the equity impact of various interventions.

Data is disaggregated by relevant characteristics (gender, age, location, disability, income level) to reveal disparities and assess whether development gains are reaching all segments of society. High Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET) rates among youth, gender gaps in income and leadership, and unequal access to basic services for persons with disabilities are highlighted as indicators of exclusion. The LNOB lens ensures that data interpretation actively identifies who is being left behind and why, informing rights-based policy recommendations and interventions.

As reflected in the LNOB analysis matrix, multiple population groups in Zimbabwe are at risk of being left behind, including vulnerable children, women and girls, persons with disabilities, people living with HIV, and stigmatised populations such as Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Intersex (LGBTI) persons, sex workers, and people who use drugs. The matrix highlights that rural populations face disproportionate exclusion due to limited access to services and high exposure to climate-related shocks.

Across the groups identified, the matrix shows that socioeconomic deprivation and vulnerability to shocks are the most pervasive drivers of exclusion, often compounded by discrimination, governance barriers, and weak protection systems. It also underscores persistent data gaps—particularly for hidden and marginalised populations—pointing to the need for stronger, more inclusive data systems to inform targeted, equity-focused interventions.

Figure 2.2: LNOB Analysis Matrix

Groups likely to be left behind in Zimbabwe	UN Entity to provide analytical input for the CA	Approximate No of individuals	Marginalization factors				
			Discrimination	Geography	Governance	Socioeconomic status	Vulnerability to shocks
Asylum Seekers and Refugees	UNHCR	20,000-25,000	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Children with chronic malnutrition (0-4 years	UNICEF	500,000		✓		✓	✓
Families in a situation of food insecurity	WFP	6-7 million		✓		✓	✓
Family headed by children (12 to 19 years old)	UNICEF	-		✓		✓	✓
Internally displaced people	UNHCR	139,000		✓	✓	✓	✓
Indigenous Populations		-	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
LGBTI	UNDP	-	✓		✓	✓	✓
Orphans (0-17 years old)	UNICEF	1-1.5 million	✓	✓		✓	✓
Children out of school	UNICEF	20-25%	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
People incarcerated/in jail	UNDP	24,000	✓		✓	✓	✓
People living with HIV	UNAIDS	1.3 million	✓	✓		✓	✓
Persons with disabilities	RCO	206,000	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
People who use drugs (PWUD)	WHO	-	✓		✓	✓	✓
Rural Children	UNICEF	4.4 million		✓	✓	✓	✓
Rural Women	FAO	4.8 million	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Sex Workers	UNFPA &	-	✓		✓	✓	✓
Older people (+60 years of age)		1-1.5 million		✓		✓	✓
Trafficked women and girls	IOM	-	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

Groups likely to be left behind in Zimbabwe	UN Entity to provide analytical input for the CA	Approximate No of individuals	Marginalization factors				
			Discrimination	Geography	Governance	Socioeconomic status	Vulnerability to shocks
Migrants	IOM	429,000	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Women & Children in Specific Religious	UN WOMEN	-	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Women exposed to gender-based violence	UN WOMEN	1 in 3 women	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Young girls (10-19 years old)	UN WOMEN	1.5-2 million	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

2.3 Systems Thinking

The analysis adopts a "systemic, integrated, forward-looking" approach rooted in systems thinking. This framework is designed to understand the interconnected nature of Zimbabwe's development challenges, recognizing that "structural economic weaknesses, environmental vulnerabilities, and deep-seated social inequalities intersect and amplify one another" (Systems Analysis of the SDGs in Zimbabwe).

Systems thinking is applied throughout the Country Analysis to identify the interlocking drivers and inhibitors of sustainable development. Rather than treating development challenges in isolation, the analysis examines how economic, social, environmental, and governance factors interact and amplify one another through reinforcing and balancing feedback loops, creating systemic dynamics that require integrated, multi-sectoral responses.

The systems thinking approach operates at two levels in this document. First, in Chapter 8 (Deep Dive: Key Challenges and Opportunities), the analysis identifies and maps three central feedback loops that structure Zimbabwe's development challenges:

- The Poverty-Informality Trap: High poverty and limited formal employment drive informal economy expansion, which reduces productivity and domestic revenue, limiting public investment in health, education, and social protection, and perpetuating poverty.
- The Climate Vulnerability-Agriculture-Food Security Loop: Recurrent climate shocks disrupt rain-fed agriculture, increasing food insecurity and poverty, eroding household and national resilience, and making the country more vulnerable to subsequent shocks.
- The Debt and Financing Constraint Loop: High public debt and arrears limit access to concessional finance, suppressing growth and narrowing the tax base, producing revenue shortfalls and renewed borrowing, while debt servicing crowds out social and development spending.

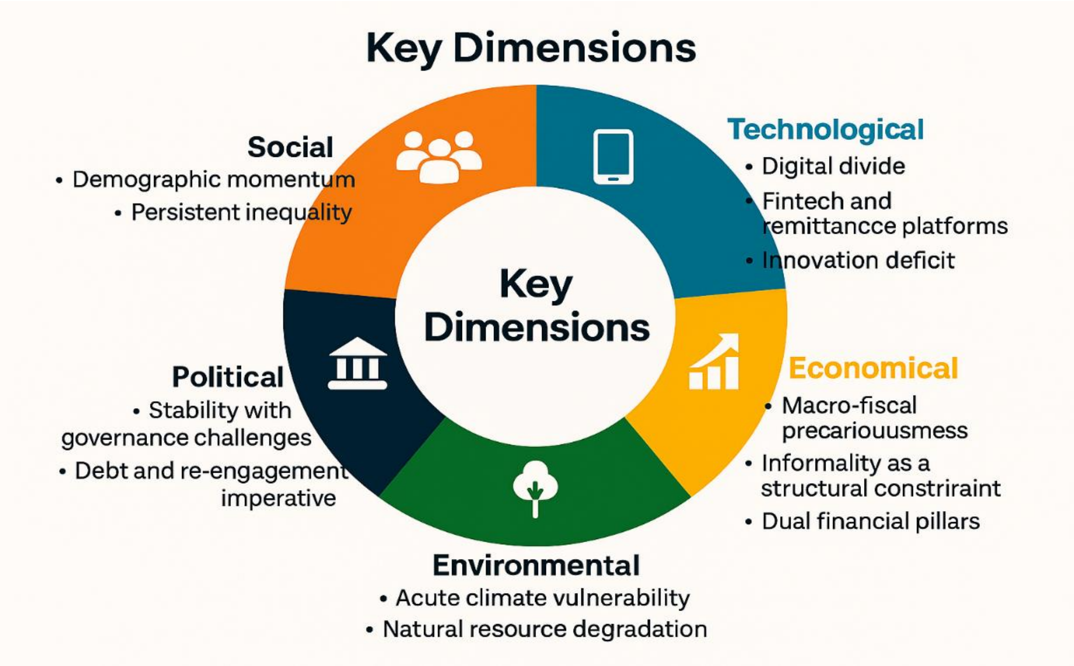
These feedback loops are further illustrated through Causal Loop Diagrams (see Section 2.6), which also map the cross-pillar interdependencies between People, Planet, Prosperity, Peace, and Partnership — for example, how energy deficits constrain industrial output and job creation, or how governance weaknesses enable illicit financial flows that undermine domestic resource mobilisation.

Second, systems thinking informs the design of the six Acceleration Pathways in Chapter 9. Each pathway is conceived as a high-leverage intervention in the identified systemic dynamics, addressing the reinforcing mechanisms that sustain them rather than isolated symptoms. The pathways are therefore mutually reinforcing: progress in one area creates enabling conditions in others. Within each pathway, a Gender Mainstreaming sub-section specifies concrete requirements for women's participation, programme design, data collection, and financing — reflecting the recognition that gender inequality functions as a cross-cutting driver that, if unaddressed, will perpetuate the feedback loops that hold back Zimbabwe's development.

2.4 Social, Technological, Economic, Environmental, and Political (STEEP) Analysis

A dedicated "STEEP Analysis: Drivers Shaping Zimbabwe's SDG Trajectory" provides a structured way to identify the major external and internal forces influencing Zimbabwe's development pathway.

The STEEP framework systematically categorizes key drivers affecting Zimbabwe's progress towards the SDGs:



Data relevant to each STEEP category is analysed. The interpretation focuses on how these drivers create "uncertainty, anticipate risks, and assess how policy choices, external shocks, and system dynamics could accelerate, stall, or reverse progress toward the 2030 Agenda". This helps in developing scenarios and risk-aware programming by understanding the context within which development occurs.

2.5 PowerCube

The PowerCube/Matrix provides a structured understanding of power dynamics within Zimbabwe's complex development landscape. It disaggregates power into three forms (visible, hidden, and invisible) and three spaces (closed, invited, and claimed).

The "PowerCube – Zimbabwe" diagram maps various actors (e.g., Cabinet, Parliament, Private Sector, CSOs, MSMEs, Youth & Women collectives) against these power forms and spaces. It identifies:

- **Visible power:** Formal decision-making and recognized authorities (e.g., Cabinet, Ministry of Finance, Economic Development and Investment Promotion, Reserve Bank of Zimbabwe (RBZ) on fiscal policy, monetary policy).
- **Hidden power:** Agenda-setting, gatekeeping, and informal influence (e.g., licenses, permits, incumbent sector interests).
- **Invisible power:** Social norms, beliefs, and cultural practices that shape perceptions and behaviour (e.g., informality as norm, gendered power relations). Actors are categorized by their engagement space: "Closed (state/elite-led)", "Invited (consultative)", and "Claimed (bottom-up)".

The PowerCube helps interpret whose interests are served by current policies, who influences decisions informally, and what underlying norms perpetuate inequalities. For instance, data on policy formulation (visible power), budget allocations (visible power), or civil society space (invited/claimed space) is analysed through this lens. The influence level (High, Medium, Low) assigned to each actor helps in understanding their capacity to shape outcomes. This framework identifies opportunities for "coalition-building and policy influence" by revealing where power lies and how it is exercised, guiding strategies for stakeholder engagement and governance reforms.

2.6 Causal Loop Diagrams (CLDs)

Causal Loop Diagrams (CLDs) are used in this Country Analysis to map and visualise the key systemic dynamics that shape Zimbabwe's development trajectory. As qualitative conceptual tools, CLDs illustrate the causal relationships and feedback mechanisms between different variables — making complex interdependencies visible and identifying leverage points where interventions can have the greatest impact.

The analysis draws on four CLDs to illustrate critical systemic issues in Zimbabwe:

- The Poverty-Informality Trap: High poverty and limited formal jobs drive informal economy expansion, leading to low productivity, limited revenue, inadequate public investment, and persistent poverty — a self-reinforcing cycle.
- The Climate-Livelihoods-Food Security Loop: Climate shocks disrupt rain-fed agriculture, leading to food insecurity, increased poverty, malnutrition, and reduced adaptive capacity, which in turn increases vulnerability to future shocks.
- The Human Capital Drain: Underfunded health and education systems and poor service quality lead to skilled labour emigration, partially offset by a balancing effect through remittances and knowledge transfer from the diaspora.
- The Governance-Trust-Resources Loop: Weak accountability and low public trust contribute to limited domestic revenue mobilisation and weak institutions, reinforcing each other and undermining the State's capacity to deliver services and maintain legitimacy.

These CLDs also highlight the cross-pillar interdependencies running through Zimbabwe's development system — for example, how Planet-level challenges (energy and water deficits) affect Prosperity (industrial output, jobs) and People (health and human capital), or how Peace-level factors (governance weaknesses) undermine Prosperity (investment climate) and Partnership (resource mobilisation). By making these causal relationships visible, the CLDs help identify the leverage points — the places in the system where targeted interventions can disrupt negative cycles and generate the greatest cascading benefits across the Sustainable Development Goals.

3.0 Country Context

This chapter provides an overview of Zimbabwe's demographic, political, and macroeconomic contexts, revealing both opportunities and challenges shaping the nation's future. The demographic profile indicates a growing population, particularly in rural areas that rely on subsistence agriculture, highlighting the need for targeted investments in sustainable development, especially for women and youth who face significant barriers. Politically, the country generally remains peaceful and stable since the 2023 harmonized elections: however, governance and accountability challenges and shrinking democratic and civic space prompts concerns about meaningful citizen engagement and development financing. Economically, while a rebound in growth from agricultural and mining performances and remittances suggests recovery, the economy is still hindered by high debt levels, fiscal pressures, and high informality necessitating urgent reforms to foster sustained growth and sustainable development and align with the Vision 2030 and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). This chapter emphasizes the interconnectedness of these factors and the critical need for comprehensive strategies to promote inclusive growth and resilience in Zimbabwe.

3.1 Demographic Profile

According to the 2022 Population and Housing Census, Zimbabwe’s population stood at 15,178,957 as of 20 April 2022, representing a 16.2% increase from 13,061,329 in 2012 and an average annual growth rate of 1.5% over the decade. The population is projected to grow further to 21.2 million by 2042, with an average annual growth rate of 1.8%, underscoring increasing pressure on land, infrastructure, social services, and employment systems. Approximately 61% of the population in Zimbabwe resides in rural areas. Rural communities form the backbone of Zimbabwe’s population. These communities are heavily dependent on subsistence agriculture, natural resources, and small-scale livelihoods, making them particularly vulnerable to climate shocks, limited infrastructure, and inadequate access to education, healthcare, and energy services. Strengthening rural development through targeted investments in agriculture, renewable energy, digital connectivity, and social services is essential not only for reducing poverty and inequality but also for achieving national development objectives under Vision 2030 and the Sustainable Development Goals.

Women constitute 52% of the population and men 48%, resulting in a sex ratio of 92 males per 100 females. Women and girls continue to experience structural inequalities, including unpaid care burdens, limited economic opportunities, and barriers to leadership and asset ownership. Gender-based violence remains widespread, with 27% of women aged 15–49 having experienced physical violence since age 15, and 13% having experienced physical violence in the 12 months preceding the survey[1]. On the other hand, youth are a significant demographic in Zimbabwe, representing both a major opportunity and a critical challenge for development. Youth[2] aged 15–24 years constitute 18.8% of the national population, while

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[1] Zimbabwe National Statistics Agency (ZIMSTAT) and ICF. (2025). Zimbabwe Demographic and Health Survey 2023–24: Key Indicators Report. Harare, Zimbabwe, and Rockville, Maryland, USA: ZIMSTAT and ICF.
[2] While the United Nations (UN) defines youth as persons aged 15–24 years, both the African Union (AU) and Zimbabwe adopt a broader definition that includes persons aged 15–35 years.

when expanded to include ages 15–35, young people make up 33.2% of Zimbabwe's population—higher than the African Union average of 31.9% for ages 15–34. Youth face high unemployment, informality, and skills mismatches, threatening the country's ability to realise a demographic dividend. There is a need for increased and more targeted investments in education, skills development, and health to transform Zimbabwe's large youth population into a productive, skilled, and innovative workforce, capable of driving inclusive growth, innovation, and socio-economic transformation in support of Vision 2030 and the Sustainable Development Goals.

According to the 2022 Population and Housing Census, persons with disabilities accounted for 1.6% of Zimbabwe's total population. Disability prevalence increases markedly with age, with children aged 5–9 and 10–14 years accounting for 0.5% and 0.6%, respectively, compared to 3.1% among those aged 55–59 and 4.3% among those aged 60–64. Disability was reported by approximately 13% of persons aged 65 years and older.

Demographic Change and Human Mobility

Zimbabwe's population is projected to grow from 15.2 million in 2022 to 21.2 million by 2042, representing an average annual growth rate of 1.8% (ZIMSTAT, 2022–2042 Population Projections Report). This demographic trajectory, combined with a youth population of 33.2% aged 15–35 years (ZIMSTAT, 2022 Population and Housing Census), presents both significant opportunities and challenges for development planning.

Zimbabwe is undergoing a gradual demographic transition, characterised by declining fertility rates that remain above replacement level — projected to decline from 3.7 children per woman in 2022 to 3.2 by 2042 (ZIMSTAT, 2022–2042 Population Projections Report) — and steadily improving life expectancy, currently estimated at 68.2 years for women and 61.3 years for men (ZIMSTAT, 2022–2042 Population Projections Report). Although fertility is declining, the population is projected to continue growing for at least the next two decades. At the same time, sustained net emigration — assumed at a constant -70,000 persons per year in the medium variant projection (ZIMSTAT, 2022–2042 Population Projections Report) — continues to influence population growth, labour markets, and the country's demographic structure.

