ZIMBABWE BLUEPRINT INITIATIVE

Zimbabwe at the Crossroads:

A Blueprint for Transformative Development

FOUNDING PAPER | PAPER 1 OF THE BLUEPRINT SERIES

ABSTRACT

Zimbabwe possesses every ingredient for transformative economic success — fertile land, abundant natural resources, a relatively educated population, and one of Africa's most resourceful diasporas. Yet decades of policy failures and institutional erosion have kept it trapped well below its potential. This founding paper argues that transformation is not only possible but achievable within a generation. It sets out a five-pillar strategic framework and articulates a clear, evidence-based vision: a Zimbabwe that has achieved G20-scale economic status by 2045–2060, characterised by sustained high growth, developed-country infrastructure, a stable currency, near-full employment, and functioning public institutions. Detailed policy proposals follow in subsequent papers in this series.

Published by the Zimbabwe Blueprint Initiative

May 2026 — Final Version

This paper is published for open public debate. It is not affiliated with any political party, movement, or electoral campaign.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Executive Summary

Zimbabwe stands at a defining moment in its history. Blessed with fertile land, abundant natural resources, a relatively educated population, and one of Africa's most resourceful diasporas, the country possesses every ingredient for transformative economic success. And yet, decades of policy missteps, institutional erosion, and monetary instability have kept it trapped well below its potential.

This paper argues that transformation is not only possible but achievable within a generation — and that the path to a prosperous, stable Zimbabwe is neither mysterious nor beyond reach. What is required is not a miracle. It is clarity of purpose, institutional discipline, and the political will to implement solutions that are already well understood.

Our vision is concrete: a Zimbabwe that has achieved G20-scale economic status by 2045–2060 — characterised by sustained high growth, developed-country infrastructure, a stable currency, near-full employment, and functioning public institutions that citizens can trust. This is not wishful thinking. It is the trajectory achieved by South Korea, Rwanda, Botswana, and Mauritius — countries that, at various points in their histories, faced challenges as daunting as Zimbabwe's today.

This founding paper sets out the strategic framework. Detailed policy proposals covering currency reform, infrastructure development, governance, agricultural productivity, and diaspora re-engagement will follow as individual papers in this series. Together, they constitute a blueprint — practical, evidence-based, and written with one purpose: to contribute to a Zimbabwe that future generations can be proud of.

SECTION 1

1. The Premise: Potential Is Not Destiny

Zimbabwe should, by any reasonable measure, be one of Africa's success stories.

It sits atop one of the world's richest concentrations of natural resources — platinum, gold, diamonds, lithium, and chrome among them. Its agricultural land, anchored by the highveld plateau, is among the most fertile on the continent. Zimbabwe's adult literacy rate stands at approximately 90%, one of the highest in sub-Saharan Africa.[1] And its diaspora — scattered across South Africa, the United Kingdom, the United States, Australia, and beyond — comprises hundreds of thousands of educated, entrepreneurial, globally experienced citizens who retain deep ties to home.

These are not minor advantages. Many of the world's most successful development stories were built on far less.

And yet Zimbabwe's GDP stands at approximately $44 billion — smaller than the economy of a mid-sized European city.[2] Inflation has destroyed savings twice in living memory. Infrastructure that was once the envy of the region has deteriorated. Talented citizens continue to leave in search of stability and opportunity elsewhere. The gap between what Zimbabwe is and what it could be is not just an economic statistic. It is a human tragedy — measured in unrealised lives, frustrated ambitions, and a generation that grew up knowing their country was capable of more.

The purpose of this paper is not to dwell on that gap, but to close it.

SECTION 2

2. An Honest Reckoning — Then We Move On

Any credible blueprint must briefly acknowledge how Zimbabwe arrived at this point — not to assign blame, but because understanding the causes of a problem is the first step to solving it.

The structural damage inflicted on Zimbabwe's economy over the past three decades is well documented. The fast-track land reform programme of the early 2000s, however politically motivated, devastated agricultural output and triggered a collapse in investor confidence that echoed across every sector. The hyperinflation of 2007–2008 — one of the worst in recorded history — wiped out savings, destroyed the banking system's credibility, and embedded a deep institutional distrust of monetary authorities that persists to this day. Successive cycles of political instability undermined the rule of law, weakened property rights, and created an environment in which short-term survival crowded out long-term investment.

