

# Young People's View on the Possibility for Dialogue, the Lack of it and the Stand-Off in Zimbabwe

*Adio-Adet Dinika*



The Zimbabwean economy is in shambles, inflation has gone through the roof. Tension is almost palpable and cases of abductions, and beatings at the hands of state actors both alleged and actual are prevalent. The health system has all but collapsed with Doctors and government in a stand-off that has gone past ninety days. Fuel queues are longer than ever and recently the United Nations said about seven million people; almost half the country's population are facing starvation. What everyone can agree on is that things in the country are bad, very bad. To quote Retired Major General S.B. Moyo "The situation in our country has reached another level."

Many are presenting dialogue as a panacea for Zimbabwe's woes, but maybe before we embrace it lets first define it. At the risk of being too academic I will take a definition offered by Paffenholz et al. (2016) which defines (national) dialogue as broad-based, inclusive and participatory negotiation platforms involving large segments of civil society, politicians, youth, women, academia and peace building experts. They are ordinarily convened to negotiate major political reforms or peace in complex and fragmented conflict environments.

As young people we yearn for a country that functions, a country were dreaming to be president is

not a crime. A platform where our voice can be heard is long overdue, where we have the freedom to speak our minds without fear of being abducted or labelled "a western puppet". The current situation has not only spoiled our present but also robbed us of our future, our parents speak of the "good old days" but we have no such memories unless of course being shown baby pictures wearing Edgars clothing counts. We need an end to this impasse and just as dialogue led to the end of Apartheid, Lancaster House conference and the 2009 Government of National Unity perhaps it holds answers for us.

Agenda for dialogue?

To date both state actors and non-



state actors such the National Peace and Reconciliation Commission (NPRC), The Government (President Mnangagwa) through the Political Actors Dialogue (POLAD), Zimbabwe Council of Churches, which the Catholic Church is party to and the Citizen's Manifesto have all carried out efforts towards national dialogue. The MDC led by Adv. Nelson Chamisa rejected the call to join the POLAD arguing that the venue (State House) and the convenor (President Mnangagwa) were inappropriate. To their credit, several months down the line POLAD meetings have achieved absolutely nothing.

What's apparent from all the dialogue efforts is that almost all of the participants have different agendas, different starting points and different approaches to the dialoguing process for instance, President Mnangagwa called for a post-election dialogue while Adv. Chamisa argues that President Mnangagwa's legitimacy should be the first port of call. The two have stuck to their guns which has seen MDC legislators walking out on President Mnangagwa while in turn ZANU PF legislators have refused to be chaired by MDC legislators in Parliamentary Portfolio Committees arguing that they ought to recognise President Mnangagwa first, which has all but crippled the work of Parliament.

So, what really is the agenda for the dialogue? Is it to settle the question of President Mnangagwa's legitimacy? Is it to bring everyone to the big (POLAD) tent and denounce sanctions? Is it to come up with economic reforms so as to solve the economic crisis, get Doctors back to work, capacitate our Hospitals, get all civil servants back to work with salaries that can sustain them? Is it to come up with political reforms so as to ensure the rule of law, an end to abductions and prepare for a credible and dispute free 2023 election? Or maybe drawing inspiration from one of the Zimbabwe Catholic Bishops' pastoral letters is to come up with "The Zimbabwe we all want?" There is need for an Agenda that speaks to the real issues and sets aside partisan interests from either the MDC or ZANU PF.

The level of mistrust and animosity between the two main parties, ZANU PF and MDC do not inspire much confidence as far as national dialogue is concerned, there is the proverbial chasm between them and a history of betrayal of trust and penchant for using thugs dressed in police uniform to pummel opponents



as alleged by Jim Kunaka in his testimony before the Motlanthe Commission, which was instituted to look into the 1 August 2018 disturbances, after the harmonised presidential and parliamentary elections of the same year. The halting of the NPRC's efforts to give way for the POLAD already indicates how one party can easily lean on state resources/arms to further its own agenda. The MDC has said that it is ready to dialogue if there is an independent mediator but the question is given how the two view Southern Africa Development Community (SADC), the European Union and the United States of America with different levels of mistrust, will they agree on a mediator? I doubt it.

Zimbabwe can however not be summarised by the two parties, there is perhaps need for a broad-based national dialogue as argued by the Zimbabwe Council of Churches and the Citizens Manifesto. My measured view however is that these efforts while noble are dead in the water as long as there is no political will to support them as well as to take on board their conclusions/positions. ZANU PF has repeatedly said it will not reform itself out of power, meaning any dialogue that will threaten its hold on power will be thwarted. National broad-based dialogues can be a starting point. However, perhaps if the people find common ground, then they can remove the stranglehold of the two main political parties on national issues and institutions.