These demographic dynamics present both significant opportunities and challenges. A growing working-age population offers the potential to harness a demographic dividend, but this will depend on sustained investments in quality education, healthcare, nutrition, skills development, and productive employment. Without accelerated economic transformation and sufficient job creation, the expanding labour force risks increasing unemployment, underemployment, and informality, particularly among young people.

Continued population growth will also place increasing pressure on education, health, housing, water and sanitation, transport, and other public services, especially in rapidly urbanising areas. At the same time, improvements in life expectancy will gradually increase the number of older persons — with disability prevalence rising to approximately 13% among those aged 65 and above (ZIMSTAT, 2022 Population and Housing Census) — requiring stronger social protection systems, age-responsive healthcare, and long-term care services. These trends also have important implications for natural resource management, climate resilience, and the sustainable delivery of public services.

Human mobility is becoming increasingly diverse and complex. Labour migration within the region and beyond continues to play an important role in livelihoods and foreign exchange earnings through remittances, while return migration is creating opportunities for skills transfer, entrepreneurship, and investment. Climate-related displacement is increasing as recurrent droughts, floods, and other environmental shocks affect vulnerable communities (IOM, Migration, Environment and Climate Change Stock-Taking Report, 2025), and urbanisation is expected to continue as economic activity and services remain concentrated in urban centres — Zimbabwe's urban share stood at 38.6% of the population in 2022 (ZIMSTAT, 2022 Population and Housing Census), up from 33% in 2012. Zimbabwe also remains an important transit country along the North–South migration corridor.

These trends underscore the need for an integrated policy response. The Cooperation Framework should prioritise investments in human capital, employment-intensive and inclusive economic growth, and expanded social protection to harness the demographic dividend and protect vulnerable populations. It should also support sustainable urban development, strengthen migration governance, promote diaspora engagement, and integrate human mobility — including climate-induced displacement — into broader development, climate adaptation, and disaster risk reduction strategies.

3.2 Political Analysis

Zimbabwe's political environment has remained relatively stable following the 2023 harmonised elections, in which the ruling ZANU-PF party retained power. This stability has provided a degree of policy continuity and supported the implementation of national development priorities. At the same time, governance and institutional performance continue to present both opportunities and challenges, particularly in relation to democratic governance, institutional effectiveness, accountability, civic participation, and public confidence in state institutions.

The political landscape continues to evolve, including ongoing public discourse on constitutional governance and the future direction of the country's democratic institutions. Discussions relating to the possible extension of presidential term limits beyond the current constitutional provisions, together with broader political developments, have contributed to continued public debate. At the same time, a range of stakeholders have highlighted the importance of further strengthening the effectiveness and independence of public institutions, enhancing transparency and accountability, addressing corruption, and fostering an enabling environment for civic participation. These issues continue to influence levels of trust among the State, citizens, civil society, the private sector, and development partners.

The enactment of the Private Voluntary Organisations (PVO) Amendment Act in 2025, while intended to strengthen the regulatory framework governing private voluntary organisations, has also prompted discussion among some stakeholders regarding its potential implications for civic space and the operating environment for civil society organisations. Given the important contribution of civil society to service delivery, community resilience, humanitarian action, and policy dialogue, the implementation of the Act will warrant continued monitoring and stakeholder engagement. International experience suggests that an enabling environment for civil society can strengthen development partnerships and enhance the contribution of non-state actors to inclusive development, accountability, and resilience, particularly in fragile and climate-vulnerable contexts.

Looking ahead, continued efforts to strengthen democratic governance, the rule of law, institutional effectiveness, transparency, accountability, and inclusive dialogue will be important for reinforcing public trust, enhancing institutional resilience, and fostering an enabling environment for sustainable development, social cohesion, and effective partnerships in support of the Sustainable Development Goals.

3.3 Macroeconomic Analysis

Zimbabwe's economy is estimated to have rebounded by 6.6% in 2025 up from 1.7% in 2024, reflecting a recovery driven primarily by improved agricultural performance, favourable mineral prices, and sustained diaspora remittance inflows[3]. Despite this rebound, economic growth over the past decade has been erratic and volatile, averaging only 2.5% per annum, which has constrained the mobilisation of domestic resources for productivity-enhancing and welfare-oriented sectors such as health, education, social protection, and infrastructure. The economy remains vulnerable to climate-related and external shocks, which have repeatedly undermined structural transformation, private sector investment, decent job creation, and poverty reduction.

Zimbabwe remains in debt distress, significantly constraining fiscal space and development financing. As of September 2025, Public and Publicly Guaranteed debt stood at US$23.4 billion (44.7% of GDP), with high debt service obligations crowding out social spending. External debt has restricted access to concessional financing and international capital markets, while domestic debt servicing continues to absorb a substantial share of public resources. Although the rebasing of national accounts has raised GDP estimates and placed Zimbabwe in the lower-middle-income category, structural vulnerabilities persist, including high informality, low productivity, and limited value addition.

At the same time, the country has achieved short-term macroeconomic stabilisation, reflected in declining inflation rates during 2025, supported by tight fiscal and monetary policies. Sustaining this stability is critical for restoring economic confidence and supporting long-term growth. However, without decisive fiscal adjustment and structural reforms, medium-term growth is projected to moderate. Advancing Vision 2030 and the SDGs will require consolidating macroeconomic stability, resolving debt distress, strengthening domestic resource mobilisation, accelerating economic diversification, and expanding fiscal space for inclusive and sustainable development.

4.0 National Vision for Sustainable Development

Zimbabwe's Vision 2030 Agenda outlines an ambitious national development framework aimed at transforming the country into an upper-middle-income economy by the year 2030. The agenda prioritizes inclusive economic growth, industrialization, infrastructure development, poverty reduction, and improved social service delivery to enhance the quality of life for all citizens. Vision 2030 is closely aligned with global and regional development frameworks, particularly the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the African Union's Agenda 2063, ensuring coherence with broader efforts toward sustainable development, good governance, and socio-economic transformation. Through the implementation of medium-term strategies such as the National Development Strategy 1 and 2, the Vision seeks to promote macroeconomic stability, job creation, and human capital development while fostering resilience and national prosperity.

[3] 2026 National Budget Statement.

Vision 2030 will be realized through the TSP (2018-2020) and two successive Five-Year National Development Strategies: NDS 1 (2021-2025) and NDS 2 (2026-2030). The Transitional Stabilisation Programme (TSP) was launched on 5 October 2018 and was implemented from October 2018 – December 2020. The focal areas of the TSP included: stabilising the macro-economy, and the financial sector; introducing necessary policy, and institutional reforms, to transform to a private sector led economy; and launching quick-wins to stimulate growth. The TSP envisaged overall real GDP growth (%) of 6.3% (in 2018); 9.0% (in 2019); and 9.7% (in 2020). The overall real GDP growth (%) targets for 2018 and 2019 were missed. In 2018, the economy only grew by 3.4% against a TSP target of 6.3%, while in 2019, the economy declined by -6.5% against a TSP target of 9%.

The National Development Strategy 1 (NDS1) was officially launched by President E.D. Mnangagwa on Monday 16 November 2020. The NDS1 was underpinned by 14 priorities. The major thrust of the NDS 1 was to "leave no-one and no place behind." in line with Sustainable Development Goals principle. NDS1 emphasised macro-economic stability as a key ingredient in the realisation of the Strategy outcomes and targets.

Progress was recorded in selected areas, including budget transparency and public financial management, infrastructure rehabilitation (particularly roads and energy), and aspects of macroeconomic stabilisation. Zimbabwe has demonstrated notable progress in public financial management, particularly in budget transparency, scoring 63 out of 100 in the 2023 Open Budget Survey[4], well above the global average and among the strongest performances in Sub-Saharan Africa. The NDS1 also strengthened the culture of results-based planning and monitoring within government, which many stakeholders regard as an institutional gain. However, the overall impact of NDS1 was constrained by persistent structural challenges. Erratic economic growth, limited fiscal space, chronic high inflation, climate shocks, and external financing constraints affected its effective implementation. In addition, governance concerns, uneven institutional capacity, and slower-than-anticipated private sector investment limited progress in key areas such as job creation, poverty reduction, and broad-based economic transformation. As a result, while NDS1 laid important groundwork and delivered incremental gains, it fell short of fully achieving its ambitious development objectives especially around poverty reduction.

The National Development Strategy 2 (NDS2) was officially launched on 27 November 2025 by President E.D. Mnangagwa. The NDS2 will run from 2026 to 2030. While NDS 1 had broad foundational goals, NDS2 places greater emphasis on structural transformation, innovation, jobs and targeted sectors that support sustained growth. NDS2 is framed as building on positive momentum while addressing unfinished business from NDS1, with stronger emphasis on value addition, competitiveness, climate resilience and innovation. It is designed to consolidate gains from the first strategy (NDS1: 2021–2025) and accelerate progress toward transforming Zimbabwe into a prosperous and empowered upper middle-income society by 2030. The strategy was developed through broad national consultations and aligns with regional and global frameworks such as the SADC Regional Indicative Strategic Development Plan (RISDP), the African Union's Agenda 2063, and the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Table 4.1 shows the relationship between the Vision 2030, the SDGs, and the National Priorities under the National Development Strategy 2 (NDS2). The table highlights how Zimbabwe's long-term development aspirations are operationalized through NDS2 priority areas, ensuring coherence between national planning frameworks and global development commitments in support of inclusive and sustainable development.

Table 4:1 Relationship between the Vision 2030, SDGs, and the National Priorities under NDS2

Vision 2030 Pillar	**SDGs**	**UN SDG Transition**	**NDS2 Priority Area**
Inclusive Growth	1, 2, 3, 4, 5	Food Systems Jobs and social protection	Inclusive Economic Growth and Structural Transformation
Governance	10, 16		Good Governance, Institution Building, Peace and Security
Infrastructure and Utilities	6, 7, 9	Energy access and affordability	Infrastructure Development and Housing
Social Development	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 10, 11, 17	Education Jobs and social protection	Social Development, Gender and Social Protection Job Creation, Youth Entrepreneurship and Development, Creative Industry and Culture Agriculture, Food Security, Climate and Environment
Macroeconomic Stability and Financial Re-engagement	8, 10, 17	Jobs and social protection	Macro-Economic Stability and Financial Sector Deepening Image Building, International Relations and Trade
Cross-cutting	8, 10, 11	Digital connectivity Climate change, biodiversity loss and pollution	Science, Technology, Digitalisation, Innovation and Human Capital Development Regional Development and Inclusivity through Devolution and Decentralisation

Zimbabwe's ability to monitor progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and design evidence-based policies depends on a strong, well-coordinated national statistical system. While important progress has been made, significant challenges remain. Key constraints include infrequent household surveys, limited use of administrative data for decision-making, delays in data production and dissemination, data quality and coverage gaps, and weak interoperability across institutions. For example, the most recent Poverty, Income, Consumption and Expenditure Survey (PICES) was conducted in 2019, limiting the ability to monitor recent poverty trends and assess the impact of successive economic and climate shocks.

Addressing these challenges will require sustained investment in the national statistical system. Priorities include strengthening the institutional and financial capacity of ZIMSTAT, harmonising administrative data systems across government, improving the collection and use of disaggregated data by sex, age, disability, geographic location, and socioeconomic status, and enhancing data quality, timeliness, and accessibility. Strengthening data governance, interoperability, quality assurance, and data literacy across government institutions will also be essential to support evidence-based planning, budgeting, monitoring, and evaluation.

The Cooperation Framework should also promote greater use of innovative and non-traditional data sources to complement official statistics. Citizen-generated data, geospatial information, satellite imagery, mobile phone data, and other big data sources offer important opportunities to improve real-time monitoring, poverty and vulnerability mapping, disaster risk management, climate adaptation, and service delivery. Realising these opportunities will require stronger partnerships with the private sector, academia, civil society, and development partners, together with robust governance frameworks that safeguard data quality, privacy, ethics, and responsible data use.

Strengthening migration data systems should form an integral part of these efforts. Improved data on labour migration, diaspora populations, remittance flows, skills mobility, return migration, climate-related displacement, and migrant vulnerabilities will support evidence-based migration governance and development planning. The Cooperation Framework should support the implementation of the Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM), strengthen migration analytics and diaspora data systems, improve labour migration statistics, and integrate migration, environment, and climate change (MECC) data into national planning and disaster risk reduction frameworks.

5.0 Commitments

This chapter explores Zimbabwe's commitment to sustainable development through a comprehensive framework of global, regional, and sub-regional agreements. The chapter begins with an overview of the key international treaties and instruments that shape the nation's development agenda, underscoring Zimbabwe's alignment with the 2030 Agenda and its 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) aimed at fostering inclusive growth and human rights.

Zimbabwe's initiatives to combat climate change are highlighted, particularly its adherence to the Paris Agreement and the implementation of Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) focused on enhancing climate resilience through sustainable practices. The chapter also addresses the core human rights treaties Zimbabwe has ratified, which establish a framework for aligning national policies with international human rights norms and standards.

The analysis further delves into Zimbabwe's integration of the African Union's Agenda 2063 and the Southern African Development Community (SADC) commitments into its national policies. This strategic alignment demonstrates Zimbabwe's dedication to harmonizing local development strategies with broader continental aspirations aimed at fostering socio-economic transformation, peace, and sustainability.

Through these commitments, Zimbabwe signals an intention to build a future that prioritizes the well-being of its citizens while addressing critical challenges such as inequality, environmental sustainability, and governance.

Meaningful Participation of Marginalized Groups: The Country Analysis was informed by extensive stakeholder consultations. However, ensuring that the voices of people at risk of being left behind are meaningfully reflected requires more than broad participation alone. Particular attention should be given to children, women and girls, persons with disabilities, indigenous communities, older persons, and other marginalised groups whose perspectives are often underrepresented in decision-making processes. Meaningful participation depends on accessible information, inclusive and safe consultation processes, appropriate accommodations, adequate resources, transparent feedback, and opportunities for participants to influence decisions.

Building on the consultation process, the next Cooperation Framework should further strengthen inclusive engagement throughout implementation, monitoring, and evaluation. This includes establishing accessible and responsive feedback and accountability mechanisms, investing in the capacity of stakeholders to participate effectively, allocating adequate resources to remove barriers to participation, and ensuring that engagement approaches are tailored to the needs of different groups. Strengthening these mechanisms will help reinforce trust, promote national ownership, and ensure that the principle of Leave No One Behind is reflected throughout the Cooperation Framework cycle.

Operationalizing the Human Rights-Based Approach: The Country Analysis applies a Human Rights-Based Approach (HRBA), recognising that sustainable development depends on the realization of human rights and the principles of participation, equality and non-discrimination, accountability, transparency, and empowerment. The analysis identifies both the rights of people and the corresponding responsibilities of institutions to respect, protect, and fulfil those rights. Particular attention is given to people at risk of being left behind, including children, women and girls, persons with disabilities, older persons, migrants, refugees, and other vulnerable and marginalised groups who continue to face multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination.

Despite important legislative and policy advances, significant human rights challenges continue to affect development outcomes. Many people continue to experience barriers in accessing adequate healthcare, quality education, food security, water and sanitation, housing, social protection, and decent work. At the same time, stakeholders continue to highlight concerns relating to civic participation, access to justice, institutional accountability, gender equality, and discrimination affecting some population groups. These challenges are interconnected and reinforce existing inequalities, limiting progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals.

The analysis draws on Zimbabwe's obligations under international and regional human rights instruments, as well as recommendations from United Nations treaty bodies, the Universal Periodic Review, and relevant African human rights mechanisms. Recent recommendations have highlighted priorities including strengthening social protection, improving access to health and education, addressing discrimination and violence against children and women, enhancing institutional capacity, and reinforcing accountability and inclusive governance. These recommendations provide an important framework for identifying development priorities and monitoring progress.

The Cooperation Framework should mainstream the Human Rights-Based Approach across all outcomes and interventions by strengthening participation, non-discrimination, accountability, and empowerment. It should support national institutions in implementing human rights commitments, strengthen the capacity of duty-bearers to deliver equitable services, empower rights-holders to claim their rights, and promote evidence-based policies that address structural inequalities and advance the Leave No One Behind principle.

