



Africa's Awakening: A Zimbabwean Perspective on the Need for Harnessing local resources for Endogenous Resilience amidst global funding shifts

Albert Munyanyi ^{1,*} and Christopher Kufakunesu ²

¹ Great Zimbabwe University and Reformed Church University.

² Reformed Church University.

World Journal of Advanced Engineering Technology and Sciences, 2025, 15(01), 2091-2100

Publication history: Received on 15 March 2025; revised on 23 April 2025; accepted on 25 April 2025

Article DOI: <https://doi.org/10.30574/wjaets.2025.15.1.0366>

Abstract

Zimbabwe, like many African countries, has long depended on foreign assistance for its development. However, the recent and sudden drop in global Official Development Assistance (ODA) calls for a re-examination of this dependence as well as the need to accelerate the building of endogenous resilience. Using document review, key informant interviews, observations, and focus group discussions, this qualitative study examines the multifaceted implications of this funding shift in Zimbabwe, revealing its pervasive impacts. The research shows the perception of declining global funding impacting important sectors — with face loss of health, agriculture, and governance — and highlights vulnerabilities in the country. While considerable obstacles exist, including limited domestic resources and weak institutions, the assessment also identifies key opportunities for Zimbabwe to operationalize self-reliance through strengthened domestic resource mobilization and South-South cooperation, as well as a renewed emphasis on local ownership. Moreover, these findings emphasize the absolute necessity of strong Monitoring & Evaluation (M&E) systems to ensure the efficient and transparent allocation of limited resources during this transitional process towards sustainability. As such this study concludes that the decline in global development funding represents a crucial juncture for Zimbabwe to plot a course for much more sustainable and locally driven development, with robust M&E systems at the very foundation of that transformative journey in an evolving system of international assistance that is now on the verge of transformation.

Keywords: Aid Dependence; Resilience; Monitoring and Evaluation; Development Funding; Qualitative Research; Thematic Analysis; Narrative Analysis

1. Introduction

International aid has played such a big part in the trajectory of development in much of Africa over the years. But for the first time since the 1950s, Africa finds itself in a unique predicament: flows of Official Development Assistance (ODA) have compressed to unprecedented historic low levels. In 2023, Africa's ODA fell nearly 7% to \$74 billion [1]. Factors contributing to this decline include dissatisfaction with the effectiveness of aid, changing domestic priorities in donor countries, a movement towards private sector engagement, and geopolitical shifts [3,4]. Zimbabwe and many other African countries have depended on development aid over the years, with even the United States contributing through its USAID program. Yet a recent freeze in USAID funding to Zimbabwe [2], combined with further spending cuts from other key donors like the United Kingdom, European Union and Switzerland, typifies this troubling trend of reduced global development funding for the country. This decline has a negative impact and a collateral damage that can concern hundreds of aid workers and more broadly the populations they are helping. The halving of global funding may prove to be a turning point, driving Zimbabwe to seriously re-consider its decades-long reliance on foreign aid and to vigorously pursue locally-conceived forms of economic development. Repositioning funding in this manner needs the

* Corresponding author: Albert Munyanyi

establishment of national resilience — the capacity of Zimbabwe to absorb these shocks and adjust its systems accordingly in a manner which will facilitate sustainable long-term development. The establishment and strengthening of well-functioning Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) systems is essential to the transition, to guarantee that scarce resources are spent in an effective and transparent manner in an aid scarce environment.

This paper aims to answer the following two existential question:

- What is the perceived impact of reduced global development funding on key sectors in Zimbabwe?
- How does Zimbabwe conceive and cultivate national resilience to survive the transition of funding?
- How can Zimbabwe transition from relying on aid to becoming self-reliant through strong Monitoring and Evaluation systems?

2. Literature Review

The Dependency theory is an important analytical tool for understanding the historical and structural conditions that have contributed to the many African nations, such as Zimbabwe, to become reliant on international development aid and assistance. This theory suggests that the international economic system is one of unequal exchange, shifting resources from less-developed to more-developed countries to benefit the latter at the expense of the former. This perspective in the context of development aid implies that powerful countries, through their aid, may unintentionally or intentionally create a dependency state of less developed countries through aid mechanisms that are usually conditional and mostly aligned with the donor's geopolitical and economic interest or agenda [6]. This paradigm gives way to a critique of the structures of power embedded in the relationship between the aider and the receiver, and shows how the very nature of these relationships can work against genuine self-sufficiency. The colonial legacy, when African economies were largely organized in the service of supplying raw materials to colonizing powers, established the groundwork for these forms of dependency to take place, and some argue it has even continued as neo-colonialism after achieving political independence [6].

