

**Rational or Disjointed: Grappling with Philosophical Contradictions in 21st Century
Economic Policy Planning and Development in Zimbabwe**

By

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ABSTRACT

At the turn of the second millennium AD, Zimbabwe has hogged the domestic, regional and international limelight for various reasons. The reasons include, but not limited to, a controversial land reform programme, disputed elections, and warped economic policies which the government justified in the name of development. The above factors led to ostracism by most western countries and multilateral financial institutions and induced a multiplicity of political and economic problems. Confronted with a fugitive inflation, unprecedented economic emigration, a debilitating famine, an unsustainable unemployment rate, and a down warp in living standards, the Zimbabwean government was forced to grope for a comprehensive economic policy that would set the country on a development path. In the process, there have been a lot of volte-faces in modelling economic policies. This paper grapples with the philosophy (or lack of) underpinning economic policy choices in Zimbabwe, especially since 2000. It also highlights those factors that informed the economic policies that are implemented in Zimbabwe. It is within the precincts of this paper to discuss the policy making framework in Zimbabwe, particularly since the turn of the 21st century.

INTRODUCTION

In 1980, the Zimbabwean government emphatically stated its Marxist-Leninist ideology in the running of government. Supposedly economic-policy planning would be informed by socialist principles. However, the ZANU-PF leadership dropped the socialist ideology in 1989 and began to consecrate the capitalist schemeⁱ and then shifted to largely “undefined” ideas in the 21st century. The main objective of drawing up its development plan was stated in the first government policy document, Growth with Equity, and that objective remains the same to dateⁱⁱ, that is, to “achieve sustainable high rate of economic growth and speedy development in order to raise incomes and standards of living of the people”.ⁱⁱⁱ However, there has been a tendency to fuse ideologies in a single economic policy in the government’s major economic policies since 2001 which include the Zimbabwe Millennium Economic Recovery Plan (2001), the National Economic Recovery Plan (2003), the Ten Point Plan, and the National Economic Development Priority Plan (2004). The impetus to do this has, to a larger extent, been predicated on the need for both political survival of the ruling party and, to a lesser extent, the need to bring development to the people. The above policies have been launched amid fanfare with high hopes and hyped as setting Zimbabwe on a track of development, only to fade away before their objectives are realised.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Care should be taken when embarking on an examination of Zimbabwe’s politics. There is a danger of withdrawing too far from theory and simply gathering facts that will not lead to any kind of generalizable statement’.^{iv} Accordingly, I have adopted two philosophical schools. On one hand, is the Rational Comprehensive Model, which seeks the best policy in theory. However, it is not very realistic. One has to account for the many constraints that reality holds. On the other hand, is the Disjointed Incrementalism Model, which is based on finding the more acceptable and agreeable policy by all the relevant constituencies. It is both descriptive, that is, it states what has been done, and prescriptive, that is, it states what ought to be done. There is, however, the “Third” approach to planning and/or policy making, as espoused by Amitai Etzioni. The model which has been criticized for its lack of any

philosophical foundations is a compromise model for planning which is relevant for countries in transition, particularly the Third World countries. This installment largely focuses on the first two.

However, some have highlighted, that in any case, philosophies can never be the ultimate answer to problems bedeviling Third World countries; rather policies should be designed in such a way to serve different and pressing needs of societies at different times, while at the same time maintaining some consistency. It is imperative, from the outset, to note that lack of critical thinking in policy planning is equally disastrous as is the failure to plan. The mixed-scanning model is useful in as far as it borrows from the Rational Comprehensive Planning Theory and the Disjointed Incrementalism Theory, but for its lack of philosophical foundation I will not pursue it in this installment.

THE POLICY PLANNING MODELS: AN ANATOMY

Rational Comprehensive Planning (RCP) rose in response to problems brought on by urban growth in the Nineteenth Century when scientific methods were applied to find solutions to urban problems.^v Planners in Zimbabwe now style themselves as using RCP. This is evident in Official Plans and the plan-making process, which involve scientific instruments like forecasts, analyses of issues and concerns, studies of anticipated social and environmental impacts, and goal statements.^{vi}

As its name implies, this theory applies rational decision-making to planning. The four typical elements of RCP are goal setting, identification of policy alternatives, evaluation of means against ends, and implementation of decisions with feedback loops and repetition of steps.^{vii} Using this method requires meticulous information gathering and analysis. It stresses objectivity, the public interest, information and analysis, which allow planners to identify the best possible course of action.