Human Rights Capacity Gap Analysis: A Human Rights-Based Approach (HRBA) requires analysing not only who the rights-holders and duty-bearers are, but also whether they have the capacities to claim and fulfil rights. This includes assessing capacities related to knowledge and awareness, participation, leadership, access to information and resources, institutional effectiveness, accountability, and the ability to make and implement decisions.

Rights-holders. Many people at risk of being left behind continue to face significant barriers in claiming their rights. Children experience obstacles in accessing birth registration, quality education, health services, and protection, with children with disabilities facing particularly high levels of exclusion from education. Women and girls continue to face legal, social, economic, and cultural barriers that limit their participation in decision-making and access to justice, productive resources, and essential services. Persons with disabilities encounter persistent physical, communication, and attitudinal barriers, together with limited access to assistive technologies and inclusive services. Some population groups, including LGBTI persons and sex workers, also experience stigma, discrimination, and legal and social barriers that may limit access to services, justice, and effective remedies. Across many groups, limited awareness of rights, inadequate access to information, weak organisational capacity, and financial constraints continue to reduce opportunities to participate meaningfully in decision-making and claim rights.

Duty-bearers. The Government, as the primary duty-bearer, has established an extensive constitutional, legal, and policy framework for the protection of human rights. However, implementation is constrained by limited financial, technical, institutional, and human resource capacity across many sectors. Coordination among institutions, enforcement of existing legislation, monitoring systems, and accountability mechanisms require further strengthening to support effective implementation of human rights obligations. Resource constraints continue to affect the delivery of quality health, education, social protection, water and sanitation, and other essential public services.

Other duty-bearers also face important capacity challenges. Local authorities and independent commissions require stronger institutional and financial capacity to fulfil their mandates effectively. Traditional and community leaders play an important role in advancing social inclusion but may benefit from continued engagement and capacity development on human rights, gender equality, disability inclusion, and child protection. The private sector has opportunities to strengthen the implementation of responsible business practices, including respect for labour rights, occupational safety and health, non-discrimination, and effective grievance mechanisms. Development partners can further enhance the effectiveness of their support through strengthened coordination, alignment with national priorities, and continued investment in national systems and institutional capacity.

Addressing these capacity gaps will require sustained investment in institutional strengthening, human resource development, financing, public awareness, coordination, and accountability systems. The Cooperation Framework should therefore prioritise building the capacities of both rights-holders to claim their rights and duty-bearers to fulfil their obligations, while embedding participation, equality and non-discrimination, transparency, accountability, and empowerment across all programme areas.

5.1 Global Commitments

Zimbabwe's sustainable development agenda is anchored in a broad range of international, regional, and sub-regional normative frameworks that promote human rights, inclusive development, environmental sustainability, peace, and resilience. As a State Party to numerous global and regional instruments, Zimbabwe has committed to aligning its laws, policies, and development strategies with internationally agreed norms and standards.

Zimbabwe's Country Analysis is grounded in the international and regional human rights framework established through the core human rights treaties and instruments ratified by the country. These include the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (CERD), the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights, and the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child. Together, these instruments provide the normative and accountability framework that underpins the analysis and supports the application of the Human Rights-Based Approach and the Leave No One Behind principle throughout the Cooperation Framework.

The analysis also draws on recent recommendations and concluding observations issued by international and regional human rights mechanisms, including the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR, 2025), the Committee on the Rights of the Child (CRC, 2016), and the African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACERWC, 2024). These recommendations have informed the thematic analysis and policy priorities presented throughout the document.

Zimbabwe committed to implementing the 2030 Agenda and its 17 Sustainable Development Goals, adopting the principle of "leaving no one and no place behind" as a central pillar of national development planning. The SDGs are mainstreamed into national frameworks such as the National Development Strategy 1 (2021–2025) and its successor the National Development Strategy 2 (2026–2030), with an emphasis on poverty reduction, inclusive economic growth, human capital development, climate resilience, and strengthened institutions.

Zimbabwe is a Party to the Paris Agreement and has submitted Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs), committing to climate change mitigation and adaptation actions, including enhancing climate-resilient agriculture, sustainable land management, renewable energy expansion, and disaster risk reduction.

Zimbabwe is a State Party to the core international and regional human rights instruments that underpin sustainable development, including the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD), the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families (ICRMW), the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights, and the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child. Through these commitments, the Government has undertaken to respect, protect, and fulfil economic, social, cultural, civil, and political rights, and to integrate human rights principles into economic, social, and environmental policies and programmes. These obligations require the State to progressively realise human rights, reduce inequalities, eliminate discrimination and exclusion, and remove the structural barriers that prevent people from fully participating in and benefiting from sustainable development.

Recent Concluding Observations of the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (2025) reinforce these obligations by highlighting the need to strengthen domestic investment in healthcare, education, social protection, and other essential public services; improve access to decent work and social security; address persistent inequalities affecting people at risk of being left behind; and strengthen institutional capacity and accountability for the implementation of economic, social, and cultural rights. Together with recommendations from other international and regional human rights mechanisms, these findings provide an important human rights framework for the Country Analysis and the forthcoming United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework.

Zimbabwe has committed to international norms promoting peaceful societies, inclusive governance, access to justice, and accountability, consistent with SDG 16. Engagement with international human mechanisms and bodies s reflects a willingness to improve governance, human rights, and institutional performance.

5.2 Continental and Regional Commitments

African Union Agenda 2063: Zimbabwe is committed to Agenda 2063's vision of inclusive growth, structural transformation, peace, and sustainable development, with alignment between Agenda 2063 aspirations and the SDGs. Zimbabwe has mainstreamed the African Union (AU) Agenda 2063 into its national development strategies, integrating continental priorities such as inclusive growth, sustainable development, regional integration, and socio-economic transformation into the planning and implementation of the National Development Strategy 1 (NDS1) and the National Development Strategy 2 (NDS2). This alignment ensures that Zimbabwe's national policies are coherent with Africa-wide aspirations while advancing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

African Regional Human Rights Framework: Zimbabwe is also guided by the African human rights system, including the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights, the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa (Maputo Protocol), the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, the African Youth Charter, the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in Africa, the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Older Persons in Africa, the African Union Convention for the Protection and Assistance of Internally Displaced Persons in Africa (Kampala Convention), and the OAU Convention Governing the Specific Aspects of Refugee Problems in Africa, subject to their respective ratification status. These regional instruments reinforce Zimbabwe's commitments to equality, participation, accountability, non-discrimination, and the promotion and protection of civil, political, economic, social, and cultural rights within the African human rights framework.

SADC Protocols and Regional Frameworks: Zimbabwe has mainstreamed the SADC Regional Indicative Strategic Development Plan (RISDP) 2020-2030 and the principles of sustainable development within its national development framework. This alignment ensures that regional commitments, such as economic integration, social development, and environmental sustainability, are fully incorporated into the country's National Development Strategy 1 (NDS1) and the National Development Strategy 2 (NDS2). Zimbabwe subscribes to SADC protocols on gender and development, energy, water, trade, and infrastructure, promoting regional integration, shared resource management, and economic cooperation.

6.0 Cross-boundary, Regional and Sub-regional Perspectives

Zimbabwe's sustainable development trajectory is deeply interconnected with regional and cross-border dynamics within Southern Africa and the broader African continent. As a land-linked country at the centre of SADC, Zimbabwe's economic, environmental, and social outcomes are influenced by regional integration, shared natural resources, population mobility, climate systems, and transboundary infrastructure networks.

Regional Economic Integration and Trade: Zimbabwe is a member of the SADC, the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA), and the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA). These frameworks offer opportunities to expand trade, diversify exports, promote regional value chains, and stimulate industrialisation. However, Zimbabwe's export structure remains concentrated in primary commodities, limiting its ability to fully leverage regional markets. Non-tariff barriers, infrastructure bottlenecks, and limited productive capacity continue to constrain cross-border trade competitiveness.

Cross-border trade, both formal and informal, plays a vital role in livelihoods, particularly for women and youth. While it supports income generation and food access, much of this trade operates outside formal regulatory frameworks, limiting protection, revenue mobilisation, and scalability.

Transboundary Infrastructure and Connectivity: Zimbabwe's development is closely tied to regional transport, energy, and ICT corridors, including the North–South Corridor linking Southern and Central Africa. Efficient regional infrastructure is critical for lowering transport costs, facilitating trade, and improving access to markets. Persistent gaps in transport networks, border efficiency, energy supply, and digital connectivity reduce Zimbabwe's competitiveness and affect regional supply chains.

Energy security is inherently regional. Zimbabwe is integrated into the Southern African Power Pool (SAPP) and relies on electricity imports from neighbouring countries to meet domestic demand. While regional energy trade enhances resilience, power deficits across the region and climate-related reductions in hydropower generation highlight the need for diversified and renewable energy investments at both national and regional levels.

Shared Natural Resources and Environmental Systems: Zimbabwe shares major transboundary river basins including the Zambezi and Limpopo, which are critical for water supply, agriculture, hydropower generation, biodiversity, and livelihoods across multiple countries. Climate change, upstream abstraction, pollution, and ecosystem degradation pose regional risks to water security and require strengthened basin-level governance and cooperation. Similarly, Transfrontier Conservation Areas (TFCAs)—such as the Kavango–Zambezi (KAZA) TFCA—support biodiversity conservation, climate resilience, and nature-based tourism, generating shared economic and environmental benefits. However, human–wildlife conflict, land pressure, and financing constraints remain cross-border challenges.

Climate Change and Disaster Risk: Climate-related shocks—including cyclones, floods, droughts, and heatwaves—frequently affect Zimbabwe and neighbouring countries simultaneously. Events such as Cyclone Idai underscored the need for regional early-warning systems, climate information sharing, and coordinated disaster preparedness and response mechanisms. Cross-border climate impacts on agriculture, food security, and migration necessitate harmonised regional strategies for resilience and adaptation.

Migration, Mobility, and Diaspora: Comprehensive Analysis

Migration Patterns and Dynamics: Zimbabwe's migration landscape is characterised by complex and interconnected patterns of emigration, labour migration, transit migration, return migration, and climate-related human mobility. Most Zimbabwean migrants remain within Southern Africa, particularly in South Africa, Botswana, and Namibia, while significant diaspora communities have also been established in the United Kingdom, the United States, Australia, and other countries. Labour migration has expanded employment opportunities and generated important remittance inflows but has also contributed to the emigration of skilled professionals, particularly in the health and education sectors, with implications for human capital development and service delivery. Zimbabwe also serves as an important transit country along the North–South migration corridor, while climate-related disasters—including droughts, floods, and cyclones—are increasingly contributing to displacement and influencing migration as an adaptation strategy.

Migration presents both opportunities and challenges for sustainable development. Diaspora remittances, which consistently exceed foreign direct investment and official development assistance, provide an important source of household income, foreign exchange, and economic resilience, supporting consumption, education, health, and small business development. Beyond financial contributions, the Zimbabwean diaspora represents a valuable source of skills, knowledge, technology, innovation, entrepreneurship, and investment that can contribute to national development. The adoption of the National Migration Policy and the National Diaspora Policy provides an important foundation for strengthening migration governance and diaspora engagement. However, implementation continues to be constrained by institutional capacity limitations, data gaps, and resource constraints.

At the same time, important challenges remain. High remittance transfer costs reduce the developmental impact of remittance flows, while much of these resources continue to finance household consumption rather than productive investment. Migrants in vulnerable situations continue to face protection risks, including exploitation, trafficking in persons, and limited access to services. Climate-related displacement is increasing, requiring stronger integration of human mobility into climate adaptation, disaster risk reduction, and resilience planning. Evidence gaps on migration, diaspora engagement, labour mobility, and climate-related displacement also constrain effective policymaking.

The Cooperation Framework should support a comprehensive migration and development approach by strengthening migration governance, operationalising the National Migration Policy and National Diaspora Policy, improving migration data and analytics, protecting migrants in vulnerable situations, reducing the cost of remittances, promoting diaspora investment and skills transfer, integrating climate mobility into national planning, and strengthening regional cooperation on labour mobility and migration governance. Harnessing the positive contribution of migration while addressing its associated risks will be essential for advancing inclusive growth, human capital development, resilience, and sustainable development.

Migration, Mobility, and Remittances: Labour mobility within Southern Africa is a defining cross-boundary feature. Zimbabweans migrate within the region and beyond in search of livelihoods, skills development, and income. Diaspora remittances, largely originating from the region, are a critical source of household income and foreign exchange. While migration can reduce poverty and enhance skills transfer, it also contributes to brain drain, particularly in health and education sectors, affecting service delivery in the country.

Regional Cooperation for Sustainable Development: Zimbabwe's pursuit of sustainable development is strengthened through regional partnerships on trade facilitation, infrastructure development, climate action, water governance, energy security, and public health. Continued alignment between national development strategies and regional frameworks—such as SADC Regional Indicative Strategic Development Plan, AU Agenda 2063, and AfCFTA implementation mechanisms—will be essential to maximise cross-border synergies.

7.0 Progress towards the 2030 Agenda

Zimbabwe demonstrates a mixed and uneven SDG progress, with some areas showing moderate gains (health, education, gender policy, water access, climate mitigation) while others face persistent and significant challenges (poverty, nutrition, informal economy, inequality, corruption, climate vulnerability). The country's development trajectory is a complex, self-reinforcing system where structural economic weaknesses, environmental vulnerabilities, and inequalities intersect, requiring integrated, multi-sectoral interventions that prioritize the most vulnerable and address underlying constraints. Financing gaps, macroeconomic vulnerabilities, and implementation capacity remain critical limiting factors across all goals.

Overall, Zimbabwe's SDG trajectory points to the need for targeted investments, strengthened governance and service delivery systems, and enhanced financing for development to accelerate progress, particularly for the most vulnerable groups and communities furthest behind.

7.1 People (Human Capital and Social Development)

Moderate improvements in health and education outcomes, and progress in establishing gender equality policy frameworks. The country was successfully removed from the global Hunger Hotspots list.

Key Trends and Challenges:

- **Poverty (SDG 1):** High and persistent, with 42% poverty in 2023, far from the 2025 NDS1 target. Social protection coverage remains critically low (16.4%) and underfunded, exacerbated by a large informal economy[5].
- **Hunger and Nutrition (SDG 2):** While food security improved, the country is off-track for most global nutrition targets, facing a triple burden of malnutrition (stunting, wasting, micronutrient deficiencies, rising overweight). Undernutrition remains the major issue among children under 5 years of age and with over one out of every four (27%, or

[5] World Bank. (2025). Zimbabwe economic update: Fostering a business-enabling regulatory environment for private sector growth (December 2, 2025). World Bank.

570,000) Zimbabwean children stunted, not growing and developing to their full potential, the country has regressed against this indicator[6].

- **Health and Well-being (SDG 3):** According to the World Health Organisation (WHO), in terms of the Universal Health Coverage (UHC) Service Coverage Index (SDG3.8.1), the country has an index of 59 as at 2023 up from 54.00 in 2018. Maternal mortality significantly declined (from 960 in 2011 to 212 projected in 2024[7]. However, adolescent pregnancy is rising, and infant/neonatal mortality rates fluctuate, with neonatal mortality reaching its highest in 2024. Access to quality healthcare, particularly for persons with disabilities, remains limited, and health financing is below international targets.
  The Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR), in its September 2025 Concluding Observations, highlighted persistent challenges affecting the health sector, including inadequate public financing, the continued emigration of health professionals linked to low remuneration and difficult working conditions, declining external financing, and shortages of essential medicines, medical supplies, and equipment. The Committee recommended increasing public investment in health, strengthening the recruitment and retention of health workers through improved conditions of service, and ensuring the sustainable availability of essential medicines and health commodities. These recommendations reinforce the need to strengthen the health system and provide an important foundation for the Universal Basic Services pathway and the Cooperation Framework's focus on equitable access to quality healthcare.
- **Quality Education (SDG 4):** Enrolments show progressive growth, and gender parity is largely achieved in primary education. However, targets for primary/secondary enrolment were missed. Significant challenges persist in foundational learning outcomes, digital access, infrastructure deficits, and high dropout rates due to financial constraints and adolescent pregnancy/marriage.
- **Child Protection Systems and Vulnerabilities:** Zimbabwe's child protection system continues to face significant capacity and financing constraints, with available resources meeting only an estimated 2–5 per cent of identified needs in 2025. As a result, essential services—including prevention, case management, psychosocial support, family strengthening, and alternative care—remain under-resourced. Birth registration coverage remains low at 56.6 per cent, limiting many children's access to legal identity and increasing their vulnerability to exploitation, child labour, trafficking, child marriage, and exclusion from essential services. Violence against children remains widespread, while child labour continues to affect many children, driven by poverty, economic hardship, and climate-related shocks. Children with disabilities continue to experience severe exclusion from education and other basic services, and child marriage remains a significant challenge despite recent legal reforms. Increasing climate-related disasters are further disrupting children's access to education, health, nutrition, protection, and other essential services, highlighting the growing links between climate change and child rights.
  The Committee on the Rights of the Child (CRC), in its 2016 Concluding Observations, and the African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (2024) highlighted persistent concerns relating to discrimination against children in vulnerable situations, incomplete birth registration, child marriage and other harmful practices, violence against children, including corporal punishment, and the treatment of children

[6] Zimbabwe National Statistics Agency (ZIMSTAT) and ICF. (2025). Zimbabwe Demographic and Health Survey 2023–24: Key Indicators Report. Harare, Zimbabwe, and Rockville, Maryland, USA: ZIMSTAT and ICF.
[7] Zimbabwe National Statistics Agency (ZIMSTAT) and ICF. (2025). Zimbabwe Demographic and Health Survey 2023–24: Key Indicators Report. Harare, Zimbabwe, and Rockville, Maryland, USA: ZIMSTAT and ICF.

in conflict with the law. While welcoming important legislative reforms, including the Children's Amendment Act, the African Committee also noted continuing implementation challenges, particularly in rural areas, and called for stronger investment in child protection systems. These findings underscore the need to strengthen child protection institutions, expand access to essential services, and ensure adequate and sustainable financing to safeguard the rights and wellbeing of every child.