Dependency theory has also been subject to important critique though [8,9]. It not only simplifies the very complex economic interrelations of the countries, but also neglects some internal factors that sensibly affect developing countries. Governance, policy choices, and social structures remain key determinants of what constitutes a development outcome. Additionally, it has been questioned by the economic success stories of certain countries that used to depend heavily on aid but subsequently experienced significant economic growth and industrialization [9]. Therefore, a pragmatic approach is needed that acknowledges both the external constraints emphasized by dependency theory and the internal agency and transforming power within developing nations.

It is important to mention that the empirical literature on aid dependence in Africa paints, from time to time, a complex and contested picture [10]. Others point out that in the long run aid has little effect on economic growth and can actually inhibit the emergence of local institutions in some contexts [5,18]. On the other end of the spectrum, additional studies advocate targeted assistance as an effective way to deal with identifiable development problems, especially in sectors like public health and poverty alleviation [11]. Case studies in countries such as Ghana have illustrated the difficulties associated with moving "beyond aid" and the complexities of building domestic resource mobilization [22]. An analysis about the growth of Botswana's economy similarly highlighted strong institutions and the responsible use of natural resources as the keys to independence, despite Botswana's early dependency on foreign aid [13]. These studies highlight the complexity of aid dependence and the need to consider context-specific factors in assessing its effects.

The given vulnerabilities exacerbated by external shocks and the global push to achieve sustainable development post-2015 led to a growing emphasis on resilience in development literature [14,17]. Resilience is commonly conceptualized as the ability of a system, community, or society exposed to hazards to resist, absorb, adapt, transform, and recover from the impact of those hazards in a timely and cost-effective manner at the level of individuals, communities and nations [15]. It addresses multiple, but overlapping elements as social, economic, environmental, infrastructural and institutional capacities. Resilience building goes beyond this notion, requiring a multi-sectoral approach by addressing vulnerabilities whilst encouraging entire communities and nations to anticipate, adapt, and recover from a diverse range of shocks and stressors. National resilience can be conceptualized and examined according to various frameworks, many of which stress the need for strong governance, social bonding, economic diversification, and infrastructure that can adapt [16,17]. Especially for developing countries like Zimbabwe where resilience is paramount to overcome chronic challenges including climate change, economic volatility and political instability.

Other reviews of the literature on aid dependence in the African context highlight a variety of negative effects on African countries [19]. Heavy dependence on external support may undermine the policy autonomy of recipient countries and result in misaligned national priorities with local needs and stunted local institution development [5,18]. Aid may also foster a dependency syndrome where recipient countries make use of the rentier state theory by being too dependent on external assistance and lack of incentive to develop domestic resource mobilization strategies [5,18]. Additionally, the unpredictable nature of aid flows can induce instability in national budgets and hinder effective long-term planning [19]. The debate around the effectiveness of aid is, however, complicated and not settled [20]. Others argue that when well-managed and targeted, aid can be a powerful instrument for reducing poverty and facilitating human development [11]. They stress how critical aid is for making fundamental investments in areas like health, education, and infrastructure — especially in nations with cash-strapped coffers. Furthermore, some schools of thought argue that humanitarian assistance and emergency relief are universally considered to be an indispensable response to a crises and one which necessitates human compassion and empathy. However, the success of aid seems to be based on a variety of variables, such as the quality of governance in recipient nations, the extent to which aid is line up with national development objectives, and the particular methods used for aid delivery and accountability [20].

With the increasing acknowledgment of building national resilience as a proven strategy for African countries to reduce their reliance on aid and ultimately attain sustainable development [17], much concerns have raised on its significance for low-income African countries. Resilience includes a wide array of capacities such as the capacity to withstand economic shocks, adapt to the impacts of climate change and recover from social and political crises. This includes enhancing key institutions, diversifying the economy to reduce dependency, enhancing social cohesion to enable collective action, and investing in human capital to create an agile and productive workforce [16]. Many resilience-building strategies emphasize the importance of good governance, sound macroeconomic policies, and inclusive development processes that include broad participation and benefit-sharing. Many African countries have already begun taking bold steps towards minimizing dependence on aid and fostering greater self-reliance. 28 Rwanda is an example to be followed as demonstrated by its great advances in strengthening its domestic revenue mobilization and thus reducing in the dependency of aid foreign [21]. Similarly, Ghana has implemented an ambitious "Ghana Beyond Aid" agenda, which aims at stimulating economic growth and overall development via greater domestic resource mobilization, better trade relations and enhanced governance practices [22]. Such cases and many more assist countries in Africa with valuable lessons and inspirations as they work towards a sustainable pathway of self-medication.