The rational comprehensive position, abstracting from the messy "real world", assumes that decision-makers have, a well-defined problem, a full array of alternatives to consider, full baseline information, complete information about the consequences of each alternative, full information about the values and preferences of citizens, and full adequate time, skill, and resources.^{viii} However, considering the real conditions facing policy planners, this can be disapproved. Simon and March have propounded that,

“Actual decision-makers face ambiguous and poorly defined alternatives, incomplete information about alternatives, incomplete information about the baseline and the background of "the problem", incomplete information about the consequences of supposed alternatives, incomplete information about the range and content of values, preferences, and interests, and limited time, limited skills, and limited resources^{ix}.”

RCP, as the government planners in Zimbabwe have styled themselves, approaches problems from a systems (integrated) viewpoint, using conceptual or mathematical models that relate ends (objectives) to means (resources and constraints) with heavy reliance on numbers and quantitative analysis.^x It attempts to circumnavigate the issue of conflict by presuming a discernable public interest. This assumes that a community's various collective goals can be measured in some effective way.^{xi} Contrary to what has prevailed in Zimbabwean policy planning, where political expediency supplant common good, the method strives to be objective, technical, and exclude subjective and emotional discussion sparked by divergent perception of problem. It attempts to separate planning from politics by ignoring the political considerations of public interest.^{xii} Faludi argues that RCP is impractical:

“As a methodology, it can only be applied to relatively simple problems and then only in modified form. In the real world, inherent limitations on resources, information and time make it impossible to use RCP in its purest form. Lindblom goes so far as to comment that its non-implementability takes away any point in using it^{xiii}.”

In place of an unambiguous problem leading to a solution, decision-makers who use RCP face a more fuzzy picture. Its demands are considerable and require more than decision-makers are capable of giving. Etzioni contends that the impossibility of predicting all consequences or grasp all variables and the lack of resources and time to collect information needed for rational choice limit its practicability.^{xiv} Evidently, the costs of being more comprehensive often exceeded the benefits.

Lastly, using the RCP, the Zimbabwean government through its economic planning department, assisted by Reserve Bank Governor, relied heavily on particular models of a clear, unitary notion of the public interest, which is impossible to achieve in the real world. Interests in reality are pluralist, citizens, politicians, and administrators with differing and conflicting values and objectives. This makes it

difficult for planners to ascertain the majority's preference and public debate is rarely wide enough to accomplish this^{xv}

The above concerns and submissions lead to the debate on the use of Disjointed Incrementalism. Its underpinning argument is that the planning practice is different from the theory of planning. It is not a rational activity governed by experts using scientific knowledge, but an irrational process dominated by petty political concerns.^{xvi} A key element of Incremental Planning is a pluralistic view of a society composed of competing interest groups who lobby government for certain policies. In this model, plans are not constructed by a strict process, but by a series of consultations largely based on peoples' actual experiences.^{xvii} Put to an examination, the Zimbabwean Government dismally failed the acid test within the period under scrutiny. The government has been given to populist behavior, pretending to be appealing to the people while its heavy hand drives the policy.

DI's strength, as Friedman argues, is that large decisions are divided into smaller ones and distributed among a large number of actors who make decisions independently, each pursuing their separate interests, and form alliances to get support for their goals^{xviii}. The state serves as an independent adjudicator seeking compromises between these groups. According to the Incremental Planning model, this process brings out the public interest.^{xix} Incremental Planning's greatest strength is that instead of attempting to be rational and comprehensive it describes decision-making as it actually occurs. The model recognizes that policy is continually being made and re-made, thereby avoiding errors that come with radical change in policy and stays within predictive capability.^{xx}

Incremental Planning's basic weakness is its assumption of a pluralistic society composed of small interest groups, which I think Zimbabwe is not. It is true that contrary to Incremental Planning's view of a pluralist society, society is actually dominated by certain groups, which make competition unequal and undemocratic. According to Etzioni, decisions reached using Incrementalism, therefore, reflect the interests of the more powerful rather than those of the community in general.^{xxi} Zimbabwe suits the description.