- **Governance and Institutional Capacity:** Governance and institutional capacity constraints continue to affect the effectiveness, efficiency, and equity of service delivery across the health, education, and social protection sectors. In the health sector, institutional fragmentation, limited domestic financing, reliance on out-of-pocket expenditure and external assistance, and accountability challenges continue to affect the sustainability and resilience of the health system. In education, a large share of public expenditure is allocated to employment costs, limiting fiscal space for infrastructure, learning materials, digital technologies, and quality improvements, while coordination across levels of government and engagement with non-state providers require further strengthening. The social protection system remains fragmented across multiple institutions, with challenges relating to coordination, beneficiary identification, data integration, and budget execution, reducing the effectiveness and coverage of social assistance programmes.
  Strengthening governance and institutional capacity will be fundamental to improving development outcomes and accelerating progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals. The Cooperation Framework should support stronger public financial management and budget execution, enhanced institutional coordination and accountability, integrated data and information systems, clearer roles and responsibilities across national and subnational institutions, and more transparent, inclusive, and participatory approaches to planning, budgeting, service delivery, monitoring, and evaluation.
- **Human Capital Outcomes and Persistent Inequalities:** The 2023–24 Zimbabwe Demographic and Health Survey (ZDHS) highlights persistent inequalities in human development outcomes across nutrition, health, and education. Child nutrition remains a major concern, with 27 per cent of children under five stunted, one in four children experiencing severe food poverty, and exclusive breastfeeding rates at just 42 per cent. Child survival also remains a challenge, with under-five mortality at 69 deaths per 1,000 live births and neonatal mortality at 37 per 1,000 live births. Although childhood immunisation coverage has improved, with 72 per cent of children receiving basic vaccinations, nearly two-thirds of women continue to report barriers to accessing healthcare, pointing to persistent constraints in the availability, affordability, and accessibility of essential health services.
  Education outcomes reveal a similar pattern. While access to primary education is high, with a gross enrolment rate of 101.3 per cent and a completion rate of 91 per cent, participation declines sharply at higher levels of education. Gross enrolment falls to 52.2 per cent at secondary level, and only 11 per cent of learners complete upper secondary education. Financial constraints remain the principal driver of school dropout, while adolescent pregnancy continues to disproportionately affect girls' educational attainment. These findings underscore the need for sustained investment in equitable, quality, and inclusive health, nutrition, education, and social protection systems to strengthen human capital development and accelerate progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals.
- **Protection, WASH and Human Well-Being:** Protection and WASH indicators further highlight persistent inequalities and development challenges. An estimated 39 per cent of

women aged 15–49 have experienced physical or sexual violence, while the adolescent birth rate remains high at 111 births per 1,000 girls aged 15–19 years. Birth registration coverage has stagnated at 56.6 per cent, limiting many children's access to legal identity and essential services. Although 84 per cent of households have access to improved drinking water sources, significant disparities remain in sanitation, particularly between rural (63 per cent) and urban (97 per cent) areas. Women and girls continue to bear a disproportionate responsibility for collecting water, reflecting persistent gender inequalities in unpaid care and domestic work.
These findings highlight the need for integrated investments in protection, health, education, nutrition, water and sanitation, supported by stronger institutions, more equitable service delivery, improved use of disaggregated data, and sustained attention to the needs of people at risk of being left behind. Addressing these interconnected challenges will be essential for strengthening human capital, reducing inequalities, and accelerating progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals.

- **Gender Equality (SDG 5):** Zimbabwe has made important progress in strengthening the legal and policy framework for gender equality, and women's representation in managerial positions and the Senate has increased. However, significant gender inequalities persist in access to economic opportunities, productive resources, finance, and decision-making. Representation of women in the National Assembly has declined, while gender-based violence (GBV) remains widespread. Women and girls also continue to shoulder a disproportionate share of unpaid care and domestic work, limiting their economic participation and opportunities for leadership.
  The Universal Periodic Review (UPR) third cycle (2022) encouraged Zimbabwe to strengthen investment in social sectors, reduce inequalities, reinforce human rights institutions and accountability mechanisms, address discrimination against women, persons with disabilities, and other marginalised groups, and protect the rights to freedom of expression, association, and peaceful assembly. It also called for strengthened efforts to combat corruption. These priorities are reinforced by broader assessments that continue to highlight challenges relating to civic participation, governance, and the protection of human rights. Together, these findings underscore the importance of advancing gender equality, strengthening inclusive governance, and addressing structural barriers that continue to limit equal opportunities and the full realization of human rights.

7.2 Planet (Environment and Climate Resilience)

Improvements in access to water and sanitation. Significant legislative efforts in climate action, including a Climate Change Management Bill. Forest cover has rebounded, and protected areas for biodiversity have expanded. Renewable energy share is increasing.

Key Trends and Challenges:

- **Water and Sanitation (SDG 6):** According to the Zimbabwe Demographic and Health Survey (2023-24), the proportion of households using an improved water source has increased to 84%, compared to 78% in 2015 and 79% in 2010-11. The proportion of households using improved sanitation facilities has increased over the years from to 67% in 2015 to 77% in 2023–24. The proportion of households practicing open defecation has decreased from 23% in 2015 to 17% in 2023-24[8].However, significant rural–urban disparities persist, with a higher prevalence in rural areas (25%) than in urban areas

[8] Zimbabwe National Statistics Agency (ZIMSTAT) and ICF. (2025). Zimbabwe Demographic and Health Survey 2023–24: Key Indicators Report. Harare, Zimbabwe, and Rockville, Maryland, USA: ZIMSTAT and ICF.

(2%). Deteriorating water and sanitation infrastructure, inadequate investment, and the continued prevalence of waterborne diseases remain critical challenges, disproportionately affecting women and girls.

- **Clean Energy (SDG 7):** Energy access is improving, and renewable energy's share in total final consumption is growing, with increased installed capacity. Despite this, persistent power shortages and overreliance on fossil fuels negatively impact the economy.
- **Climate Action (SDG 13):** Zimbabwe demonstrates strong performance in climate change mitigation. However, it remains highly vulnerable to climate-induced shocks (droughts, floods, cyclones), which lead to increased disasters, deaths, and significant economic costs (projected 5% of GDP annually by 2050)[9]. Greenhouse gas emissions are on an upward trend.
- **Life Below Water (SDG 14, freshwater focus):** While adapting the SDG to freshwater ecosystems, challenges include mounting pressures from pollution, inadequate waste management, and agricultural runoff, threatening aquatic life and water quality.
- **Life on Land (SDG 15):** Forest cover rebounded by 2024, and protected areas for biodiversity have increased. Nevertheless, extensive land degradation, deforestation, water scarcity, and pollution from unsustainable practices (e.g., mining) remain critical environmental challenges.

7.3 Prosperity (Economic Structure and Growth)

Economic growth is projected to rebound. Manufacturing capacity utilization and output show signs of recovery, contributing significantly to GDP. The labour share of GDP has increased, suggesting improved income distribution to workers.

Key Trends and Challenges:

- **Decent Work and Economic Growth (SDG 8):** The economy remains heavily informal (85.5% of employment)[10], characterized by low productivity, limited access to finance, and poor work conditions. Persistent labour market challenges include high youth unemployment (41.2%) and low overall labour force participation, especially for women. Worker productivity lags behind regional averages.
- **Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure (SDG 9):** Manufacturing's contribution to GDP and value added per capita has significantly declined over time, indicating deindustrialization and weakened productive capacity. There are ongoing challenges in improving the business environment and providing MSMEs with access to finance.
- **Sustainable Cities and Communities (SDG 11)**: Zimbabwe has undergone rapid urbanisation, with the population increasing from 13.1 million in 2012 to 15.2 million in 2022, reflecting an annual growth rate of 1.5%, while the proportion of people living in urban areas rose from 33% to 38.6% over the same period[11]. This trend has intensified pressure on housing, infrastructure, and social services.
- **Responsible Consumption and Production (SDG 12):** Heavy reliance on extractives and low-value production, combined with high energy costs, limited finance, and informality, constrains Zimbabwe's transition to resource-efficient, low-carbon, and

[9] World Bank Group. 2024. Zimbabwe Country Climate and Development Report. CCDR Series. © World Bank. http://hdl.handle.net/10986/41137 License: CC BY-NC-ND 3.0 IGO."
[10] Zimbabwe National Statistics Agency (ZIMSTAT). 2024 Third Quarter Labour Force Survey Report.
[11] Zimbabwe National Statistics Agency (ZIMSTAT). 2024. Zimbabwe Population and Housing Census 2022. Harare: ZIMSTAT.

sustainable production systems. High levels of poverty, food insecurity, and informality shape consumption choices in Zimbabwe, prioritising affordability and immediate survival over sustainability. Limited waste management and recycling services further reinforce unsustainable consumption patterns, particularly in urban and peri-urban areas.

- **Reduced Inequalities (SDG 10):** The Gini index indicates high- and increasing-income inequality (50.3 in 2019)[12], with pronounced spatial disparities between rural and urban areas. These inequalities are further exacerbated by climate shocks and persistent poverty, undermining social cohesion and constraining inclusive economic growth.

7.4 Peace (Governance & Social Cohesion)

Zimbabwe's peace and security landscape is shaped by a complex interplay of historical legacies, socio-political dynamics, economic challenges, and climate-induced vulnerabilities. While the country has not experienced armed conflict since independence in 1980, underlying social and economic inequalities, political tensions, and social exclusion continue to undermine sustainable peace and social cohesion. Legislative frameworks for human rights, child protection, and disability inclusion exist and while the government has expressed commitments to reform, progress remains uneven, and concerns persist regarding the protection of fundamental freedoms.

Key Trends and Challenges:

- **Peace, Justice & Strong Institutions (SDG 16):** Despite some progress, challenges remain in areas such as corruption, access to justice, and institutional accountability. While efforts have been made to strengthen transparency and protect vulnerable groups, progress is uneven and limited by governance and resource constraints.
- A national human rights institution exists and is compliant with the Paris Principles. However, key rule of law and oversight institutions remain under-resourced, limiting their ability to deliver services and ensure transparency. Public trust in institutions is low and weak enforcement and poor compliance with regulations compound the problem; for example, Auditor General reports often show that recommendations to address financial irregularities are ignored.
- Persistent restrictions on political freedoms, shrinking civic space, and weak protection of fundamental rights undermine inclusive governance and limit meaningful citizen participation. Access to justice remains unequal, with rural and marginalised communities facing barriers such as high costs, long distances, and inadequate legal representation.
- Corruption remains a significant challenge in Zimbabwe, as reflected in a score of 22 out of 100 and a ranking of 157 out of 180 countries on the 2025 Transparency International Corruption Perceptions Index.
- Illicit financial flows (IFFs) pose a major constraint on Zimbabwe's ability to finance sustainable development, diverting critical resources away from public investment in health, education, infrastructure, and social protection. Between 2015 and 2023, estimated annual losses resulting from mineral smuggling, trade misinvoicing, and tax evasion exceeded USD 2 billion, with gold and chrome among the most affected commodities (African Natural Resources Management and Investment Centre, 2025).
- National strategies are aligned with SDG 16 targets to reduce violence, trafficking, and child exploitation. Yet political violence remains a major issue, often linked to electoral

[12] World Bank (2022)

processes and intra-party disputes, violence against women and girls is still prevalent and intentional homicide rates have risen sharply.

Civic Space and Participation: An open and inclusive civic space is an important enabler of sustainable development, democratic governance, accountability, and the realization of human rights. In Zimbabwe, the legal and regulatory environment for civil society has continued to evolve. The enactment of the Private Voluntary Organisations (PVO) Amendment Act in 2025, which broadened the scope of organisations subject to regulation and introduced additional registration and compliance requirements, has generated discussion among stakeholders regarding its potential implications for the operating environment of civil society organisations, development partnerships, and service delivery. Other legislation relating to public order, cyber governance, and access to information has similarly been the subject of debate regarding its potential impact on civic participation and the exercise of fundamental freedoms.

Beyond the legal framework, civic participation is also influenced by institutional capacity, access to information, financial and technical resources, and opportunities for meaningful engagement in public policy processes. Civil society organisations play an important role in delivering services, promoting community resilience, strengthening accountability, and amplifying the voices of people at risk of being left behind. Maintaining an enabling environment for constructive engagement among Government, civil society, the private sector, communities, and development partners will therefore remain important for inclusive development and effective implementation of the Cooperation Framework.

The Cooperation Framework provides an opportunity to strengthen inclusive participation, dialogue, and accountability by supporting institutional capacity, promoting meaningful stakeholder engagement, and reinforcing partnerships that contribute to transparent, responsive, and people-centred development.

7.5 Partnerships

Zimbabwe is promoting a multi-stakeholder partnership approach to the SDGs, reflecting growing recognition that coordinated action across government, civil society, the private sector, and development partners is essential to address complex development challenges under constrained fiscal conditions. Through its convening role, the UN Country Team (UNCT) supports alignment around shared outcomes, joint programming, and policy advocacy, with the UNSDCF serving as the primary framework for coherent UN engagement in Zimbabwe. Civil society organisations (CSOs), think tanks, and universities are active in SDG-related research, advocacy, and service delivery.

The private sector is a critical partner for SDG implementation in Zimbabwe, particularly in the context of limited fiscal space, constrained public investment, and growing development needs. However, its full contribution is constrained by financing, policy, and structural barriers. Unlocking its potential will be essential for inclusive growth, job creation, and sustainable development.

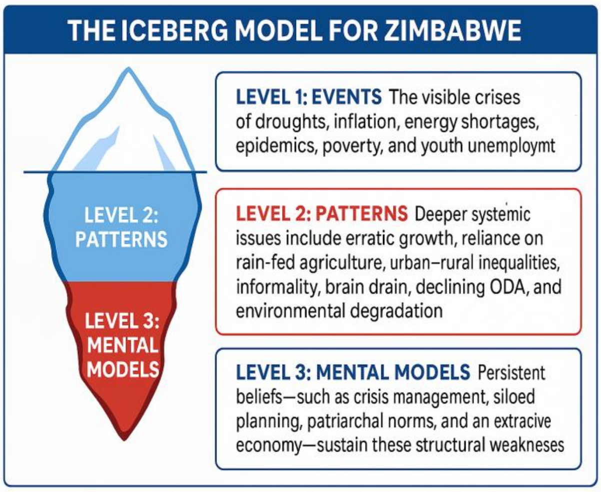
Community-based structures—including ward committees, community health workers, school development committees, and water point committees—support the delivery and sustainability of basic services such as health, education, water, and sanitation, particularly in rural and hard-to-reach areas.

Zimbabwe’s diaspora plays a significant and multifaceted role in advancing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Key areas of diaspora contribution include: financing for development; human capital and skills transfer; investment and entrepreneurship; philanthropy; and advocacy. Unlocking its full potential will require stronger policy frameworks, trust-building, and structured mechanisms to align diaspora engagement with sustainable development priorities.