These are the facts. They are not in dispute. But they are also the past.

What matters now is this: none of the damage is irreversible. Institutions can be rebuilt. Monetary credibility can be restored. Investor confidence can be won back. Agricultural productivity can recover. The evidence from comparable countries shows that transformation from crisis to stability — and from stability to prosperity — can happen within a single generation when the right foundations are put in place.

2.1 Lessons from Prior Reform Efforts

Zimbabwe is not without prior reform efforts, and intellectual honesty requires acknowledging them.

The Economic Structural Adjustment Programme (ESAP) of the early 1990s, designed with IMF and World Bank support, sought to liberalise and stabilise the economy. It failed to deliver growth — producing an average growth rate of just 1.1% against a target of 5% — and inflicted significant social hardship, including a 39% decline in public health expenditure.[3] The lesson of ESAP is not that reform is futile. It is that technical economic reforms imposed without adequate sequencing, social protection, or genuine political commitment are a fragile thing. ESAP's deeper failure was that economic liberalisation was never matched by the political and institutional transformation required to make it stick.

More recently, the government's own Vision 2030 and National Development Strategy 1 (NDS1, 2021–2025) speak the language of transformation, and that ambition is to be welcomed. NDS1 explicitly recognises that "bold and transformative measures are required" and that "slow and incremental change will not deliver the transformation that the people of Zimbabwe deserve."´ This blueprint shares that ambition entirely.

But the IMF's most recent Article IV consultation, concluded in 2025, notes that despite a degree of macroeconomic stability, important challenges remain from fiscal financing pressures, low reserve buffers, and governance gaps that continue to constrain Zimbabwe's economic potential.µ And the ZiG — introduced in April 2024 as Zimbabwe's sixth attempt at currency reform since 2000 — has already lost significant value, illustrating once again that monetary instruments without institutional foundations will not hold.¶

But the IMF's most recent Article IV consultation, concluded in 2025, notes that despite a degree of macroeconomic stability, important challenges remain from fiscal financing pressures, low reserve buffers, and governance gaps that continue to constrain Zimbabwe's economic potential.µ And the ZiG — introduced in April 2024 as Zimbabwe's sixth attempt at currency reform since 2000 — depreciated by 94.7% in its official exchange rate quote (representing a 48.6% loss in its external purchasing power relative to the US dollar) within ten months of its launch. This illustrates once again that monetary instruments operating without deep institutional foundations cannot withstand market scepticism.¶

This blueprint does not seek to duplicate what exists. It seeks to strengthen the analytical foundation beneath it — and to make the case, directly to Zimbabwean citizens and policymakers, that the preconditions for transformation are more urgent and more achievable than current policy frameworks suggest.

2.2 A Note on Independence

This platform is neither a party manifesto nor an academic treatise. It draws on the substantial body of international development economics research — including work by the World Bank, IMF, African Development Bank, and independent scholars — to build a solutions-focused framework specific to Zimbabwe's circumstances.

Where its conclusions resemble positions held by political actors of any stripe, that is because the underlying evidence points in a consistent direction — not because of political alignment. Good policy does not belong to any party. The ideas here are offered to all who are serious about Zimbabwe's future, regardless of where they sit politically.

The Zimbabwe Blueprint Initiative is not affiliated with any political party, movement, or electoral campaign. It is an independent, citizen-led contribution to the national conversation about Zimbabwe’s future.

SECTION 3

3. The Vision: Zimbabwe 2045–2060

> ***By 2045–2060, Zimbabwe should be a high-income, diversified economy — one of Africa's leading nations and on a trajectory that places it firmly among the world's developed economies.***

In concrete terms, this means sustaining approximately 7–8% annual real GDP growth over two to three decades — the rate required to place Zimbabwe firmly in the ranks of upper-middle to high-income nations by mid-century. To illustrate the scale of that ambition: an economy growing at 7% annually for 35 years grows roughly tenfold. The precise GDP figure matters less than the trajectory and what it delivers: G20-standard institutional quality, infrastructure, and living standards. The goal is not a ranking. It is a standard of life.