From the above submissions it is clear that neither the RCP nor the Disjointed Incrementalist models are the panacea to efficient policy planning in Zimbabwe. The weaknesses of each of these models are such that they cannot benefit the assumed beneficiaries – the poor. Thus, out of the deficiency of these classical policy-making approaches comes a middle-of-the road approach by Etzioni.

The overall aim of Amitai Etzioni's work is to demonstrate how policy makers can best collect information on policy alternatives and strategize on the allocation of resources.^{xxii} Etzioni argued that reality cannot be assumed to be structured in straight lines where each step towards a goal leads directly to another and where the accumulation of small steps in effect solve the problem.

The Zimbabwean model is one that has attempted to take both rational model and disjointed one. It is not clearly one that is informed by a mixed scanning model. A mixed-scanning strategy would include elements of both approaches, i.e. Disjointed Incrementalism and Rational Comprehensive Planning. Effective decision making requires that sporadically, or at set intervals, investments encompassing (high coverage) scanning be increased to check for far removed but "obvious" dangers and search for better lives of approach.^{xxiii}

Reality cannot be assumed to be structured in straight lines where each step towards a goal leads directly to another and where the accumulation of small steps in effect solve the problem.^{xxiv} According to..., it is noted that,

"In the exploration of mixed-scanning, it is essential to differentiate fundamental decisions from incremental ones. Fundamental decisions are made by exploring the main alternatives the actor sees in view of his conception of his goals, but unlike what rationalism would indicate-details and specification are omitted so that an overview is feasible. Incremental decisions are made but within the contexts made by fundamental decisions (and fundamental reviews). Thus, each of the two elements in mixed-scanning helps to reduce the effects of the particular shortcomings of the other; Incrementalism reduces the unrealistic aspects of rationalism by limiting the details required in fundamental decisions, and contextualizing rationalism helps to overcome the conservative slant of Incrementalism by exploring longer-run alternatives. Together, empirical tests

and comparative study of decision makers would show that these elements make for a third approach which is at once more realistic and more effective than its components.^{xxv}”

In mixed-scanning, the structures within which interaction among actors take place become more significant. The more we recognize that the basis of decisions neither are, nor can be, a full set of values and an exhaustive examination of reality. In part, the strategy followed is determined neither by values, nor by information, but by the position of and power relations among the decision-makers.^{xxvi} Mixed-scanning is flexible; changes in the relative investment in scanning in general, as well as among the various levels of scanning permit it to adapt to the specific situation.^{xxvii}

Since Zimbabwe attained her independence in 1980, the ruling party and government has remained more or less the same. The regime has made countless policy shifts, when one would have expected a more unswerving, recurrent and expected policy-making approach. This has, nonetheless, not been the case. Political goals have taken centre stage in policy-making. Populist policies that are predicated by political expediency have been so obvious in the policy-making framework of the ZANU (PF) government. In the end, the whole exercise has been noted by many an analyst as futile, grandiose disaster and regressive.

No doubt, as we entered the new millennium, the rest of the developing world has been faced with a myriad of problems within and without the state itself. Within the state there has been an epic challenge to transform the lives of the people for the better on the milieu of sadistic pressure from civil society groups backed by the international pressure groups proffering alternative ways of developing the people. Without the state, has been the express deluge of international humanitarian organisations and laws, which have contributed, to a larger extent, to the erosion of state sovereignty. Notwithstanding these challenges, Zimbabwe has been compelled by circumstances to chart its own destiny through economic policies suitable for its society. Policies became a tool to avert regime change than at the expense of people's needs. There has, therefore, been a predisposition by the Zimbabwean government to make volte-faces in policy-making and there has not been a clear-cut and consistent demeanour.

THE ECONOMIC POLICY CONCEPT

There is obviously a lack of harmony on the characterization of policy and worse still of economic policy, but policy making is certainly a process which is based on critical thoughts, and not simply a days' choice. This is supported by Jenkins, who characterizes policy as a set of interrelated decisions taken by a political actor, or group of actors, concerning the selection of goals and the means of achieving them within a specified situation where those decisions should, in principle, be within the power of those actors to achieve'.^{xxviii}

Hitherto, others say the term public policy always refers to the actions of government and the intentions that determine those actions'.^{xxix} This explains the characterization that public policy is the outcome of the struggle in government over who gets what.^{xxx} This summarization put simply assumes that public policy is the sum of government activities, whether acting directly or through agents, as it has an influence on the life of citizens.