Beyond financing, the means of implementation for the SDGs in Zimbabwe are also shaped by access to technology and external markets. While digital connectivity has expanded, significant disparities in the availability, affordability, and effective use of technology persist—particularly among women, rural populations, and micro, small and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs)—constraining inclusive digital transformation, innovation, and the expansion of e-governance. Access to external markets also remains constrained by non-tariff barriers, infrastructure gaps, and the ongoing impact of unilateral coercive measures (UCMs), which affect trade flows, financial transactions, and investor confidence. Leveraging regional trade frameworks, including the African Continental Free Trade Area, alongside strengthened South–South cooperation, will be critical to diversifying exports, promoting value-added trade, and reducing reliance on traditional markets. Addressing these non-financial constraints is essential to unlocking productivity gains, enhancing competitiveness, and advancing sustainable and inclusive economic growth.

8.0 Deep Dive: Key Challenges and Opportunities

Zimbabwe's development trajectory is marked by a complex interplay of progress, persistent structural challenges, and significant opportunities. The nation's aspirations, articulated in Vision 2030 and the National Development Strategies (NDS1 & NDS2), aim for an upper-middle-income economy by 2030. However, achieving this vision requires navigating deep-seated systemic issues.



Zimbabwe’s Iceberg Model reveals that the country’s visible crises—such as climate-induced disasters, inflation, energy shortages, disease outbreaks, rising poverty, and high youth unemployment—are symptoms of deeper systemic patterns, including erratic growth, dependence on rain-fed agriculture, entrenched informality, urban–rural inequalities, brain drain, declining external support, and environmental degradation. Beneath these patterns lie structural drivers: a narrow and informal economic base, weak domestic resource mobilization, governance and coordination gaps, underfunded social sectors, gender disparities, infrastructure deficits, and constrained access to long-term finance. At the deepest level, persistent mental models—short-term crisis management, siloed planning, patriarchal norms, acceptance of informality, centralized decision-making, dependency on external financing, and an extractive economic paradigm—sustain these structural weaknesses. Addressing Zimbabwe’s development trajectory therefore requires interventions that move beyond treating surface-level events to restructuring systems and transforming underlying beliefs through economic diversification, formalization, social investment, climate-resilient development, governance reforms, and gender-transformative approaches.

Key Systemic Challenges and Interconnections

The analysis highlights several reinforcing feedback loops that perpetuate challenges:

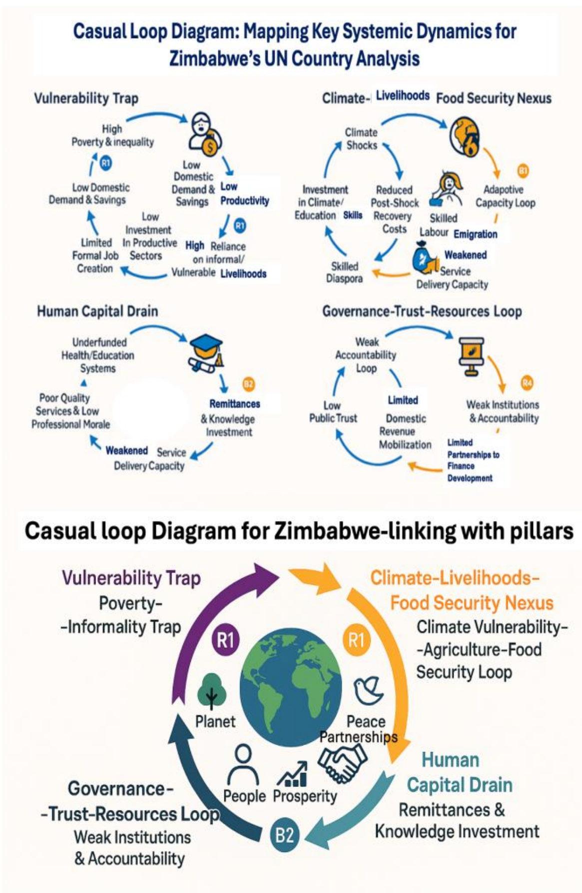
1. **Poverty-Informality Trap:** High poverty and limited formal job opportunities drive the expansion of the informal economy. This informal sector, characterized by low productivity and wages, limits domestic revenue mobilization, leading to inadequate

public investment in health, education, and social protection. This, in turn, perpetuates poverty and erodes human capital, creating a vicious cycle.

2. **Climate Vulnerability-Agriculture-Food Security Loop:** Recurrent climate shocks, such as droughts and floods, disrupt rain-fed agriculture, leading to food insecurity and livelihood losses. This increases poverty and malnutrition, reduces household and national resilience, and makes the country more vulnerable to subsequent climate shocks.
3. **Debt & Financing Constraint Loop:** High public debt and arrears limit access to concessional finance, contributing to macroeconomic vulnerabilities and low investment. This results in subdued growth and a narrow tax base, leading to revenue shortfalls and renewed borrowing, where debt servicing crowds out social and development spending.

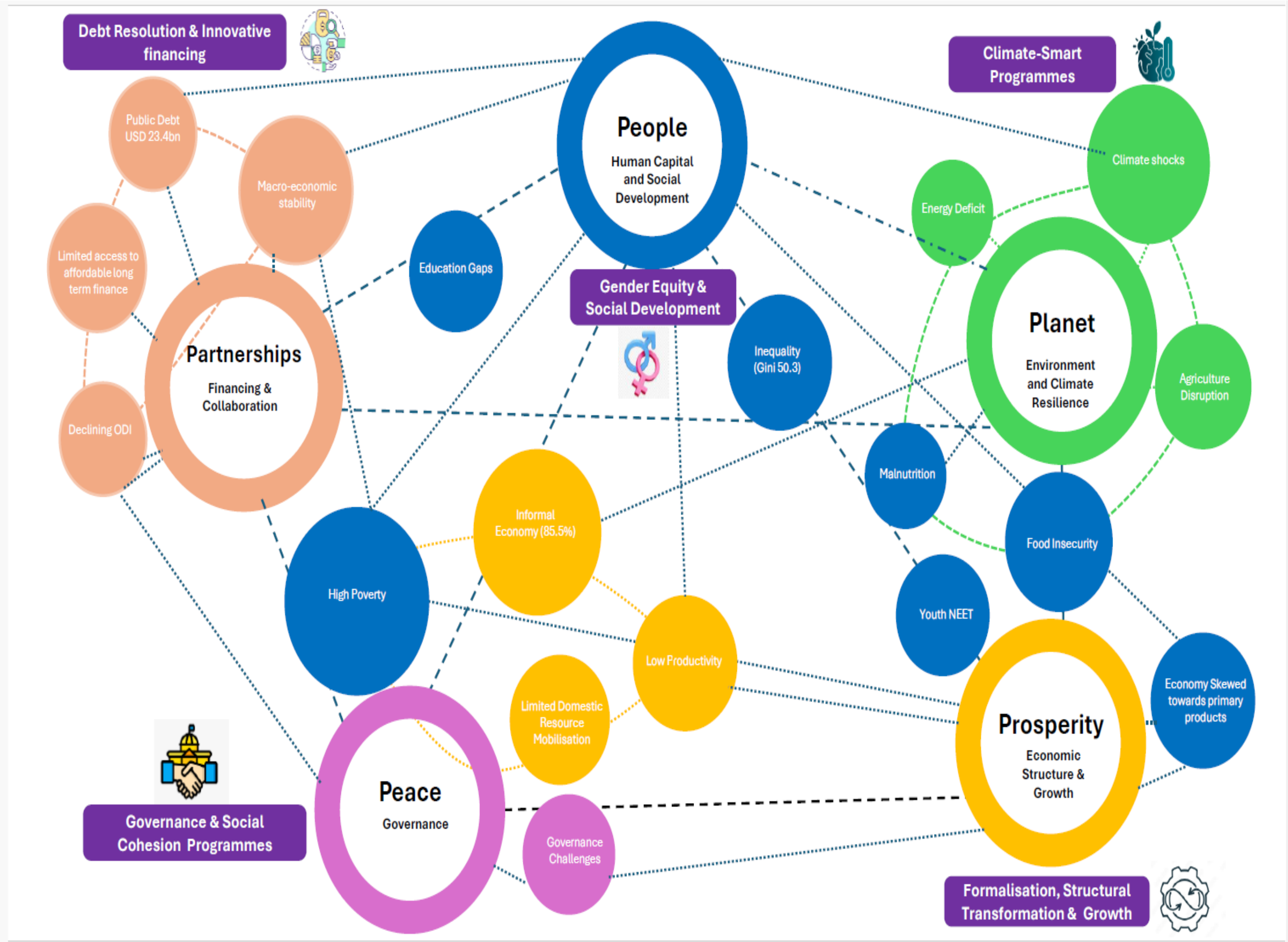
These loops underscore the interconnectedness of challenges across different pillars:

- **Planet → Prosperity & People:** Energy deficits hinder industrial productivity and job creation, while water and sanitation gaps worsen health outcomes and human capital.
- **People → Prosperity & Peace:** Education and skills gaps contribute to high youth NEET rates, fuelling grievances and threatening peace.
- **Peace → Prosperity & Partnership:** Governance challenges deter investment and enable illicit financial flows, erode public trust, undermining prosperity and domestic resource mobilization.
- **Partnership → All Pillars:** Financing gaps lead to underinvestment in critical sectors like health, climate adaptation, infrastructure, and institutions.



This causal loop diagram illustrates four interconnected systemic challenges that perpetuate cycles of vulnerability and constrain sustainable development in Zimbabwe. The **Vulnerability Trap** shows how high poverty and limited formal job creation reinforce dependence on informal livelihoods, reducing investment and domestic demand, which in turn deepens poverty. The **Climate-Livelihoods-Food Security Nexus** depicts a reinforcing loop where climate shocks disrupt rain-fed agriculture, leading to food insecurity and reduced adaptive capacity, further heightening vulnerability. The **Human Capital Drain** cycle links underfunded health and education systems to poor service quality and skilled emigration, though remittances and knowledge investment provide a partial balancing effect. Finally, the **Governance-Trust-Resources Loop** demonstrates how weak accountability undermines revenue mobilization and partnerships, limiting resources for development and reinforcing institutional weaknesses. Together, these loops cut across the five SDG pillars—People, Planet, Prosperity, Peace, and Partnerships—highlighting how failures in one dimension exacerbate challenges in others, creating a complex web of barriers to sustainable and inclusive growth.

Zimbabwe System Thinking results and explanation



Zimbabwe's development challenges form an interconnected system in which structural economic weaknesses, climate vulnerabilities, and social inequalities reinforce one another, slowing progress across multiple Sustainable Development Goals. Climate shocks undermine rain-fed agriculture and food security (SDG 2), while energy deficits limit productive capacity and green transition efforts (SDG 7, SDG 13). Persistent poverty, high informality, malnutrition, and gaps in education and health erode human capital (SDG 1, SDG 3, SDG 4), with gender inequality further constraining economic participation (SDG 5). Governance constraints, debt distress, and limited access to concessional finance weaken institutions and partnerships (SDG 16, SDG 17). Addressing these systemic challenges requires integrated interventions—such as climate-smart agriculture, renewable energy expansion, economic formalization, strengthened social protection, debt resolution, and inclusive governance—to unlock cross-cutting development gains aligned with Zimbabwe's Five Ps and accelerate national progress toward the SDGs.

Human Rights Dimensions of Systemic Dynamics: While the systems analysis effectively identifies structural barriers through causal loop diagrams, these dynamics must be understood not merely as economic or technical constraints, but as manifestations of rights deprivations and gaps in State obligations. The Poverty-Informality Trap, for instance, directly implicates the right to work (ICESCR Article 6), the right to social security (ICESCR Article 9), and the right to an adequate standard of living (ICESCR Article 11). The persistence of this trap reflects the State's obligation to take steps toward the full realization of these rights, including through progressive realization and non-retrogression.

Similarly, the Climate Vulnerability-Agriculture-Food Security Loop represents a failure to fulfil the right to adequate food (ICESCR Article 11) and the right to water (ICESCR Articles 11 and 12). Each climate shock that undermines agricultural livelihoods constitutes not merely an economic loss but a rights violation that disproportionately affects rural populations, women, and children. The State's obligations under the Paris Agreement and its Nationally Determined Contributions must therefore be understood as human rights obligations, with climate adaptation and mitigation measures serving as mechanisms for fulfilling economic, social, and cultural rights.

The Debt Constraint Loop illustrates how fiscal decisions create cascading rights impacts. As debt servicing crowds out social spending, the State's capacity to fulfil rights to health, education, and social protection diminishes. This raises fundamental questions about the State's compliance with its obligations of progressive realization and the prohibition of retrogression, particularly where debt repayment obligations constrain investments in minimum core obligations. The analysis should consider whether current fiscal policies are consistent with Zimbabwe's commitment to the principle that human rights obligations take precedence over debt repayment.

Framing these systemic dynamics through a human rights lens transforms the analysis from a descriptive exercise into an accountability framework. It identifies where duty-bearers—the State, development partners, and other stakeholders—have obligations to act, and where rights-holders can claim their entitlements. This reframing strengthens the analytical foundation for policy recommendations and programming priorities by grounding them in binding international legal commitments rather than aspirational development objectives alone.

9. Acceleration Pathways for Systemic Transformation

The analysis identifies key acceleration pathways for integrated, high-impact interventions:

1. **Resolve Debt and Catalyse Innovative Finance:** This pathway focuses on enhancing fiscal space through debt resolution, strengthened debt management, and improved public financial management. It also seeks to mobilise innovative financing mechanisms to unlock investment in infrastructure, social services, and climate resilience. Together, these measures can enhance fiscal sustainability, strengthen macroeconomic stability, and accelerate inclusive and sustainable development while mitigating the debt constraint loop.
2. **Facilitate transition to formality:** This pathway aims to support the gradual formalisation of enterprises and employment to enhance productivity, strengthen domestic resource mobilisation, and expand access to decent work and income security.

By improving the business environment, expanding social protection coverage, and supporting small and informal enterprises to grow and formalise, Zimbabwe can reduce poverty, broaden the tax base, and strengthen social cohesion, helping to break the poverty–informality trap.

3. **Expand and modernise climate-resilient infrastructure and utilities:** Accelerating the SDGs in Zimbabwe will require expanding and modernising climate-resilient infrastructure and utilities to improve energy, water, transport, and digital connectivity while supporting inclusive growth and resilience. Accelerating progress toward the SDGs in Zimbabwe will require a strategic focus on expanding and modernising climate-resilient infrastructure and utilities—particularly in energy, transport, water and sanitation, and digital connectivity—through strengthened governance, inclusive public–private partnerships, and innovative financing, while prioritising underserved communities to ensure that infrastructure investments drive productivity, service delivery, and equitable development in line with the ambition of Leave No One Behind.
4. **Invest in Climate-Smart Agriculture:** This pathway seeks to strengthen environmental resilience, enhance food security, and increase agricultural productivity while expanding renewable energy systems. By promoting climate-smart farming practices and clean energy solutions, Zimbabwe can protect livelihoods, reduce vulnerability to climate shocks, and support sustainable, low-carbon economic growth. This helps to address the climate vulnerability loop.
5. **Enhance Human Capital and Strengthen Social Protection:** Increased investments in health, education, nutrition, and skills—particularly technical and digital competencies—can boost productivity and harness the country’s youthful population. Expanding shock-responsive and inclusive social protection systems will help reduce poverty and vulnerability to economic and climate shocks. Strengthening coordination, targeting, and sustainable financing will be key to ensuring that development gains are inclusive and leave no one behind.
6. **Strengthen Gender Equality and Inclusive Governance:** This pathway focuses on empowering women and promoting inclusive participation in economic, social, and political life to expand the productive base and support sustainable growth. It seeks to address structural inequalities across sectors while strengthening accountability, transparency, and oversight institutions to ensure governance systems function effectively and independently.

Implementation Requirements and Financing Implications: The six strategic pathways identified in the Country Analysis require an integrated and coordinated approach to implementation. Delivering these pathways will depend on stronger institutional coordination across government, alignment of policies and regulatory frameworks, strengthened implementation capacity at national and subnational levels, and meaningful participation by communities, civil society, the private sector, and development partners. Investments in public sector capacity, human capital, data systems, and institutional effectiveness will be essential to improve service delivery and ensure that development interventions reach those most at risk of being left behind.