That number deserves a moment's examination, because it is both ambitious and historically grounded.

7–8% annual growth is not a fantasy figure. South Korea's real GDP expanded by an average of more than 8% per year between 1962 and 1989, growing from $2.7 billion to $230 billion.· Rwanda has averaged comparable growth since the early 2000s and grew at 8.9% in 2024 alone, according to the World Bank.¸ Botswana transformed from one of Africa's poorest countries at independence to upper-middle-income status through institutional discipline and resource management. Mauritius, with no significant natural resources, became Africa's most developed economy through services, rule of law, and openness to capital.

Zimbabwe has more natural endowments than all four of those countries combined. The constraint has never been resources. It has been governance and institutions. That is actually an optimistic framing — because governance is changeable.

A note of analytical honesty is warranted here: no development model is directly transplantable. South Korea industrialised under specific Cold War geopolitical conditions, with substantial US support. Rwanda's transformation emerged from a unique post-genocide national cohesion. Botswana's success was shaped by the particular nature of its diamond revenues and a small, cohesive population. The value of these comparisons is not as templates to copy, but as existence proofs — demonstrations that rapid, sustained transformation is achievable, and that the variables most associated with it are institutional rather than merely circumstantial.

3.1 What a High-Income Economy Means — In Zimbabwe's Terms

A high-income, diversified economy is more than a GDP figure. It is a quality standard — one that signals a country has built the institutional foundations, the infrastructure, and the human capital base that make sustained, broad-based prosperity possible. To make that concrete, it helps to compare where Zimbabwe stands today against what a developed-economy standard looks like in the daily lives of its citizens.

Consider three Zimbabweans. Tendai sells vegetables at Mbare Musika in Harare. She starts before dawn, carries produce on foot because transport is unreliable, loses stock to heat because her stall has no power, and handles transactions in a currency that has lost value since she woke up. Across the country, Mr Moyo teaches mathematics at a secondary school in Bulawayo. He has not received his full salary on time in months, his classroom has no electricity after 3pm, and three of his best students left for South Africa last term. Sister Chipo is a nurse in Mutare. She works double shifts because the ward is understaffed, manages drug shortages weekly, and worries constantly about her own children's school fees. None of this is inevitable. In a high-income Zimbabwe, Tendai's market is connected to cold storage and mobile payments. Mr Moyo's school has reliable power and a competitive salary that keeps talent in the country. Sister Chipo's hospital is funded by a government with a tax base broad enough to maintain it properly. That is what this blueprint is building towards — not an abstract GDP number, but those three lives.

Income Per Person

Zimbabwe's GDP per capita currently stands at approximately $1,421 — equivalent to roughly 11% of the world average.[9] At upper-middle-income scale, GDP per capita would be approaching $5,000 or more. At South Africa's level — Africa's only G20 member and the nearest regional benchmark — GDP per capita stands at approximately $6,267.[10] The vision for Zimbabwe is not to replicate South Africa's current struggles — it is to build on stronger foundations, distributing prosperity more broadly across the population rather than concentrating it at the top.

Employment and the Formal Economy

Today, approximately 80% of Zimbabwe's employed population works in the informal sector — low-paying, unprotected, and largely invisible to the tax base.[11] A G20-scale Zimbabwe means a formal economy large enough to employ the majority of its working-age population in productive, contracted, tax-paying jobs. It means a graduate leaving university in Harare can expect a career trajectory comparable to a graduate in Nairobi, Accra, or Cape Town —

not a choice between the informal sector and emigration. It means a factory worker in Bulawayo has a contract, a pension contribution, and a wage that tracks productivity.

It also means a government with a tax base broad enough to fund the schools, hospitals, roads, and social protection that a functioning society requires. Informality is not just an employment problem — it is a fiscal one, and breaking that cycle is central to the transformation this blueprint describes.

Power, Water, and Connectivity

Load-shedding is not just an inconvenience. It is a direct, daily tax on every productive activity in the country. Businesses running on generators, hospitals dependent on backup power, students unable to study after dark, farmers unable to run irrigation pumps: these are the compounding costs of infrastructure failure, borne disproportionately by those who can least afford them.