The Wikipedia defines public policy as a course of action or inaction chosen by public authorities to address a problem^{xxxii}. Public policy is expressed in the body of laws, regulations, decisions, and actions of government^{xxxii}. Policy analysis may be used to formulate public policy and to evaluate its effectiveness.

Summarily, and borrowing from the above submissions, a policy can thus be seen as a deliberate plan of action to guide decisions and achieve rationale outcome(s). The term may apply to government, private sector organizations and groups, and individuals. Policies can be understood as political, management, financial, and administrative mechanisms arranged to reach explicit goals.

The elements common to all definitions of public policy are as follows:

1. Policy is made in the name of the "public".
2. Policy is generally made or initiated by government.
3. Policy is interpreted and implemented by public and private actors.
4. Policy is what the government intends to do.
5. Policy is what the government chooses to and/or not to do^{xxxiii}.

The goals of policy may vary widely according to governments and the context in which they are made. But importantly, policies are rooted in the resident thinking and orientation of those in authority. In other words, policies are an expression of the philosophical standing of a certain political cabal.

THE DEVELOPMENT CONCEPT

The concept of development has remained a controversial one and different scholars have defined it differently. However besides the fact that development is contextual, scholars have agreed that development qualifies as development when it uplifts and promotes the various facets of human welfare. Thus, Hettne contends that,

“There can be no fixed and final definition of development, only suggestions of what development should imply in particular contexts. Thus to a larger extent development is contextually defined and should be an open-ended concept, to be constantly redefined as the understanding of the concept deepens and as new problems to be solved by development emerge.”^{xxxiv}

According to W. Rodney,

“Development in human society is a many-sided process. At the level of the individual, it implies increased skill and capacity, greater freedom, creativity, self-discipline, responsibility and material well-being. Some of these are virtually moral categories and are difficult to evaluate – depending as they do on the age in which one lives, one’s class origin and one’s personal code of what is right and what is wrong. However, what is indisputable is that the achievement of any of those aspects of personal development is very much tied in with the state of the society as a whole.”^{xxxv}

For Himmelstrand,

“Development is a multi-dimensional process, which is tied to six criteria. Firstly a society’s ability to use its natural and human resources to feed itself even under threats of mounting population pressure, secondly, its ability to produce basic tools needed for food

production, thirdly, institutionalisation of binding shared rules for all actors in the system, fourthly, the presence of indigenous entrepreneurs capable of propelling growth, fifthly, the possibility of appreciable balance of trade, and lastly, the need for considerable amount of autonomy and self-reliance in the specific society or nation.”^{xxxvi}

Within this line of thinking, it is patent that development ought to somewhat advance the welfare of the individual. According to Thirwall,

“The concept of development is required which embraces the major social and values that societies strive for...Life sustenance, which is concerned with the provision of basic needs such as food, clothing, shelter and minimal education...self esteem, the feeling of self respect, independence and freedom from the three evils of “want, ignorance and squalor” so that people are more able to determine their own destiny.”^{xxxvii}

Development was conceived of almost exclusively in economic terms and growth targets, with very little regard for the beneficiaries of growth or to the composition of the output. Development here is qualified as positive and contextually acceptable change.

Economic Policy-Making and the Development Nexus

It is lucid that development planning is a domain of policy-makers. Politicians at state level, therefore, decide who gets what, when, and how. In so doing, they determine the incidence of development. Therefore, economic policy is one of the tools used by development planners to allocate economic resources in order to achieve development. One of the major objectives of development planners in policy-planning is to achieve development for the people. In as far as development should be participatory; policy-making should tentatively and virtually be participatory. In development terms participation is both a means to an end and an end in itself.

Thus far, development and policy-planning are intertwined issues. It may seem for now that the priority of African governments and their development partners should be the improvement of the quality of lives of the citizenry in the areas of poverty reduction, employment, health, and education.