The estimated financing requirement for implementing the six pathways over the period 2026–2030 is between US$22 billion and US$29 billion. Meeting this financing need will require a diversified financing strategy that combines domestic public resources, private sector investment, development finance, climate finance, concessional financing, diaspora investment, and innovative financing mechanisms, including blended finance and public-private partnerships. Given Zimbabwe's constrained fiscal space, strengthening domestic resource mobilisation, improving public financial management and budget execution, developing and operationalising an Integrated National Financing Framework (INFF), and advancing debt resolution will be critical to expanding fiscal space and improving the effectiveness of public expenditure.

Implementation will also require proactive management of several cross-cutting risks, including climate shocks, macroeconomic volatility, financing uncertainty, institutional capacity constraints, and governance challenges. The Cooperation Framework should therefore prioritise resilience, adaptive programming, risk-informed planning, strong accountability systems, and inclusive partnerships to ensure that investments translate into sustainable and equitable development outcomes. Particular attention should be given to reducing inequalities by ensuring that women, young people, persons with disabilities, and other groups at risk of being left behind participate meaningfully in the design, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of development interventions.

Implementing the six acceleration pathways will also require explicit management of trade-offs — situations where progress in one area creates costs or tensions in another. Advancing formalisation (Pathway 2) may initially reduce household incomes for informal workers who depend on the flexibility of unregistered work, requiring compensating social protection investments. Scaling climate-smart agriculture (Pathway 1) may require shifting land use in ways that displace existing practices, necessitating careful stakeholder engagement and transition support. Expanding universal energy access (Pathway 5) through private sector partnerships may increase costs for poor households if pricing structures are not regulated, requiring cross-subsidy mechanisms. Prioritising debt resolution and fiscal consolidation may create short-term constraints on social spending, requiring ring-fencing of minimum core obligations. These trade-offs are not reasons to avoid action — they are arguments for sequencing decisions carefully, for cross-sectoral policy coherence, and for robust accountability systems that allow programming to adapt when unintended consequences emerge. Political economy factors — including incumbent sector interests, patronage networks, and resistance from actors who benefit from the current distribution of power — will also shape implementation and should be addressed through transparent stakeholder engagement and the kind of coalition-building strategies identified in the PowerCube analysis.

By prioritizing these interconnected pathways, Zimbabwe can convert its systemic challenges into opportunities for resilient, inclusive, and sustainable development, ultimately achieving its Vision 2030 and the global Sustainable Development Goals.

Implementation of the six acceleration pathways should follow a two-phase sequencing approach that reflects institutional readiness, financing availability, and the interdependencies between pathways. Phase 1 (2026–2027): The focus of the first two years should be on building the enabling conditions and institutional foundations for transformation. Priority actions include: advancing and completing the debt arrears clearance roadmap through the Structured Dialogue Platform — including full implementation of the IMF Staff-Monitored Programme approved in April 2026 — to unlock access to concessional financing and international capital markets; stabilising the energy system through targeted investments in grid reliability and solar expansion; strengthening foundational learning outcomes and primary healthcare systems; establishing shock-responsive social protection mechanisms with pre-agreed trigger conditions; and initiating the formalisation strategy, including simplified business registration and presumptive tax reform. Phase 2 (2028–2030): With the foundations in place, the second phase focuses on scaling transformative investments. This includes: scaling climate-smart agriculture and irrigated production; expanding universal energy access to rural and peri-urban households; deepening industrial clusters and agro-processing value chains; rolling out digital connectivity and skills programmes aligned with labour market demand; achieving significant expansion of social protection coverage; and mobilising diaspora and blended finance at scale. Across both phases, all investments should be assessed against eight prioritisation criteria: impact on multiple SDGs; equity and reach to the most marginalised; technical and institutional feasibility; financing availability; contribution to resilience; outcome sustainability; multiplier effects across pathways; and Leave No One Behind.

Intersectionality and Compound Discrimination: An intersectional perspective highlights that vulnerability in Zimbabwe is shaped by multiple and overlapping forms of disadvantage rather than by a single characteristic. Gender, age, disability, geographic location, poverty, and other social and economic factors interact to create distinct experiences of exclusion and unequal access to opportunities and services. Women and girls with disabilities often experience compounded barriers, including increased exposure to gender-based violence, lower educational attainment, reduced access to sexual and reproductive health services, and greater unpaid care responsibilities. Adolescent girls face heightened risks of child marriage, adolescent pregnancy, and school dropout, while older women are more likely to experience poverty, inadequate social protection, and limited access to healthcare. Rural populations, particularly women, girls, and persons with disabilities, face additional challenges arising from distance to services, climate vulnerability, limited economic opportunities, and inadequate infrastructure.

Some legal provisions, policy gaps, and implementation challenges may also contribute to unequal access to services and opportunities for certain population groups, including adolescent girls, persons with disabilities, and LGBTI persons. At the same time, social norms, stigma, discrimination, and unequal access to resources continue to reinforce existing inequalities. These intersecting factors contribute to persistent disparities in health, education, employment, social protection, justice, and participation in public life.

Applying the Leave No One Behind principle will require stronger use of disaggregated data to identify intersecting forms of disadvantage, more integrated and inclusive approaches to service delivery, meaningful participation of affected communities in decision-making, and continued efforts to strengthen the implementation of laws, policies, and programmes that promote equality, non-discrimination, accessibility, and inclusion. Addressing these overlapping vulnerabilities will be essential to reducing inequalities and ensuring that development gains reach those most at risk of being left behind.

Gender Equality as a Development Multiplier: Gender equality is both a fundamental human right and a powerful driver of inclusive and sustainable development. Advancing gender equality generates multiplier effects across the economy, society, governance, and the environment. Greater participation of women in the labour market and entrepreneurship can increase productivity, strengthen economic growth, reduce poverty, and expand the domestic tax base. Investments in girls' education and women's empowerment also improve child health, nutrition, educational attainment, and household resilience, creating intergenerational benefits that extend well beyond individual households.

Gender equality also strengthens climate resilience, natural resource management, food security, and energy access by enhancing women's participation in decision-making and resource governance. More inclusive institutions are associated with stronger accountability, more responsive public services, and improved development outcomes. These cross-sectoral benefits demonstrate that gender equality is not a standalone objective but a critical enabler of progress across the Sustainable Development Goals.

For Zimbabwe, integrating gender equality across all six strategic pathways will be essential to accelerating inclusive growth and ensuring that no one is left behind. This requires systematic gender analysis, gender-responsive planning and budgeting, equitable access to productive resources and services, meaningful participation of women and girls in decision-making, and strengthened monitoring of gender equality outcomes. Embedding gender equality across all interventions will maximise development impact while addressing the structural inequalities that continue to constrain sustainable development.

Acceleration Pathways for Systemic Transformation

Pathway 1: Climate-Smart Water-Energy-Food (WEF) Resilience Compact

Gender Mainstreaming in This Pathway: Women play a critical role in water collection, agricultural production, and household energy management in Zimbabwe, yet they are systematically excluded from water governance, energy decision-making, and agricultural extension services. Gender mainstreaming in this pathway requires: (a) ensuring women's meaningful participation in water user associations (WUAs) and catchment councils, with a target of at least 30% women in leadership positions; (b) gender-responsive design of climate-smart agriculture interventions that address women farmers' specific constraints, including access to land, credit, inputs, and extension services; (c) promotion of women-led renewable energy enterprises, particularly in solar irrigation and clean cooking solutions; (d) collection and use of sex-disaggregated data on WEF access, control, and benefits to inform adaptive management; and (e) gender-responsive budgeting that allocates resources specifically to address women's WEF-related needs and priorities.

Pathway 2: Inclusive Industrialization & Formalization for Decent Jobs

Gender Mainstreaming in This Pathway: Women constitute the majority of informal sector workers in Zimbabwe, yet face significant barriers to formalization, including limited access to finance, business development services, and markets. Gender mainstreaming requires: (a) targeted support for women-owned and women-led MSMEs to transition to formality, including simplified registration procedures, access to credit, and business development training; (b) promotion of women's participation in high-growth industrial clusters, particularly in agro-processing, green minerals, and e-mobility components, addressing the underrepresentation of women in STEM fields (only 28.79% of STEM degree holders in Zimbabwe are women); (c) gender-responsive labour market policies that address occupational segregation, the gender pay gap, and unpaid care work; (d) enforcement of labour rights and workplace protections for women in informal and formal employment; and (e) collection of sex-disaggregated data on formalization, employment, and enterprise development to track progress.

Pathway 3: Universal Basic Services: Primary Health & Nutrition Systems Reset

Gender Mainstreaming in This Pathway: Women and girls face distinct health challenges, including maternal mortality (212 per 100,000 live births), teenage pregnancy (111 per 1,000 adolescent girls), and gender-based violence (39% of women aged 15-49 have experienced physical violence). Gender mainstreaming requires: (a) strengthening maternal, newborn, and child health services, with a focus on reducing maternal mortality and improving access to skilled birth attendance; (b) expanding adolescent-friendly SRHR services, including addressing legal barriers such as parental consent requirements under the Public Health Act; (c) integrating GBV prevention and response into health services, including clinical management of rape and psychosocial support; (d) addressing the specific health needs of women with disabilities, who face compounded barriers to accessing SRHR services; (e) promoting women's participation in health governance, including health centre committees and district health teams; and (f) gender-responsive health financing that allocates resources to address women's specific health needs.

Pathway 4: Learning-to-Earning: Foundational Literacy, Skills & Rural Digital Connectivity

Gender Mainstreaming in This Pathway: Girls face distinct barriers to education, including distance to school, safety concerns, child marriage, pregnancy, and household care responsibilities. Gender mainstreaming requires: (a) targeted interventions to address girls' dropout rates, particularly at secondary level, including conditional cash transfers, safe transport, and sanitary products; (b) promotion of girls' participation in STEM and digital skills training, addressing cultural norms and stereotypes that limit girls' educational and career aspirations; (c) integration of gender-sensitive pedagogy and curricula that challenge harmful gender norms; (d) safe school policies that address GBV, including sexual harassment and violence against girls in and around schools; (e) women's participation in school development committees and education governance; and (f) collection and use of sex-disaggregated education data to track disparities and inform targeted interventions.

Pathway 5: Universal Energy Access

Gender Mainstreaming in This Pathway: Women bear the primary responsibility for household energy collection and use in Zimbabwe, yet are underrepresented in energy sector decision-making (constituting less than 20% of decision-makers in industrial decisions). Gender mainstreaming requires: (a) promotion of women-led energy enterprises, including solar distributors, clean cooking solution providers, and mini-grid operators; (b) gender-responsive design of energy interventions that address women's specific needs, including access to clean cooking solutions that reduce indoor air pollution and time spent collecting fuel; (c) ensuring women's participation in energy governance, including rural electrification committees and energy planning processes; (d) collection of sex-disaggregated data on energy access, use, and benefits; and (e) gender-responsive energy financing that allocates resources to women-led energy initiatives.

Pathway 6: Sovereign SDG Finance & Diaspora Investment Mobilization

Gender Mainstreaming in This Pathway: Women face systematic barriers to accessing finance, including limited collateral, discriminatory lending practices, and lack of financial literacy. Gender mainstreaming requires: (a) gender-responsive budgeting across all sectors, with dedicated allocations for gender equality outcomes; (b) gender-responsive public financial management that tracks expenditures on gender equality and women's empowerment; (c) targeted financing mechanisms for women-owned enterprises, including guarantee schemes, microfinance, and venture capital; (d) promotion of women's participation in financial sector governance and decision-making; (e) collection and use of sex-disaggregated data on access to finance, investment, and economic participation; and (f) integration of gender equality criteria into SDG-linked bonds, diaspora investment funds, and other innovative financing instruments

10. Risk Analysis

Zimbabwe has experienced multiple and overlapping climate-related and economic shocks over the past decade, including recurrent droughts, floods, cyclones, and periods of macroeconomic instability. These shocks have adversely affected livelihoods, food security, service delivery, and development gains, and continue to pose significant challenges to the country's progress towards the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Climate-related and economic shocks are mutually reinforcing, with recurrent droughts, floods, and cyclones exacerbating structural economic vulnerabilities, while fiscal constraints and limited productive capacity weaken the country's ability to respond to and recover from climate impacts—deepening vulnerabilities, undermining livelihoods and public services, and slowing progress towards the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Table 10.1 presents the SDGs Risk Matrix for Zimbabwe, outlining the key risk dimensions, underlying risk drivers, and the primary SDGs affected, alongside an assessment of the likelihood of occurrence over the next 3–5 years and the potential impact on SDG progress. The matrix also identifies key Early Warning Indicators (EWIs) to support timely monitoring, risk mitigation, and adaptive policy responses, strengthening anticipatory action and resilience in advancing the 2030 Agenda.

Zimbabwe's SDG Risk Matrix depicts a high-threat landscape where interconnected, severe risks, notably climate shocks, macroeconomic instability, and food insecurity, converge to undermine core development foundations. These high-likelihood crises are exacerbated by major concurrent challenges in public health, social inequality, infrastructure, governance, and human capital. This analysis highlights a mutually reinforcing cycle of environmental, economic, and institutional fragility, monitored by clear early warning indicators. For the United Nations in Zimbabwe, this necessitates an integrated, crisis-responsive strategy that simultaneously addresses humanitarian needs, builds systemic resilience and targets structural drivers while closely tracking key risk indicators

Zimbabwe's risk landscape must be understood not only in terms of economic costs and development setbacks, but as a system of threats to the enjoyment of specific human rights and corresponding State obligations. Climate and environmental shocks threaten the right to food, the right to water, and the right to life — obligations enshrined in ICESCR Articles 11 and 12 and the Constitution of Zimbabwe. Macroeconomic and fiscal instability creates conditions that undermine the State's capacity to progressively realise economic and social rights, raising concerns about retrogression under the ICESCR. The food and nutrition insecurity risk implicates not only agricultural policy but the State's immediate obligation to ensure that no person falls below minimum subsistence levels. Public health crises expose the consequences of underfunded health systems on the right to health (ICESCR Article 12). The 'Inequality and Exclusion' risk dimension, which encompasses discrimination on the basis of gender, age, disability, and other characteristics, is reclassified from 'Major' to 'Severe' given that persistent discrimination constitutes a direct and ongoing violation of rights under CEDAW, the CRC, the CRPD, and the African Charter. Each Early Warning Indicator in Table 10.1 should be understood as a signal not only of development risk, but of the State's evolving capacity to meet its obligations under these instruments.

Table 10.1: SDGs Risk Matrix for Zimbabwe

Risk Dimension	Key Risk Drivers	Primary SDGs Affected	Likelihood (Next 3-5 Years)	Impact on SDG Progress	Key Early Warning Indicators (EWIs)
Climate & Environmental Shocks	Increased frequency/intensity of droughts & floods; reliance on	**SDG 2, 6, 13, 15**	**High**	**Severe**	Rainfall deficit vs. seasonal average; Number of people in IPC Phase 3+; Dam water levels (% of capacity).

Risk Dimension	Key Risk Drivers	Primary SDGs Affected	Likelihood (Next 3-5 Years)	Impact on SDG Progress	Key Early Warning Indicators (EWIs)
	rain-fed agriculture; deforestation & land degradation.				
Macroeconomic & Fiscal Instability	High inflation & currency volatility; unsustainable public debt; narrow export base; low FDI.	**SDG 1, 8, 9, 17**	Medium	**Severe**	Annual inflation rate (ZiG, USD, Weighted); Parallel market exchange rate premium; Debt service-to-revenue ratio.
Public Health Crises	Weak health system resilience; reliance on external health funding; poor WASH infrastructure; climate-sensitive disease spread.	**SDG 3, 6**	**High**	**Major**	Weekly cholera case incidence; Stock-out rate of essential medicines (%).
Food & Nutrition Insecurity	Climate shocks on agriculture; high food prices; child food poverty; triple burden of malnutrition.	**SDG 2, 3**	**High**	**Severe**	Number of people in IPC Phase 3+; Maize grain price deviation from 5-year average.
Inequality and Exclusion	High poverty & youth unemployment; gender inequality; non-recognition; weak social protection coverage; urban-rural disparities.	**SDG 1, 4, 5, 10**	**High**	**Severe**	Youth (15-24) NEET rate; Proportion of births attended by skilled personnel (rural vs. national). hate speech, inadequately disaggregated data
Energy and Infrastructure Deficit	Low & unreliable electricity access; high costs of outages; under-investment in renewable transition.	**SDG 7, 9, 13**	**Medium**	**Major**	National daily energy deficit (MWh); % of health facilities with unreliable power.
Governance and Institutional Capacity	High perceived corruption; shrinking civic space; weak rule of law and	**SDG 16, 17**	**Medium**	**Major**	Time lag in national budget disbursement to key social sectors.