Several authors underscore an important role of Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) for accountability, learning and evidence-based decisions in development [23,24]. Efficient M&E systems are critical for monitoring the extent to which targets in development are being achieved, recognizing areas in which interventions are having an affirmative impact, and changes to policies and programs that may be needed to improve effectiveness. In the specific context of reducing reliance on aid, M & E is crucial for closely tracking the transition process and for systematically evaluating the effectiveness of new policies and strategies put in place, as well as for ensuring that scarce resources are used in the most efficient and effective way to achieve the greatest developmental impact. Identification; the selection of what and who to include in the monitoring and evaluation of projects must take into account the theories of change underlying development strategies. Robust and vibrant M&E systems that are transparent, participatory, including stakeholders on every level of the development process are critical. In addition, such systems need to be closely aligned to national development priorities and integrated into national planning and budgeting processes so as to be sustainable and remain relevant to national developments.

In conclusion, it is evident from the reviewed literature that aid dependence in Africa is multifaceted and continuously evolving, and that improved resilience to different types of shocks, both economic and non-economic, is gaining traction as a central concern among policy-makers, practitioners and researchers alike. Building M&E systems capable of sustaining this transition towards self-reliance is implicitly acknowledged as critical in delivering on this resilience. This reinforces the call for a more holistic understanding of the intricacies and opportunities of development aid. It highlights that a one-size-fits-all approach does not often translate to successful failure mitigation and prevention strategies without the three linchpins of institution building, sound policies and a robust system of monitoring and evaluation in place.

3. Methodology

This study used qualitative research methodology to confirm the multi-layer effects of the gradual reduction of global development funding for key sectors in Zimbabwe and the layers of effort required to build national resilience. The qualitative approach was considered to be suitable because it enables an in-depth exploration of the perspectives, experiences, and perceptions of a range of stakeholders, offering a deeper insight into the complex social and political dynamics involved [25]. We employed a case study design, examining Zimbabwe as a particular context through which

to consider larger themes of aid dependence and resilience in Africa [26]. While the case study method limited the generalizability of findings, it facilitated in-depth analysis of the contextual factors shaping Zimbabwe, including its history, political economy and social formation.

We used the following methods for data collection:

- **Document Review:** A comprehensive review of relevant documents was conducted to provide contextual information and to identify key trends and patterns. These included policy documents, government reports, academic articles and media reports on development aid, resilience and Monitoring and Evaluation in Zimbabwe. This review provided an historical context and highlighted key issues and debates surrounding aid dependence in the country.
- **Key Informant Interviews:** We conducted in-depth interviews with key informants who would have had helpful insight into the research questions. These informants included officials from government, representatives of international organisations, leaders in civil society, academics and those working in development practice. Semi-structured interview guides were utilised to standardise across interviews, whilst remaining flexible to the potential emergence of topics [27].
- **Observations:** Observations were conducted in development project sites, government offices and community meetings to obtain first-hand knowledge of what was happening. Observations helped to contextualize the information obtained through interviews and document review as well identify any divergence between declared policies and real-world actions [27]. Field notes were drawn up in a systematic and detailed manner to document observations.
- **Focus Group Discussions:** The focus groups sought detailed perspectives on participants' perceived implications of the funding cessation, as well as the challenges and opportunities for building resilience, and the role of M & E in this process. These were conducted at the community level with the target groups (right holders) of development programs. Focus groups serve as a mechanism to gather participants' perspectives in a group context, yielding insights about commonalities and differences [28].

The study employed purposive sampling to select participants and to identify research sites that were most relevant to the research questions. The key informants were chosen and recruited based on their level of expertise and knowledge on the development sector in Zimbabwe. The selection of reviewers included people from diverse demographic and geographic backgrounds, including community members and right holders. Sample size was according to data saturation whereby data were collected until no new, relevant information appeared [29]. They were analysed thematically and narratively [30,31]. The data were subjected to thematic analysis, where recurring themes and patterns in the data were identified, coded, and organized into a coherent framework [30]. The narrative approach incorporated analysis of the stories [30], focusing on the experiences of participants, sense-making and sense-building [31]. This kind of pairing enabled a more holistic interpretation of the data through both thematic and narrative analysis. Research was done in line with ethical principles and guidelines. All participants provided informed consent prior to data collection. Participants were then briefed on the study's aims and objectives, the methods used to collect data and their right to withdraw from the study at any given time. The results of the study were anonymized and confidentiality was maintained in the research study.