A G20-scale Zimbabwe means reliable electricity for households and businesses alike — not as a luxury, but as a basic expectation. It means clean running water in homes, schools, and clinics. And it means digital connectivity that allows a farmer in Masvingo or an entrepreneur in Mutare to access global markets, banking services, and real-time information. In a world where economic opportunity increasingly flows through digital infrastructure, connectivity is no longer optional. It is the new electricity.

The Currency in Your Pocket

Perhaps nothing has eroded ordinary Zimbabweans' trust and wellbeing more persistently than monetary instability. When the currency in your pocket loses value overnight, when savings accumulated over decades can be wiped out by a policy announcement, when pricing goods requires daily recalculation — economic planning becomes impossible for everyone, from the smallest market trader to the largest manufacturer.

A G20-scale Zimbabwe means a currency stable enough that a parent can save for their child's education without fear of devaluation, a business can plan a five-year investment with confidence, and a pensioner can retire with their savings intact. This is not a technical aspiration. It is the basic monetary foundation that citizens in every G20 economy take for granted — and that Zimbabweans deserve.

Institutions You Can Trust

In a G20-scale Zimbabwe, a citizen who suffers a wrong has access to a court that will hear their case fairly and promptly. A business that signs a contract can rely on it being enforced. A civil servant is appointed on merit, not patronage. A journalist can report without fear. A small business owner can register their company, pay their taxes, and compete on equal terms without navigating a system designed to favour the connected.

These are not luxuries. They are the operating system of a functional society. Their absence is precisely what keeps investment away, keeps talent abroad, and keeps ordinary citizens perpetually uncertain about the future. Building them is unglamorous, slow, and often politically inconvenient — which is exactly why it requires deliberate, sustained commitment rather than periodic announcements.

What It Means for the Diaspora

Hundreds of thousands of Zimbabweans currently living in the United Kingdom, South Africa, the United States, Australia, and beyond are not gone — they are waiting. They are sending remittances home, watching the news, debating in group chats, and making quiet calculations about whether the moment to return is getting closer or further away.

A G20-scale Zimbabwe is a country they can come home to — not just to visit, but to build a business, raise children, invest savings, and grow old. The diaspora’s return is not simply a sentimental outcome. It is an economic force multiplier, bringing skills, capital, international networks, and hard-won ambition back to where they are most needed. Every policy in this blueprint is, in part, a message to the diaspora: the conditions you are waiting for are buildable. Come home and help build them.

3.2 A Realistic Timeline — And Why It Is Achievable

Reaching G20 scale by 2045–2060 is ambitious. It is meant to be. But ambition without realism is wishful thinking, and this framework is neither.

The 35-year horizon is deliberate. It is long enough to allow for the compounding effect of sustained growth — and short enough to be within the lifetime of every Zimbabwean adult alive today. Children born this year will be in the prime of their working lives when the 2045 milestone arrives. The decisions made in the next five to ten years will determine whether they inherit a transformed country or a continuation of managed decline.

The sequencing matters as much as the destination. South Korea did not leap from poverty to prosperity in one bound — it built foundations, then accelerated. Rwanda stabilised first, then grew. Botswana managed its resource revenues with institutional discipline before diversifying. In each case, the pattern was the same: institutional credibility first, investment second, sustained growth third. That sequence is not optional. It is the mechanism. The five pillars set out in Section 4 of this paper are ordered accordingly.

The window for Zimbabwe is genuinely open right now. The global energy transition has created extraordinary demand for lithium, platinum, and other critical minerals Zimbabwe holds in abundance. Development finance institutions are actively seeking credible African partners for infrastructure investment. The diaspora has the resources and the willingness to participate — if the conditions are right. None of these windows will remain open indefinitely.

> ***The question is not whether Zimbabwe can reach this destination. It is whether the decisions made now will be equal to the opportunity.***

SECTION 4

4. The Transformation Framework: Five Interconnected Pillars

Zimbabwe's transformation depends on five interconnected pillars. They are interconnected deliberately — progress on one creates the conditions for progress on the others, and neglecting one undermines all the rest.