Risk Dimension	Key Risk Drivers	Primary SDGs Affected	Likelihood (Next 3-5 Years)	Impact on SDG Progress	Key Early Warning Indicators (EWIs)
	oversight institutions; weak public service delivery; debt distress limiting fiscal space.				
Human Capital Erosion	Skills mismatch & brain drain; high dropout rates; inadequate education funding; impact of shocks on school attendance.	**SDG 4, 8**	**Medium**	**Major**	Youth (15-24) NEET rate; Primary school dropout rate due to financial constraints.
Geopolitical & Global Systemic Risks	Global economic fragmentation; reduced ODA flows; commodity price volatility; sanctions-related constraints; global interest rate shocks; supply chain disruptions.	**SDGs 1, 2, 8, 9, 13, 17**	**Medium–High**	**Severe**	ODA disbursement trends; Global gold and oil price volatility; Net FDI inflows; Global interest rate movements.

An estimated 1–1.5 million Zimbabweans are aged 60 years and older, a population that is growing as life expectancy improves (ZIMSTAT, 2022 Population and Housing Census; ZIMSTAT, 2022–2042 Population Projections Report). Older persons — particularly older women in rural areas — face among the most acute social protection gaps in the country. The large majority of older Zimbabweans worked in subsistence agriculture, informal trade, or other informal activities throughout their working lives, leaving them without contributory pension entitlements under the National Social Security Authority (NSSA), which covers only formal sector workers. As a result, older persons are almost entirely dependent on family support, informal community networks, and limited categorical grants. This constitutes a significant human rights gap under ICESCR Articles 9 and 11 and the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Older Persons in Africa. Climate shocks, the erosion of family care networks through emigration, and rising healthcare costs all compound the vulnerability of this population. Disability prevalence rises sharply with age — reaching approximately 13% among those aged 65 and above — further increasing needs for social protection, age-responsive healthcare, and accessible services. The Cooperation Framework should explicitly address the social protection, health, and inclusion needs of older persons, particularly older women in rural and peri-urban areas, and should monitor Zimbabwe's progress toward ratification of the Protocol on the Rights of Older Persons in Africa.

11. Development Financing Landscape

In line with Vision 2030 and the National Development Strategy 1 (NDS1) and its successor NDS2, Zimbabwe's development financing framework draws on a mix of domestic public revenues, debt financing, official development assistance, private sector investment, and diaspora resources to support inclusive growth, infrastructure development, and social service delivery. Achieving the country's long-term development objectives will require strengthening domestic resource mobilisation, resolving external debt constraints, deepening private sector participation, and more effectively leveraging the Zimbabwean diaspora for investment and entrepreneurship, alongside traditional remittance flows. The Government will need to address the persistently high levels of informality and ensure sustained, inclusive economic growth in order to expand the tax base, strengthen domestic resource mobilisation, and create the fiscal space necessary to sustainably finance the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Zimbabwe faces a significant financing gap, which is compounded by low domestic savings, limited foreign direct investment inflows, declining official development assistance, and rising public indebtedness, constraining the country's capacity to sustainably finance its development priorities and achieve the Sustainable Development Goals. Zimbabwe requires approximately US$5.0 billion annually to fast-track structural transformation by 2030, and an additional US$0.87 billion per year to sustain similar transformation through 2063, in line with targets set under the African Union's Agenda 2063. This translates to financing gaps of approximately 13.4% of GDP by 2030 and 2.4% of GDP by 2063 (AfDB, 2024).

Addressing Zimbabwe's substantial financing gap will require a comprehensive and integrated financing strategy, encompassing enhanced domestic revenue mobilisation, debt restructuring and arrears clearance, increased private sector investment, and the deployment of innovative financing instruments such as blended finance and SDG-linked bonds, alongside strengthened global and regional partnerships. Full implementation of debt and arrears clearance measures is critical, as it would help restore fiscal sustainability, reinforce macroeconomic stability, boost investor confidence, and unlock access to concessional financing and international development support. It is also imperative to deepen diaspora engagement beyond remittance flows, including through the effective implementation of the National Diaspora Policy, to mobilise diaspora-led investment, entrepreneurship, and skills for sustainable development.

The UN Zimbabwe Joint Partnerships and Resource Mobilization Strategy (J-PRMS) 2025-2030 provides a comprehensive roadmap for mobilising the financing required to advance the Sustainable Development Goals. Recognising the challenges posed by economic volatility, donor dependence, and internal inefficiencies, the strategy promotes a shift towards a diversified and innovative financing landscape. Its emphasis on blended finance, green and SDG-linked bonds, climate finance, results-based financing, and diaspora bonds reflects a forward-looking approach to unlocking new sources of capital. The strategy underscores the importance of advancing an Integrated National Financing Framework (INFF), strengthening domestic resource mobilisation, and engaging proactively on debt resolution, all of which are critical to enhancing Zimbabwe's financial resilience, fiscal sustainability, and capacity to finance long-term development outcomes.

Zimbabwe's financing strategy should be grounded in human rights principles that provide a normative framework for resource allocation, fiscal policy, and accountability. Three principles are particularly relevant. First, the principle of non-retrogression: governments are prohibited from deliberately cutting social spending below the level needed to fulfil minimum core obligations under the ICESCR, even under resource constraints. This means that debt service obligations, fiscal consolidation, and budget rationalisation must not result in reductions in health, education, or social protection spending that push the most vulnerable below minimum subsistence levels. Second, the principle of maximum available resources: Zimbabwe is required to dedicate the maximum of its available resources to the progressive realisation of economic, social, and cultural rights (ICESCR Article 2.1). This includes not only domestic revenues but external financing, private sector mobilisation, and debt relief — each of which must be actively pursued. Third, gender-responsive budgeting: as a State Party to CEDAW, Zimbabwe is required to ensure that public expenditure does not perpetuate gender inequality. Gender-responsive budgeting — tracking expenditure by gender impact, setting explicit targets for women's economic inclusion, and allocating resources to address gender-specific barriers — should be applied across all sector budgets. The development and operationalisation of an INFF provides an opportunity to embed these principles into Zimbabwe's national financing architecture in a systematic and accountable way.

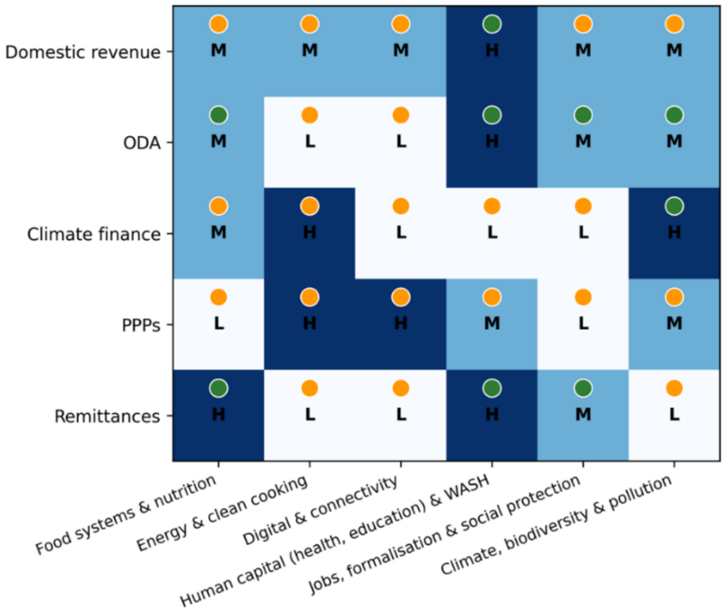
Zimbabwe's financing landscape also encompasses substantial non-financial contributions that are essential to development outcomes but are often invisible in standard financing frameworks. Community health workers, school development committees, water point committees, and village savings and loan associations collectively deliver significant volumes of services and mobilise community resources that would otherwise require public expenditure to replace. Ward committees and traditional leadership structures play an important role in local governance, conflict resolution, and community mobilisation for development initiatives. The Zimbabwean diaspora contributes not only through remittances — which at US$2.7 billion in 2025 exceed both foreign direct investment and official development assistance — but also through skills transfer, knowledge networks, entrepreneurial connections, and advocacy. Volunteer networks, particularly in health and education, have historically been critical to sustaining service delivery in resource-constrained settings, and their contribution increased substantially during the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent climate shocks. Recognising, valuing, and supporting these non-financial contributions — rather than treating them as substitutes for adequate public investment — should be an explicit component of Zimbabwe's broader financing strategy and of the development and operationalisation of a future INFF.

11.1 Financing Sources / Instruments → Six SDG Transitions (with LNOB Equity Tags)

Figure 10.1 maps how resources from five primary financing sources — domestic revenue, official development assistance (ODA), climate finance, public–private partnerships (PPPs), and remittances — are aligned with six priority SDG transitions in Zimbabwe: Food Systems and Nutrition; Energy and Clean Cooking; Digital and Connectivity; Human Capital (Health, Education) and WASH; Jobs, Formalisation and Social Protection; and Climate, Biodiversity and Pollution. The matrix demonstrates that progress towards the SDGs depends not on isolated interventions, but on coordinated and aligned flows of finance, institutions, and capabilities that enable system-level transformation.

Each cell in the matrix is labelled H (High), M (Medium), or L (Low) to indicate both the relative strength of alignment between the financing source and the SDG transition and the equity impact — that is, the potential of that financing flow to reduce inequalities and reach the most vulnerable populations. This dual assessment of alignment and equity impact provides a practical diagnostic tool, highlighting not only where financing is currently directed, but where gaps and misalignments exist that require policy attention. Together, the matrix translates financing relationships into actionable insights and can inform the development of a future Integrated National Financing Framework (INFF) for Zimbabwe, helping to shape financing strategies, policy reforms, and monitoring mechanisms that are better aligned with national development priorities and the Leave No One Behind principle.

Figure 10.1: Financing Sources



Key: ● **Equity Impact (High)** **Equity Impact (Medium)** ● **Equity Impact (Low)**
Labels in cells: L/M/H indicate relative alignment strength

12. Stakeholder Analysis

Sustainable development in Zimbabwe is shaped by a complex interplay of political, economic, and social actors whose interests, capacities, and influence affect the country's ability to achieve the 2030 Agenda and leave no one behind. Understanding the stakeholder landscape is critical to designing effective policies and interventions. Table 12.1 maps key stakeholder groups in Zimbabwe, outlining their respective roles, interests and incentives, levels of influence on SDG advancement, and the Leaving No One Behind (LNOB)–aligned development opportunities through which they shape sustainable development outcomes.

Table 12.1: Stakeholder Roles, Influence, and Opportunities for Advancing the SDGs in Zimbabwe

Stakeholder Group	Role	Interests / Incentives	Influence on SDG Advancement	LNOB / Development Opportunities
Government & Public Institutions (MDAs, Local Authorities, ZIMSTAT, Social Welfare)	Policy formulation, legislation, public finance, service delivery, statistics, implementation of NDS2 and SDGs	Inclusive growth, macroeconomic stability, effective public service delivery, regional and global commitments	**Very High** – responsible for policy, legislation, budgeting and implementation	Strengthen integrated planning, improve public service delivery, institutional coordination, data systems, and targeting of

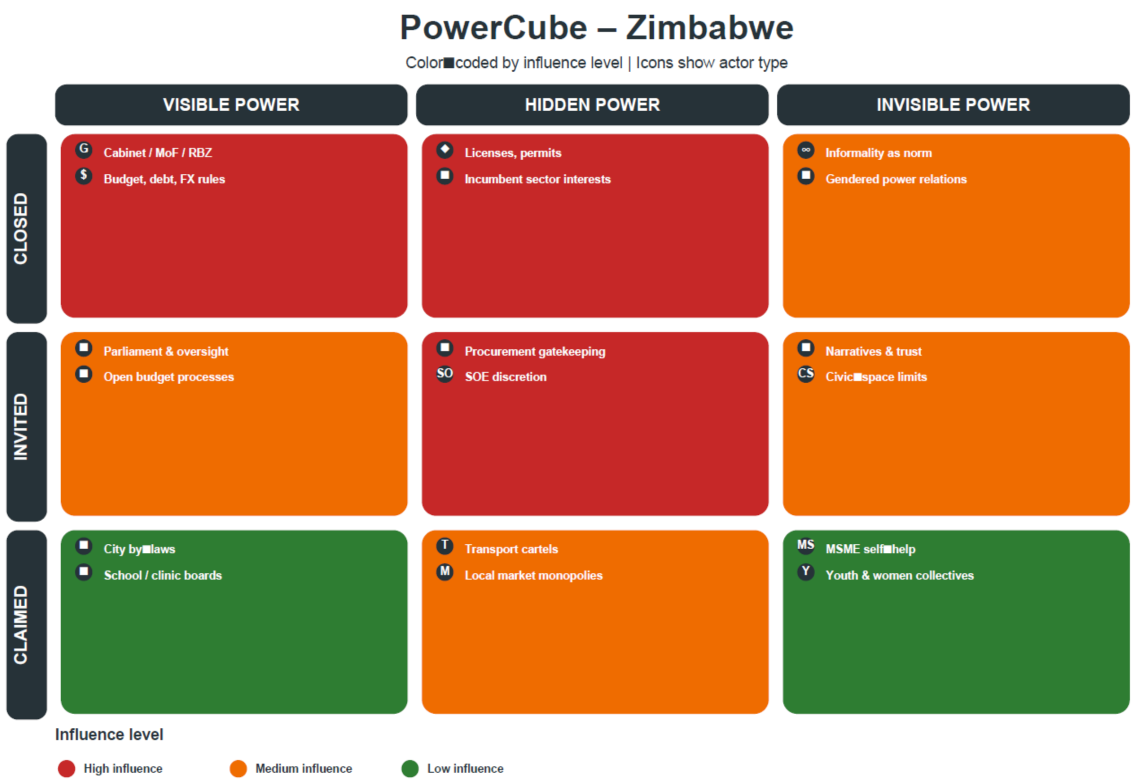
Stakeholder Group	Role	Interests / Incentives	Influence on SDG Advancement	LNOB / Development Opportunities
(Primary Duty-bearers)				vulnerable populations
Parliament & Political Leadership (Oversight Duty-bearers)	Legislation, budget approval, oversight, constituency representation	Democratic governance, accountability, policy effectiveness, political stability	**High** – influences legislation, public expenditure and accountability	Strengthen oversight of SDG implementation, promote inclusive legislation and budget allocations, reinforce accountability
Independent Commissions (ZHRC, ZGC, ZEC, ZMC, NPRC, ZACC, ZICC)	Constitutional oversight, protection of rights, governance and accountability	Human rights, constitutionalism, institutional integrity	**Medium–High** – influences governance reforms and accountability	Strengthen protection of rights, monitor inclusion, promote transparency and accountability
Private Sector (Large Firms, MSMEs, Financial Institutions, Business Associations)	Investment, production, innovation, employment creation, PPPs	Business growth, competitiveness, profitability, stable operating environment	**High** – key driver of investment, employment and innovation	Expand decent jobs, mobilise private investment, strengthen local value chains, promote responsible business conduct and skills development
Development Partners & International Financial Institutions	Development financing, technical assistance, policy advice, capacity development	Sustainable development outcomes, aid effectiveness, accountability	**High** – provides financing, technical expertise and policy support	Mobilise innovative finance, strengthen institutions, improve policy implementation and evidence-based planning
Civil Society Organisations & Community-Based Organisations	Advocacy, community mobilisation, service delivery, social accountability	Human rights, inclusion, social justice, community empowerment	**Medium** – strengthens participation, accountability and service delivery	Amplify the voices of marginalised groups, strengthen participatory governance, support community resilience and LNOB implementation
Diaspora & Migrant Networks	Investment, remittances, knowledge transfer, entrepreneurship, policy engagement	Economic opportunities, national development, reduced remittance costs	**Medium** – significant financial and intellectual capital	Operationalise the National Diaspora Policy, promote productive investment, facilitate technology transfer and diaspora financing

Stakeholder Group	Role	Interests / Incentives	Influence on SDG Advancement	LNOB / Development Opportunities
Media, Academia & Research Institutions	Research, innovation, public awareness, evidence generation, policy analysis	Knowledge generation, transparency, informed public discourse	**Medium** – shapes policy debate and public accountability	Strengthen research, innovation, SDG monitoring, public awareness and evidence-informed policymaking
Marginalised and Vulnerable Populations (Rights-holders)	Active participants, beneficiaries, community knowledge holders and contributors to development	Equal opportunities, access to services, participation, protection and empowerment	**Low individually; High collectively** through representative institutions	Strengthen participation in planning and decision-making, improve access to services, enhance social protection and establish effective feedback and grievance mechanisms

Achieving the SDGs in Zimbabwe within the 2030 timeframe demands an integrated and collaborative approach to partnerships. By strengthening internal UN coordination, enhancing engagement with the Government of Zimbabwe, diversifying funding sources from traditional to emerging donors, actively involving the private sector and foundations, and pioneering innovative financing mechanisms, Zimbabwe can put together a broad-based partnership that significantly closes funding gaps and accelerate progress towards sustainable development goals.