4. Results

Findings from the qualitative data analysis highlighted key sub-themes within broad themes related to perceived effects of the downturn in global development funding on Zimbabwe; strategies to build national resilience; and the role of Monitoring and Evaluation in the transition.

4.1. Perceived impacts of declining global funding

Implications of the pausing of USAID support and reduction of other major donor's financing to different sectors in Zimbabwe were perceived to have immediate and long-term consequences, according to most key informants and focus groups.

- **Health sector:** Suspending the funding generated concerns over the survival of key health programs. Specifically, staggering access to antiretroviral treatment for HIV-positive persons and discontinuation of administering antiretroviral pills to HIV-negative individuals would trigger high infection rates. A Health Ministry Official said, *"I am scared we will go back to the dark ages. It's like that thing, you know – on the edge of a knife. All that we've done to defeat HIV... it feels so... on the verge now."* Ending various projects that enabled the implementation of HIV programs and the provision of technical, financial, and material support, as well as

salaries to both direct and indirect healthcare providers was expected to create a massive financial gap; the same applies to discontinuing funding to malaria and maternal and child health programs.

- **Agricultural Sector:** The agricultural sector in Zimbabwe was heavily impacted by the fall in global funding. The interruption of support for smallholder farmers, including delays in the rollout of novel agricultural technologies and practices were predicted to have an adverse influence on crop yields and may aggravate pre-existing conditions of food insecurity. From an Agricultural Extension Officer, concerns were shared that *"We were just introducing real change. Farmers were changing their techniques...Yields were improving. Now, we all feel like we're going 10 steps backward."* Projects that had served as a lifeline to thousands of smallholder farming families in improving crop and livestock production were cancelled, and many feared this spelled an end to agricultural livelihoods in the country.
- **Governance and Civil Society:** Political analysts fear that the decline in global funding was also taking a toll on governance and civil society in Zimbabwe, beyond the immediate effects on health and agriculture. That include discontinuing initiatives that focused on improving government accountability and responsiveness, citizen participation in governance processes, and support for constitutional reform advocacy. This raised concerns that progress for transparency, democratic institutions, and responsive government would be set back.
- **Economic Development:** The funding pause and reductions also raised economic uncertainties. There were also risk of disruptions to sectors significantly supported by external assistance as well as delays in reaching long-term development targets set within the context of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Results of the study reflect very pertinent concerns about the Impact of decreased international development funding on several sectors in Zimbabwe. In addition, Table 1 enumerates a breakdown of data, as articulated by key informants and focus groups, covering perceived impacts.

Table 1 Perceived Impacts of Declining Global Funding by Sector

Sector	Perceived Impacts
Health	Reduced access to HIV treatment and prevention; setbacks in malaria control; disruptions to maternal and child health programs; potential closure of clinics; loss of wages for health workers.
Agriculture	Disruption of support to smallholder farmers; delays in implementing new technologies; reduced crop yields and food security; termination of projects aimed at boosting agricultural production.
Governance	Delays in implementing transparency and accountability measures; reduced support for civil society organizations; potential setbacks in enhancing government responsiveness and promoting citizen participation.
Economic Development	Increased economic uncertainties in aid-dependent sectors; potential delays in achieving long-term development goals.
Social Welfare	Reduced support for vulnerable populations, including orphans and vulnerable children affected by HIV; potential setbacks in addressing gender-based violence and promoting women's empowerment.

4.2. Conceptualizing and Building National Resilience

The study demonstrated that national resilience is a complex, multi-dimensional challenge arising out of the global shift in funding, but can also be an opportunity for Zimbabwe to pursue a pathway to sustainable and development.

4.2.1. Challenges to National Resilience

One of the dominant themes that emerged was mismanagement of domestic resources. Zimbabwe's beleaguered economy is saddled with high levels of debt, unemployment, and inflation which severely limit its ability to fill the funding gap. The other major problem raised was weak institutions. We learnt that weak governance, corruption, and a lack of transparency prevent effective use of resources and undercut any attempts to build resilience. Moreover, lack of political stability has also contributed as an obstacle to the building of resilience. Responses suggested that political uncertainty led to a poor investment and development climate, which complicate the attraction of other forms of financing. Finally, the study exposed the disadvantage of social vulnerabilities. Narratives highlighted that extreme poverty, inequality and social exclusion rendered many communities unable both to cope with the impacts of the funding cuts and to engage adequately with resilience-building efforts.