The causal logic that runs through all five pillars can be stated plainly: institutional credibility generates macroeconomic trust; macroeconomic trust enables investment; investment drives productivity growth; productivity growth creates employment; employment growth raises household incomes; and rising incomes build the state legitimacy that makes further reform politically sustainable. This is not a linear ladder — it is a reinforcing cycle. Each element strengthens the next, and each weakened by neglect corrodes the whole. The five pillars are this framework's architecture for building and sustaining that cycle.

#	Pillar	Core Argument
01	**Institutional Credibility & Rule of Law**	The foundation. Without it, every other reform operates in quicksand.
02	**Monetary & Macroeconomic Stability**	The prerequisite for savings, investment, and long-term business planning.
03	**Infrastructure as the Engine of Productivity**	Roads, power, water, and digital connectivity as economic multipliers.
04	**Agricultural & Resource Productivity**	Unlocking the value of Zimbabwe's land, minerals, and energy transition positioning.
05	**Human Capital & Diaspora Re-engagement**	Reversing brain drain by creating the conditions under which returning makes rational sense.

Pillar One: Institutional Credibility and Rule of Law

This is the foundation on which everything else rests. Investors do not commit capital where property rights are uncertain. Businesses do not plan for the long term where contract enforcement is unreliable. Citizens do not save where they distrust the institutions holding their money. And talented people do not return home where they cannot build careers in a predictable, rules-based environment.

Restoring institutional credibility requires structural reforms — judicial independence, a professional and merit-based civil service, transparent procurement, and anti-corruption enforcement with real teeth. It requires consistency over time, because trust is rebuilt through actions, not announcements.

No other reform in this blueprint will reach its potential without this foundation being secure.

Pillar Two: Monetary and Macroeconomic Stability

Zimbabwe's monetary history is a masterclass in how currency mismanagement destroys economies. The hyperinflation of 2008 and subsequent currency instability did not just cause immediate economic pain — they inflicted lasting damage on the country's savings culture, its banking system, and its attractiveness to investors.

A stable currency is not a luxury. It is the basic infrastructure of a functioning economy. Without it, every other economic reform operates in quicksand. With it, savings accumulate, credit becomes affordable, and long-term investment becomes rational.

The specific mechanisms for achieving monetary stability — whether through a currency board arrangement, formal dollarisation, or a credibly managed domestic currency with genuine central bank independence — will be explored in detail in a dedicated paper. What this framework asserts is the non-negotiability of the outcome: price stability is a prerequisite, not an afterthought.

Pillar Three: Infrastructure as the Engine of Productivity

A country cannot grow at 7–8% per year when its businesses lose hours of productivity daily to power cuts, when its roads add days to supply chains, and when its digital infrastructure excludes large portions of the population from the modern economy.

Infrastructure investment is not just spending — it is the multiplier that makes all other economic activity more productive. A reliable power grid reduces costs for every manufacturer, every farmer, every service business in the country. A modern road network connects agricultural producers to markets and ports. Digital connectivity opens global markets to Zimbabwean entrepreneurs.

Zimbabwe's infrastructure deficit, while severe, is also an opportunity. The financing mechanisms exist — development finance institutions, public-private partnerships, diaspora bonds, blended finance structures — and a country with Zimbabwe's resource base and growth potential is a credible candidate for all of them. What has been missing is the institutional credibility to attract and deploy that financing effectively. This is why Pillar One is the prerequisite for Pillar Three.

Pillar Four: Agricultural and Resource Productivity

Zimbabwe fed itself and much of the region for decades. It can do so again — and more. The agricultural potential of the highveld is not diminished. What is required is a land tenure framework that provides security of investment, access to financing for farmers, modern agricultural inputs, and reliable routes to market.

Similarly, Zimbabwe's mineral wealth — lithium alone positions it at the centre of the global energy transition — represents a generational opportunity. But resource wealth only translates into broad development when it is managed transparently, when revenues flow into productive public investment rather than private enrichment, and when local value addition is prioritised over raw material exports.

A 21st-century agricultural strategy must also be an explicitly climate-smart one. Southern Africa faces increasingly volatile El Niño cycles and climate-induced droughts that a generation-long blueprint cannot ignore. Restoring Zimbabwe as a regional breadbasket requires not just traditional inputs and market access, but investment in drought-resistant crop varieties, sustainable water resource management, solar-powered irrigation systems, and land-use practices that preserve rather than degrade soil quality over time. The opportunity is real — but only if agricultural modernisation is built for the climate conditions of the next fifty years, not the last fifty.