Understanding Economic Policy Planning in Zimbabwe: Problems and Prospects

A vast number of studies have focused on economic-planning in Zimbabwe in the 1980's and 1990's. However, despite the tremendous change in economic policy planning, since the turn of the new millennium, only a few scholars have focused on contemporary planning discourse in Zimbabwe. Birkland (2001) notes that,

“While the study of politics has a long history, the systematic study of public policy, on the other hand, can be said to be a twentieth century creation. It dates to 1922 when political scientist Charles Merriam sought to connect the theory and practices of politics to understanding the actual activities of government that is public policy.”^{xxxviii}

But up until the 21st Century there has scarcely been any serious works by third world scholars to illuminate policy choices that developing countries' governments can embark on. There has generally been a great dearth of philosophical works in the field of policy planning. While studies on policy-making in Zimbabwe have, to a larger extent, focused on ideological policies such as the socialist thrust in policy soon after independence; this has not been pursued to the twenty-first century. The literature, which deals with political and economic interactions, is very large, but much of it attempts to ask why some developing countries liberalize and others either do not or liberalize only in a piecemeal fashion.^{xxxix}

The policy planning process in Zimbabwe in the 21st century has had a propensity to assume elitist and somewhat non-participatory approaches, which are based on populist and benign governance. Additionally, key actors in policy-making in Zimbabwe have to a larger extent been the affluent yet the intended beneficiaries are the poor. Scholars in third world development planning have also tended to focus more on state theory in policy making at the expense of others. Also, policy planning in Zimbabwe in the 21st century has to a larger extent failed to transform the poor lives for the better, which ought to be its main objective. Against the aforesaid, there is need to focus on the policy planning-philosophy nexus in Zimbabwe.

The increasingly important research stream focusing on the role of ideas, knowledge, discourses, narratives in public policy-making, in addition to interests and institutions, mainly deals with policy resilience and innovation in western developed countries.^{x1} But a great dearth of systematic survey or synthetic work is available yet regarding the relevance of the cognitive, ideational, or discursive approaches to the study of public policies

There has not been a clear ideological orientation, at the dawn of the 21st Century, in policy planning in Zimbabwe. The government has largely operated through Operations, a policy which can be aptly called “Government by Operations” (GBO). These have been in form of sporadic reactions to crises that bedevilled the country, particularly in the first decade of the 21st Century. These operations have to a larger extent been manned by army personnel, police force, some retirees, and veterans of the independence war. In extreme situations, a cabal of party youths brainwashed and trained in violent conduct have been given the task to oversee implementation of these operations.

Zwizwai, Kambudzi, and Mauwa have discussed the policy-making process in Zimbabwe in as far as it acquaintances with industrial development. They contend that the government of Zimbabwe has failed to give sufficient attention to industrial development as a result of the officialdom in the ruling party and government. However, it should be noted that there is a link (or lack of) between public policy and development. Their study is an anatomy of the implementation of the policies as they pertain to industrial development. However, their research opens up a gap to explore public policy-planning and question how it has contributed to the advancement of the Zimbabwean humanity.

John Robertson critically analyses and assesses the likely impact of the National Economic Development Priority Plan. He does this by identifying its major precept and foundations that,

“Most of the effects of the problems currently facing Zimbabwe are accurately identified in this latest policy statement (NEDPP), but it does not accurately identify the causes of the difficulties. There can be no doubt that the country is suffering from severe loss of production, reduced foreign earnings, worsening shortages and inflation as well as rising unemployment and skills losses, ...”^{xli}

Robertson concludes by postulating that the NEDPP lacks substance to be a viable public policy. Through such journalistic writing there is no mention or in-depth analysis of the whole policy-making thrust used by the government in the twenty-first century.

There are two remarkable features of post-independence economic policy-making in Zimbabwe: “The very limited nature of the changes made by the new government in 1980 and the complete reversal of policy announced in 1990. It was surprising that a more radical transformation had not been introduced since this had been achieved by a civil war prompted not only by the denial of even basic rights to the majority of the population, but also an extreme inequitable distribution of economic resources.”^{xlii} (Jenkins, 1997)

What is more salient in almost all literature as well as that of Jenkins is a lack of explanation of 21st century policy-planning in Zimbabwe, which I attempt to address. In coming up with a compelling opinion on the politics of policy-planning in Zimbabwe Jenkins analyses the post-independence period and compares it with the volte-face in policy from 1990, which she attributes to history, prevailing ideas, and interaction of domestic imperatives and international pressures:

“The path taken in the past can eliminate opinions, because of inherited structures, institutions, ideologies, and values (including apartheid, colonialism and nationalism); prevailing ideas where, the liberation movement in Zimbabwe espoused socialist ideology similar to that adopted at least nominally by governments in most of the continents’ ex-colonies. Although Zimbabwe attained its independence late enough to learn something from African policy errors, the swing to economic liberalisation had not yet commenced. It was only during the 1980s that the African crisis deepened and that communism collapsed in Eastern Europe leaving even more regions dependent on and from the Western countries and institutions and interaction of domestic imperatives and international pressures is obviously significant in determining final outcomes. During the first half of the century, Zimbabwe (Rhodesia) was particularly affected by the interests of Britain, South Africa and later the United States of America in the sub-region. During the 1980s, the new government tried to manage the economy independent of outside influences and policy making was dominated by domestic pressures...external influences have however become more compelling since Zimbabwe adopted a structural Adjustment

programme in 1990 and thereby lost some autonomy in economic policy-making.”^{xliii}
(Jenkins, 1997)

It is consequently patent from the above that there is need to twirl to the momentum in economic policy-making after the year 2000, where the government has taken a semi-liberal ideology and yet full-fledged commandist style of implementation^{xliv}. What is more is that, policy succession has been unprecedented in post independence Zimbabwe. The motivation is to attempt and uncover the nexus sandwiched between present day policy-making and development.

The locus of decision-making within the state and the interconnectedness of party and state/governmental business have been highlighted by Jeffrey Herbst. He contends that in Africa and elsewhere in the third world some parties have evolved to such an extent that they must be considered party of the resource-allocation process^{xlv}. For instance in 1984, Robert Mugabe once said,

“The ruling ZANU(PF) is more important than the government and...the central committee is above the cabinet because ministers derive their power from ZANU (PF)...In the future there will be no separation of the party from the state organs because after the national congress in August government programmes will be based on the resolutions of the ZANU (PF) central Committee.”

Herbst has also further pointed the importance of ideology in the formulation of public policy, though he argues that it is difficult to determine in Zimbabwe. ‘The new government has itself consciously portrayed itself as a Marxist state; on the other hand, it has often adopted economic policies, which are far from radical. In fact, the direction that ideology has taken since 1980 has largely been affected by factional politics within the party and government’.^{xlvi} From the above assertions, it is obvious that policy making in Zimbabwe has never been clear and has been decided by politics of the day. What is clear is that Marxism was an inherent orientation in the party leadership, though not so much pronounced in policy-making.

“The strength of pressure in the government to pursue a Marxist oriented line of policy-even if this orientation is ill-defined – fluctuates but the undercurrent is always present as a result of the radicalisation of a large number of people during the liberation war, and because of the presence of committed ideologues in all sectors of the government. In

some cases, however, Marxist ideology has not been able to penetrate policy decisions^{xlvii}.”

From the above submissions, it is notable that 21st century policy-making in Zimbabwe has totally taken a complete opposite of the pertaining situation at attainment of independence. Quite very radical public policies have been adopted. I, henceforth, conclude that there has been an ideological bankruptcy and implementation confusion in the policy-planning process in the new millennium without a link to development in Zimbabwe.

CONCLUSION

In the final analysis, critical thinking (philosophy) is, in policy-planning, as inescapable as the making of these policies. Historically, as governments embark on policy-making, they have been informed by some philosophical scholarship. Liberalism, socialism, communism, etc. are all critical thoughts that inform governments in modelling their policies. It is, however, common practice that these ideologies can fuse to address practical problems. Governments choose those aspects of one philosophy with which they have an affinity and leave those which are deemed counterproductive to their objectives. However, it should be noted that even within such a discourse, a certain line of thinking is detected. The Zimbabwean situation, however, presents the question: What exact philosophy underpins its policy thrust since the new millennium? Since its declared loyalty to Marxist-Leninism in 1980, the same government has had the propensity to shift positions, notably in 1990, when the western backed liberal structural adjustment was blessed. What is worse, by the beginning of the 21st century, indubitably no economic discourse or policy planning paradigm existed, but only fumbling and groping for political relevancy by the dictators.

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