4.2.2. Opportunities for Resilience at the National Level

Experts interviewed (Key informants) argued that despite those formidable challenges, opportunities exist for building national resilience, offering a counter-narrative of hope and potential for positive change. *"There are many opportunities ahead of us — one is to strengthen accountability with domestic resources,"* narrates one economic expert. Narratives indicated further that the funding shift served as impetus for Zimbabwe to turn its attention towards enhancing its ability to capitalize on its own endowments, including curbing financial leakages, the economic diversification, and promoting private sector investment among others. He continued, *"We can also work with Other Trade Enterprises by promoting South-South Cooperation."* Narratives suggested Zimbabwe may pursue greater interaction with other developing nations, particularly in Africa and Asia, to advise on their own development and provide new funding and technical skills. Additionally, the recommendation that was presented pointed towards the possibility of improving local ownership and involvement. Narratives argued that the shift in funding had provided an opportunity to encourage more local participation in development programs, making sure that initiatives were in line with national priorities and appropriately addressed the needs of the communities that they were aiming at. Last but not least, the research highlighted the chance to invest in human capital. Narratives suggested that education, health and skills development were critical investments in building a resilient economy, productive workforce that in turn would underpin economic growth and development.

Building national resilience is key to navigating global funding decline. The challenges identified by the research that continue to hinder this process as well as opportunities that Zimbabwe can capitalize on are summarized by the table 2 below, together with illustrative narrative insights from the various stakeholders and potential strategic responses.

Table 2 Challenges and Opportunities for Building National Resilience in Zimbabwe

Dimension	Challenge	Narrative Insight	Potential Strategies
Economic	Limited Domestic Resources	"Our coffers are stretched thin...This funding cut...it's like adding fuel to the flames." (Finance Ministry Official)	Fiscal reforms, debt management, economic diversification, sustainable financing mechanisms.
Institutional	Weak Institutions	"Corruption...it eats away at everything. How can we build resilience on such shaky ground?" (Civil Society Leader)	Strengthening governance, promoting transparency and accountability, combating corruption.
Political	Political Instability	"The political climate...it's too unpredictable. We need stability to build anything." (Entrepreneur)	Political reforms fostering stability and a conducive investment environment.
Social	Social Vulnerabilities	"The poor...they suffer the most...How can we talk about resilience when so many are struggling?" (Community Elder)	Targeted social protection measures, poverty reduction programs, inclusive development policies.
Economic	Strengthening Accountability with Domestic Resources	"Zimbabwe has all it needs...This is our chance to reform. To build a system that can sustain us." (Activist)	Fiscal reforms and strategies to enhance domestic revenue generation.
International	Promoting South-South Cooperation	"We are not alone...We can learn from them, build partnerships. South-South cooperation...it's a path forward." (Retired Diplomat)	Exploring and strengthening partnerships with other developing countries.
Social	Enhancing Local Ownership and Participation	"Now is chance for communities to lead...This is the time to develop sustainable programs...only possible when communities are empowered." (Community Development Officer)	Inclusive development processes empowering communities.
Human Capital	Investing in Human Capital	"Our children are our future. If we invest in them...they can build a new Zimbabwe. A resilient Zimbabwe." (Teacher)	Increased investment in education, health, and skills development.

4.3. Importance of Monitoring and Evaluation Systems

The research emphasized the importance of M&E systems in helping Zimbabwe navigate from the path of aid dependence to one of self-reliance. Nonetheless, key informant interviews conducted with M&E practitioners highlighted critical gaps and shortcomings that have undermined the sustainability and effectiveness of development interventions. These problems include limited responsibilities for accountability and transparency; underuse of M&E data for learning and adaptation; lack of production and use of high-quality data for policy decision-making; limited ownership and engagement of communities in M&E mechanisms; and limited resources allocated to the M&E systems. There are also weaknesses in the coordination and harmonization between different M&E systems. These gaps, practitioners argue, have hampered the sustainability and resilience of development projects.

5. Discussion

The results from this study highlight the drastic consequences of decreasing global development funding for Zimbabwe, a country with a long history of dependence on foreign aid. The reduction of support is not only seen with the halting of USAID funding but with cuts from all levels of donors, evident through the widespread concern of the sustainability of essential programs in various sectors. In the health sector, the potential disruption of HIV treatment and prevention efforts, malaria control and maternal and child health initiatives underscores the fragility of progress made with donor support. And as with the health sector, there are considerable risks to the agricultural sector with the reduction of funding and ending of programs that were established to bolster food security and support millions of smallholder farmers, and which could jeopardize progress on productivity gains and livelihoods. The implications for health, agriculture, governance, economic development and social welfare not only jeopardize core service delivery in the short-term, but also lay bare the underlying vulnerabilities of the chronic dependence on aid, and lend added urgency to the call for a fundamental shift in how development is done in Zimbabwe.