Pillar Five: Human Capital and Diaspora Re-engagement

Zimbabwe's greatest resource is not underground. It is its people — and specifically, the hundreds of thousands of highly educated, internationally experienced Zimbabweans currently building careers and businesses in other countries.

The brain drain is real and its costs are severe. But the diaspora is not lost — its connection to Zimbabwe endures in remittances, in investment interest, in professional networks, and in the quiet calculations many make about whether the moment to return is approaching. Some may never permanently return, and that too is a legitimate choice. But under improved governance conditions, diaspora Zimbabweans can contribute powerfully in multiple forms: as investors, as skills transferors, as advocates in international institutions, and yes, as returnees who build businesses and raise families at home.

Creating those conditions — the work of Pillars One through Four — is the most powerful diaspora strategy available. Targeted investment vehicles, formal mechanisms for diaspora expertise to contribute to policymaking, and diaspora bonds to channel remittances into productive infrastructure will accelerate the process. But the fundamentals come first.

SECTION 4B

4b. The Political Economy of Reform

Development is not a technical exercise. It is a political one. Any blueprint that treats reform as simply waiting to be rationally chosen — as if the right policy mix merely needs to be identified and announced — is not serious about implementation. This one must be.

Zimbabwe's reform challenge is not primarily intellectual. The policies required for transformation are reasonably well understood. The challenge is political: powerful interests benefit from the status quo, and those interests will resist change in ways that are sophisticated, persistent, and sometimes invisible to outside observers. An honest blueprint must name this directly.

The Obstacles Are Structural, Not Simply Attitudinal

Patronage networks are not a personal failing of individual politicians — they are a structural feature of systems where access to state resources is the primary route to economic security for politically connected elites. In Zimbabwe, as in many post-colonial states, the state has functioned less as a neutral provider of public goods and more as a distribution mechanism for those with proximity to power. Dismantling this system is not simply a matter of changing leadership. It requires changing the incentive structures that make patronage rational.

Military and security sector economic interests represent a particular dimension of this challenge. In Zimbabwe, the security establishment has historically maintained significant economic interests — in mining, in land, in commercial enterprises — that can create institutional resistance to transparency reforms, property rights clarification, and the rule of law. Any credible reform path must account for how these interests are managed, whether through transitional arrangements, formal demilitarisation of commercial activity, or negotiated restructuring.

State capture — the process by which private interests systematically distort policy to serve themselves rather than the public — is a risk in any reform environment. Zimbabwe's experience includes numerous examples of reform language being deployed to legitimate rent-seeking rather than genuine transformation. This blueprint does not pretend that the mere existence of a policy framework eliminates this risk. What it argues is that transparency, civil society engagement, diaspora scrutiny, and international institutional oversight collectively reduce the space in which capture can occur.

Reform Coalitions and Political Bargains

Successful development transformations are rarely imposed from above by a single enlightened leader. They are built through coalitions — alliances between reformers within government, the private sector, civil society, professional associations, and international partners — that collectively make the political cost of reversal higher than the political cost of continuing.

Zimbabwe's reform coalition already exists in nascent form. It includes reform-minded technocrats within government ministries and the central bank; a private sector that has survived precisely because of its adaptability and that would benefit enormously from stability; a civil society sector that has maintained remarkable resilience under pressure; a professional diaspora with deep emotional and financial stakes in Zimbabwe's future; and international partners — from development finance institutions to bilateral donors — that have signalled genuine willingness to engage with a credibly reforming Zimbabwe.

Building and sustaining that coalition — ensuring that reformers within the system have external support, that the private sector articulates its interests clearly, that civil society can hold institutions accountable, and that the diaspora remains engaged rather than disengaged — is as important as any individual policy reform. Political will is not a fixed quantity. It is built, sustained, and sometimes lost. The role of this platform is to contribute to building it.