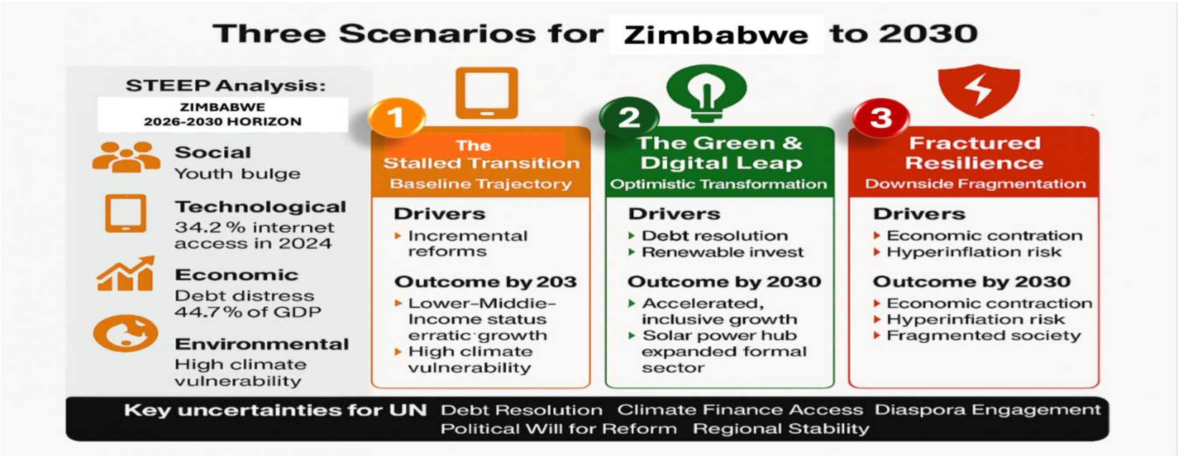
12.1 Political Economy of Power and Influence in Zimbabwe

The PowerCube framework analyses how power in Zimbabwe is distributed across three forms — visible, hidden, and invisible — and three spaces — closed, invited, and claimed — shaping development outcomes and policy influence. Visible power resides in formal laws and state institutions, such as Cabinet, the Ministry of Finance, and the Reserve Bank of Zimbabwe. Hidden power is exercised through agenda-setting, gatekeeping, and informal influence, including through licensing and permitting systems and incumbent sector interests. Invisible power operates through social norms, beliefs, and cultural practices that shape perceptions and behaviour — for example, the normalisation of informality and gendered power relations. The three engagement spaces determine how different actors access decision-making: closed spaces are state or elite-led, invited spaces are consultative, and claimed spaces are bottom-up. The informal economy holds substantial de facto power despite limited formal recognition, while development partners, the diaspora, and local actors such as traditional leaders also exert influence through financial resources and social legitimacy. Effective coalition-building depends on context, with government–private sector–development partner alliances typically driving macro-level reforms and infrastructure investment, and civil society, informal sector, and diaspora partnerships advancing equity, accountability, and inclusion. Leveraging these dynamics requires recognising power asymmetries and engaging both formal and informal centres of influence across all three forms and spaces.



13. Scenario Analysis for SDGs in Zimbabwe

Three plausible development trajectories for Zimbabwe to 2030 emerge, with the Stalled Transition considered the baseline — the most likely trajectory given current conditions. Under a Stalled Transition scenario, incremental reforms, partial debt resolution, and persistent climate shocks result in low and volatile growth, continued high informality, and rising social pressures, with the country falling short of Vision 2030 and remaining reliant on humanitarian and basic service delivery support. In contrast, a Green and Digital Leap scenario — driven by successful debt resolution, increased climate and private investment, and deeper regional integration — enables accelerated, inclusive growth, expansion of the formal economy, improved human development outcomes, and a shift toward innovation- and resilience-focused partnerships. Conversely, a Fractured Resilience scenario, triggered by global economic shocks, failed debt resolution, and severe climate events, leads to economic contraction, weakened state capacity, rising inequality, and fragmented social systems, requiring a predominantly humanitarian response and stalling progress toward SDGs.



Scenario Analysis and Strategic Implications: The scenario analysis identifies three plausible development pathways for Zimbabwe over the Cooperation Framework period, reflecting different combinations of domestic reforms, global economic conditions, climate risks, and financing opportunities. The Stalled Transition scenario, considered the baseline, assumes continued incremental reforms, partial progress on debt resolution, persistent climate shocks, modest economic growth, and limited mobilisation of private, climate, and diaspora finance. Under this scenario, development efforts would continue to prioritise basic service delivery, resilience building, social protection, humanitarian preparedness, and support for policy and institutional reforms.

The Green and Digital Leap scenario represents a more ambitious transformation, characterised by successful debt resolution, increased climate and development finance, stronger regional integration, expanded private and diaspora investment, and accelerated structural reforms. This scenario would create opportunities to scale up investments in green industrialisation, digital transformation, human capital, climate resilience, and inclusive economic growth. Conversely, the Fractured Resilience scenario assumes a combination of adverse external and domestic shocks—including global economic downturns, intensified climate disasters, reduced development finance, and heightened socioeconomic pressures—which would require greater emphasis on humanitarian response, crisis recovery, social cohesion, and protection of vulnerable populations.

Given the uncertainty surrounding Zimbabwe's development trajectory, the Cooperation Framework should remain adaptive and risk-informed. Continuous monitoring of key economic, social, environmental, governance, and financing indicators—including macroeconomic stability, debt sustainability, climate shocks, food security, remittance flows, investment trends, and governance performance—will be important for identifying emerging risks and opportunities. This will enable the UN system and its partners to adjust programming as circumstances evolve while maintaining a consistent focus on resilience, institutional strengthening, inclusive growth, and the principle of Leave No One Behind.

To enable adaptive programming, the Cooperation Framework should monitor specific threshold indicators that signal a shift between scenarios. The following triggers should inform regular scenario reassessment, ideally at mid-year review points:

- Debt and fiscal: Debt service-to-revenue ratio exceeding 30% signals tightening fiscal space consistent with the Stalled Transition or deterioration toward Fractured Resilience. Successful conclusion of a debt restructuring agreement under the G20 Common Framework would be a positive trigger toward the Green and Digital Leap scenario.

- Macroeconomic stability: Annual inflation persistently above 20% or a parallel market exchange rate premium of more than 30% signals return to macroeconomic instability. Inflation sustained below 10% with a stable ZiG exchange rate signals the macroeconomic foundation for the Green and Digital Leap scenario.
- Food security: More than 3 million people in IPC Phase 3 (crisis) or above for two or more consecutive seasons signals a climate-driven deterioration toward Fractured Resilience requiring a humanitarian response scale-up.
- Remittances and external flows: A sustained decline in diaspora remittances below US$2 billion per year, combined with falling ODA disbursements, would signal a financing deterioration consistent with Stalled Transition or Fractured Resilience.
- Governance: A deterioration in Zimbabwe's Corruption Perceptions Index score below 20 out of 100, or a significant restriction on civil society operating space, would signal governance deterioration consistent with Fractured Resilience and require a programme recalibration toward accountability and protection.
- Human capital: A Youth NEET rate above 55% or primary school dropout above 10% due to financial constraints signals human capital erosion consistent with Stalled Transition.

These thresholds are illustrative starting points. The Cooperation Framework's monitoring and evaluation system should refine them annually based on available data and agree a clear decision protocol for scenario reassessment, including which combinations of indicators would trigger a formal review of programme priorities.

Alongside the three scenarios, the Cooperation Framework should actively monitor a set of emerging 'weak signals' — early-stage developments that do not yet constitute major risks but could rapidly reshape Zimbabwe's development trajectory. First, growing youth assertiveness: Zimbabwe's large youth population (33.2% aged 15–35) is increasingly vocal in demanding inclusion, accountability, and economic opportunity. Demands for 30% youth representation in decision-making, which have gained traction regionally, signal a potential shift in political dynamics that could accelerate governance reform or, if unmet, increase social tension. Second, artificial intelligence and automation: as AI-enabled technologies diffuse across services, agriculture, and manufacturing, the risk of job displacement in routine and semi-skilled occupations increases. Given Zimbabwe's already high youth unemployment and informal workforce, this risk requires early policy attention, including reorienting TVET and skills investment toward AI-complementary capabilities. Third, geopolitical and financial system shifts: growing fragmentation of the global economy, declining ODA flows, and shifts in development finance architectures — including the possible expansion of South-South financing — create both risks and opportunities for Zimbabwe's resource mobilisation strategy. Fourth, digital exclusion as an emerging inequality: the rapid expansion of digital services, e-governance, and fintech in Zimbabwe creates a risk of a new dimension of exclusion for rural populations, older persons, women, and persons with disabilities who lack access to devices, connectivity, or digital literacy. These weak signals should be incorporated into the Cooperation Framework's risk monitoring framework and trigger regular programme reviews.

14.0 Conclusion

Zimbabwe enters the next Cooperation Framework period with important opportunities to accelerate progress towards Vision 2030 and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, while continuing to confront persistent structural challenges. This Country Analysis demonstrates that poverty, informality, climate vulnerability, governance constraints, and financing gaps are mutually reinforcing and continue to limit inclusive growth, human development, and resilience. Although important progress has been made in macroeconomic stabilisation and human development, development gains remain uneven, with women, children, persons with disabilities, rural communities, and other groups at risk of being left behind continuing to experience disproportionate levels of poverty, exclusion, and vulnerability. Strengthening investments in health, education, social protection, gender equality, climate resilience, and institutional effectiveness will therefore be essential to building human capital, harnessing the demographic dividend, and achieving sustainable development.

The six acceleration pathways identified in this analysis provide an integrated framework for addressing Zimbabwe's interconnected development challenges through coordinated action on climate-smart water-energy-food resilience, inclusive industrialisation and formalisation for decent jobs, universal basic services, foundational learning and skills, universal energy access, and sustainable financing for development. Delivering these pathways will require stronger policy coherence, effective institutions, diversified financing through domestic resource mobilisation, debt resolution and innovative financing instruments, robust partnerships across government, the private sector, civil society, development partners and the diaspora, and strengthened monitoring, accountability, and resilience to climate and other external shocks.

The United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (2027–2031) will translate this analysis into coordinated, adaptive, and results-oriented support that aligns the comparative advantages of the United Nations with Zimbabwe's national development priorities. By strengthening national systems, mobilising strategic partnerships and financing, and promoting integrated solutions grounded in human rights, gender equality, resilience, and the principle of Leave No One Behind, the Cooperation Framework will help Zimbabwe convert resilience into opportunity, growth into inclusion, and ambition into measurable and sustainable development outcomes for all.

14.1 The Path Forward: From Analysis to Action

The six acceleration pathways identified in this Country Analysis—Climate-Smart Water-Energy-Food Resilience, Inclusive Industrialisation, Universal Basic Services, Learning-to-Earning, Universal Energy Access, and Sovereign SDG Finance—provide an integrated framework for addressing Zimbabwe's interconnected development challenges. Their successful implementation will depend on strengthened policy coherence, effective institutions, diversified and sustainable financing, strategic partnerships, and adaptive approaches that respond to evolving risks and opportunities. Equally important will be addressing governance and institutional capacity constraints that influence the effectiveness, inclusiveness, and sustainability of development interventions.

The forthcoming United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (2027–2031) provides an opportunity to translate this analysis into coordinated and results-oriented action. Building on the principles of the Human Rights-Based Approach and Leave No One Behind, the Cooperation Framework should strengthen the capacities of rights-holders and duty-bearers, mainstream gender equality and disability inclusion across all programme areas, promote meaningful participation of people at risk of being left behind, strengthen evidence-based decision-making and accountability systems, and support integrated approaches that address the structural drivers of poverty, inequality, vulnerability, and exclusion.

The United Nations system, working in partnership with the Government of Zimbabwe, local authorities, civil society, the private sector, development partners, communities, and the Zimbabwean diaspora, is well positioned to support this transformation through policy advice, technical assistance, capacity development, innovation, and strategic financing partnerships. By translating evidence into action and strengthening national systems, the Cooperation Framework can help Zimbabwe build a more inclusive, resilient, prosperous, and sustainable future in which all people have the opportunity to realise their full potential and no one is left behind.

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Annexes

Data Repository

People

- Protection service mapping report.pdf
- Assessment of the Use of Administrative Data in Zim,SA,Malawi,Zam,Mauritius.pdf
- IOM AU – Africa migration report second edition 3.pdf
- labour-migration-governance-ecowas-eac-sadc_0.pdf
- Making the case to integrate human mobility.pdf
- Migration Environment Climate Change Stock Taking Report 2025.pdf
- National Migration Data Strategy and Action Plan 2025-2030.pdf
- UNESCO_Formative_Assessment_Framework_A4_SPREADS.pdf
- UNESCO_ICH_in_Basic_Education_Methodology_A4_SPREADS.pdf
- Disability_Report.pdf
- Fertility Thematic report.pdf
- Final Zimbabwe Fertility Factsheet.pdf
- Youth Thematic Report of Zimbabwe Population and Housing Census.pdf

Planet

- Zimbabwe National Environment Summary.pdf
- Climate risk analysis for the education sector Zimbabwe.pdf

Prosperity

- Productive Use of Remittances in Southern Africa_Study.pdf
- Review of Existing Schemes to Facilitate the Cross-border Movement of Traders in the COMESA Region.pdf
- Regional Baseline Assessment on Forced Labour.pdf
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- UNIDO - NDS2 STAKEHOLDERS CONSULTATIVE INPUTS.pdf
- UNIDO country-classif-report-2025.pdf

Peace
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- Concluding Observations - CERD.pdf
- Concluding Observations - CESCR.docx
- Concluding Observations - CRC.pdf
- Concluding Observations - Human Rights Committee.pdf
- Concluding Observations-ACERWC.pdf
- OHCHR ROSA Report on Civic Space in Southern Africa.pdf
- SR Report-Freedom of Assoc & Assembly.pdf
- SR Report-Freedom of Assoc & Assembly-Follow-up.pdf
- SR Report-Right to Food.pdf
- UNESCO Culture Sector Publications.docx

Partnerships
- Financing the UN Development System_ResourcingTheFuture.pdf
- Country Level Dialogues - Funding Compact - Feb 2025.pdf
- UN Collaboration with IFIs.pdf
- UN Private Sector Engagements.pdf
- PBSO Opportunities for Private Sector Engagement.pdf
- Compromiso de Sevilla for action 16 June.pdf

Cross Cutting and Leave No-One Behind
- SR Report-Unilateral Coercive Measures.pdf
- UPR-2022 Infographic.pdf
- UPR-Matrix-Thematic List of Recommendations.docx
- UPR-National Report (2022).pdf
- UPR-Report add(2022).pdf
- UPR-Stakeholder Info (2022).pdf
- UPR-UN Info (2022).pdf
- WGDAWG-End of Mission Statement-8 Aug.pdf
- 2023 Gender Observatory Report_ZGC_UNW_1st Draft_220.pdf
- National Study on Violence Against Women in Politics in Zimbabwe -2024 - UN Women.pdf
- Sexual Harassment Policy.pdf
- Sexual Harassment Policy (Main Document) .pdf
- National Assessment of Adolescent Pregnancies in Zimbabwe_.pdf