In this decisive situation, building national resilience is a complicated and yet essential task. The challenge for Zimbabwe is considerable and is well documented in the research, with mismanagement of domestic resources and high levels of debt and economic instability. Similarly, weak institutional frameworks, including deficiencies in governance and corruption, hinder an efficient use of resources and efforts to build resilience. In addition, existing political instability leads to an unpredictable environment for investments and long-term planning; widespread social vulnerabilities further magnify the effects of funding cuts on the most marginalized communities.

In spite of these significant challenges, the study also reveals some exciting opportunities for Zimbabwe to chart a more independent path of development. Adopting viable strategies such as enhancing accountability mechanisms for domestic resource mobilization or diversifying of the economy to avoid overdosing on volatile aid flows or actively seeking for South-South cooperation to access alternative funding and expertise is crucial. The strengthening of local communities through greater ownership and participation in development projects is long overdue. Sustainable economic growth also depends on investing strategically in human capital development.

A reliable and effective M&E system is required to combat aid dependency and promote self-reliance. The study highlights the importance of M&E for holding accountable the utilization of the abundant resources, engendering learning and adaptation of development efforts, and guiding evidence-policy decisions. A strong M&E system would enable Zimbabwe to be more transparent and accountable to its citizens; help it monitor progress towards its developmental objectives and resource use at both central and local levels not only efficiently but also effectively, particularly in an aid-scarce nation with known governance challenges. The experiences of other African countries which have reduced dependent echelons of foreign aid demonstrate that political will, robust economic policy framework and investment in human capital are essential ingredients of the recipe. In conclusion, with dwindling support from the international community, Zimbabwe has to assume responsibility for its development agenda through sustainable means of ensuring that its economy is built on endogenous resources and through robust M&E systems.

6. Conclusion

The steep decline in global development funding for Africa creates a defining moment that forces countries such as Zimbabwe to fundamentally re-evaluate their dependence on external support. This research has shed light on the cascading effects of this reduction in funding across sectors in Zimbabwe, reflecting the fragility of long-term aid dependence. But what may seem like such a dire situation is also in itself a unique opportunity for Zimbabwe to deliberately hone in on building national resilience. To chart a path towards greater self-determination in its development trajectory, Zimbabwe must acknowledge the multifaceted impacts, understand the inherent challenges and actively pursue the identified opportunities.

The way that Zimbabwe can become self-reliant in the long run is through a systematic and nationwide approach. This requires a serious commitment to strengthening domestic resource mobilization, diversifying the economy, investing in its human capital and upholding good governance and accountability principles. The robust monitoring and evaluation systems that are established and successfully utilized will be the key in this respect to track the progress and to assign the resources rightly. Although it will be a tough road ahead, other African countries that have transitioned toward less aid dependency provide a wealth of case studies and insights that can guide us in this journey. Recognizing the need for a renewed expectation of meaningful change and committing to it and investing in its own capacity can enable Zimbabwe to navigate this new world of global fund access to regenerate itself.

Recommendations

The following are the recommendations proposed for Zimbabwe based on the findings of this research:

- **Strengthening the Domestic Resource Mobilization:** The Government of Zimbabwe needs to focus on improving its ability to mobilize in-the-country resources rather than relying heavily on external funding. This requires a wide-ranging review and reform of the entire tax system, including measures to improve the efficiency of tax collection (such as the digitalization of tax administration), to broaden the tax base without necessarily overtaxing citizens (for example, to cover informal establishments), and to strengthen enforcement (to discourage tax evasion). At the same time, far-reaching reforms are required to strengthen public expenditure management through greater budget transparency, stronger internal controls and value for money in government spending. Importantly, however, there needs to be firm and decisive leadership to reduce and eliminate corruption across all levels of government and public institutions, as this saps large amounts of resources that can otherwise be redirected to development priorities.
- **Develop Strong Monitoring and Evaluation Systems:** Zimbabwe will need to step up its development of strong national Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) systems in order to make limited resources go further and to make evidence-based decisions in the absence of large-scale external funding. This could mean creating and operationalizing high-level M&E frameworks that are country development outcomes focused and aligned with sector specific development goals. Capacity building programs are key to prepare government officials and relevant stakeholders with skills regarding how to design, implement and use M&E processes. In addition, mechanisms should be put in place to ensure that M&E data is routinely collected and analysed and that policy adjustments, program improvements and resource allocation decisions are made based on the findings of the M&E data thus increasing accountability and transparency.
- **Advocate for Good Governance and Anti-corruption:** We must lay the groundwork of good governance principles in order to ensure a conducive space for sustainable development, while also firmly standing against corruption. This means building up democratic institutions, upholding the rule of law, and protecting the independence of oversight bodies, such as the Auditor-General and Anti-Corruption Commission. It should encourage transparency within government processes, such as through public procurement and resource management. A bold no to tenderpreneurship is imminent. Moreover, the establishment and enforcement of hindrance to public officials, along with strong anti-corruption laws, will help solidify accountability and public trust that tax dollars are being used for the right reasons.
- **Encourage Economic Diversification:** Easing reliance on aid also requires a restructuring of the economy, building a more diverse and resilient economy. This will imply diversification away from over-dependence on a few dominant sectors through the cultivation of agriculture and mining value addition, promotion of manufacturing and service sectors, and fostering an enabling entrepreneurship and innovation ecosystem. In addition, policies to harness both domestic and foreign investment across different sectors, especially through skills development initiatives and improved technology adoption will be pivotal in creating a more sustainable, self-reliant economy.
- **Strengthening South-South Development Cooperation:** Weakening of traditional donor funding means that Zimbabwe should explore alternative sources of funding more than ever. Therefore, Zimbabwe should consider extending and deepening links with other developing countries through South-South development cooperation. It could include exchanging knowledge, experiences and best practices across areas of development, as well as identifying opportunities for technical assistance, a transfer of technology and alternative financing mechanisms. Working with local institutions and building strategic alliances with countries experiencing similar developmental hurdles can also offer the needed support and help reduce dependency on conventional aid architectures.
- **Institutional Reforms and Human Capital Development:** A vibrant and prosperous Zimbabwe demands a healthy, educated, and skilled population. Hence, investing in the development of human capital must be the first option. Among these are fighting for quality and access to education at all levels, reforming a healthcare system that threatens the health outcomes and productivity of the population and implementing tailored skills

development programs to support all segments in a diversified economy. Investing in its people, their health and skills, is crucial for long-term sustainable development and less reliance on handouts.

- Increase local ownership and participation: In order for development initiatives to have an enduring impact in an environment of dwindling aid, promoting more local ownership and participation is vital. This means involving local people in identifying their needs, developing and implementing development projects themselves and monitoring them. This approach gives power to local communities to lead their own development, which ultimately ensures that interventions are better tailored to the specific needs of the context, increasing the likelihood of long-term sustainability and national resilience

Abbreviations

- USAID: United States Agency for International Development
- M&E: Monitoring and Evaluation
- UN: United Nations
- SDGs: Sustainable Development Goals
- ODA: Official Development Assistance

Compliance with ethical standards

Acknowledgments

The authors are grateful to all key informants and focus group participants for their time and insights through the data collection phase of this research. Without their valuable contributions, this study would not have been possible.

Disclosure of conflict of interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Statement of Informed Consent

All subjects gave their informed consent for inclusion before they participated in the study.

Author Contributions

Conceptualization, A.M. and C. K. Methodology, A. M. and C. K. Formal Analysis, A. M. and C. K. Investigation, A. M. and C. K. Resources, A. M. and C. K. Original Draft Preparation, A. M. Writing, A. M and C. K. Review & Editing, A.M and C. K. Visualization, A. M.

Funding

The authors declare that no funds, grants, or other support were received during the preparation of this manuscript.

Data Availability Statement

The qualitative data produced and analysed during this study are available from the authors on reasonable request.

References

- [1] Africa sees its foreign aid declining: What's behind the shift? Development Aid. Accessed March 16, 2025. <https://www.developmentaid.org/news-stream/post/193535/africa-foreign-aid-declining>
- [2] Localisation of funding in the face of US' aid cuts - Harare - The Herald. Published March 11, 2025. Accessed April 5, 2025. <https://www.herald.co.zw/localisation-of-funding-in-the-face-of-us-aid-cuts/>
- [3] Aid at the crossroads: Trends in official development assistance - UNCTAD. Published April 9, 2025. Accessed April 11, 2025. https://unctad.org/system/files/official-document/osgtinf2025d1_en.pdf
- [4] What if Africa stops receiving foreign aid? | European Union Institute for Security Studies. Published January 20, 2022. Accessed April 2, 2025. <https://www.iss.europa.eu/publications/briefs/what-if-africa-stops-receiving-foreign-aid>
- [5] Moyo, D. (2010). Dead Aid: Why Aid Is Not Working and How There Is a Better Way for Africa. United States: Farrar, Straus and Giroux.

- [6] Nkrumah, K. (1968). *Neo-colonialism: The Last Stage of Imperialism*. United Kingdom: Panaf.
- [7] Globalist.yale.edu. Reopening and Reimagining Africa: The Future of Foreign Aid and Development. Accessed March 27, 2025. <https://globalist.yale.edu/in-the-magazine/reopening-and-reimagining-africa-the-future-of-foreign-aid-and-development/>
- [8] Bauer, P. T. (1971). *Dissent on Development: Studies and Debates in Development Economics*. Harvard University Press.
- [9] Lin, J. Y. (2012). *The Quest for Prosperity: How Developing Economies Can Take Off*. Princeton University Press.
- [10] Rajan, R. G., & Subramanian, A. (2008). Aid and Growth: What Does the Cross-Country Evidence Really Show? *The Review of Economics and Statistics*, 1 90(4), 643-665.
- [11] Sachs, J. D. (2005). *The End of Poverty: Economic Possibilities for Our Time*. Penguin Books.
- [12] Whitfield, L., & Fraser, G. (2010). *Beyond Aid: Why Development Assistance to Africa Has Failed and What Africa Can Do for Itself*. Oxford University Press.
- [13] Acemoglu, D., Johnson, S., & Robinson, J. A. (2003). An African Success Story: Botswana. In *In Search of Prosperity: Analytic Narratives on Economic Growth* (pp. 80-119). Princeton University Press.
- [14] Holling, C. S. (1973). Resilience and Stability of Ecological Systems. *Annual Review of Ecology and Systematics*, 4(1), 1-23.
- [15] UNISDR. (2009). *UNISDR Terminology on Disaster Risk Reduction*. United Nations.
- [16] Manyika, J., Bughin, J., Lund, S., Nottebohm, O., Poulter, D., Jauch, S. K., & Ramakrishnan, S. (2012). *Africa at work: Job creation and inclusive growth*. McKinsey Global Institute.
- [17] OECD. (2014). *Risk and Resilience: Issues Paper for the High-Level Meeting of the Development Assistance Committee*. OECD Publishing.
- [18] Moyo, D. (2009). *Dead Aid: Why Aid Is Not Working and How There Is a Better Way for Africa*. Farrar, Straus and Giroux.
- [19] Bulř, A., & Hamann, A. J. (2008). Volatility of Development Aid: An Empirical Assessment. *IMF Staff Papers*, 55(1), 1-21.
- [20] World Bank. (1998). *Assessing Aid: What Works, What Doesn't, and Why*. Oxford University Press.
- [21] Booth, D., & Golooba-Mutebi, F. (2012). *Aid Effectiveness in Rwanda: Confronting the Paradox*. Overseas Development Institute.
- [22] Government of Ghana. (2017). *Ghana Beyond Aid: A Strategy for National Transformation*.
- [23] Gertler, P. J., Martinez, S., Premand, P., Rawlings, L. B., & Vermeersch, C. M. J. (2016). *Impact Evaluation in Practice*. World Bank Publications.
- [24] Patton, M. Q. (2008). *Utilization-Focused Evaluation*. Sage Publications.
- [25] Creswell, J. W. (2014). *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches*. Sage Publications.
- [26] Yin, R. K. (2018). *Case Study Research and Applications: Design and Methods*. Sage Publications.
- [27] Bernard, H. R. (2017). *Research Methods in Anthropology: Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches*. Rowman & Littlefield.
- [28] Krueger, R. A., & Casey, M. A. (2014). *Focus Groups: A Practical Guide for Applied Research*. Sage Publications.
- [29] Guest, G. E., Bunce, A., & Johnson, L. (2006). How Many Interviews Are Enough? An Experiment with Data Saturation and Variability. *Field Methods*, 18(1), 2 3-22.
- [30] Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77-101.
- [31] Riessman, C. K. (2008). *Narrative Methods for the Human Sciences*. Sage Publications.
- [32] Ending aid dependency through tax: emerging research findings – ActionAid International. Accessed March 27, 2025. https://actionaid.org/sites/default/files/actionaid_papert_end_aid_dep_final_23july.pdf