What This Means for Reform Strategy

The political economy analysis does not lead to pessimism. It leads to realism — and realism is the precondition for durable reform. Several practical implications follow:

- Reforms that create broad constituencies of beneficiaries early — such as monetary stabilisation, which benefits savers and wage earners immediately — are more politically durable than reforms whose benefits are long-term and diffuse
- Sequencing should account for political economy, not just technical logic: start with reforms where the coalition of supporters is widest and the resistance is weakest
- Transparency and public communication are not cosmetic — they are political tools. A reform that citizens understand and support is harder to reverse than one conducted quietly
- International anchoring matters. Commitments made to the IMF, World Bank, African Development Bank, and bilateral partners create external accountability that supplements domestic political pressure
- Reform fatigue is real. The sequencing framework in this blueprint is designed to deliver visible improvements early — in monetary stability, in power supply, in

institutional predictability — precisely because early wins sustain the political energy for harder reforms that follow

SECTION 5

5. The Sequencing Question

One of the most important — and most frequently neglected — aspects of economic transformation is sequencing. Doing the right things in the wrong order can be as damaging as doing the wrong things. ESAP's failure was partly a sequencing failure: markets were liberalised before the institutions required to make markets function had been strengthened.

This blueprint proposes a broad sequencing logic, which will be refined in individual policy papers:

Phase One (Years 1–5): Stabilisation and Foundation-Building

Institutional reforms, monetary stabilisation, and restoration of basic infrastructure reliability. This phase is about creating the conditions in which growth becomes possible. It will require political courage and will be uncomfortable in parts — but it is the phase without which nothing else endures. Critically, it must include a credible roadmap for resolving Zimbabwe's sovereign debt arrears — obligations that currently constrain major development finance institutions and multilateral lenders from deploying capital at scale. Without arrears clearance, the financing pipeline for infrastructure and investment remains structurally blocked regardless of the quality of domestic reforms.

Indicative milestones: single-digit annual inflation sustained for 24+ consecutive months; electricity availability factor above 75%; at least one independent judicial appointment completed with transparent process; formal anti-corruption prosecution with public outcome; IMF Article IV governance indicator improvement; diaspora investment inflow growth above 10% year-on-year; credible sovereign debt restructuring roadmap agreed with major creditors.

Indicative milestones: single-digit annual inflation sustained for 24+ consecutive months; electricity availability factor above 75%; at least one independent judicial appointment completed with transparent process; formal anti-corruption prosecution with public outcome; IMF Article IV governance indicator improvement; diaspora investment inflow growth above 10% year-on-year; parallel market exchange rate premium sustained consistently below 15%; and a credible sovereign debt restructuring roadmap agreed with major creditors.

A critical guardrail for this phase deserves explicit statement: Zimbabwe cannot aggressively scale resource extraction contracts — particularly in lithium and platinum — until legal, transparency, and revenue-management frameworks are secure. The resource curse is real. Rapid influxes of mineral capital into environments where institutional guardrails are still being built have historically accelerated state capture, entrenched patronage networks, and generated windfalls that benefit the few rather than the many. The sequencing here is therefore deliberate: transparency and governance guardrails first, resource extraction scale-up second. This is not idealism. It is the hard lesson of Angola, the DRC, and Nigeria — and the positive example of Botswana, which managed its diamond revenues with institutional discipline precisely because it built the framework before scaling extraction.

Phase Two (Years 5–15): Investment and Growth Acceleration

With stable foundations in place, this phase focuses on attracting domestic and foreign investment, rebuilding agricultural productivity, developing mineral value chains, and expanding the formal economy. Growth rates should begin to approach the 7–8% target during this phase.

Indicative milestones: GDP growth rate sustained above 6% for three consecutive years; formal sector employment share above 35% of working population; FDI inflows above $2 billion annually; agricultural output recovering to 80% of pre-2000 peak; fiscal deficit below 3% of GDP; infrastructure investment above 8% of GDP annually.

Phase Three (Years 15–40): Consolidation and Convergence

Sustained high growth, an expanding middle class, deepening institutional quality, and progressive convergence toward developed-economy standards of living and infrastructure. This is where the high-income trajectory becomes a realistic near-term destination rather than a long-horizon aspiration.

Indicative milestones: GDP per capita above $5,000; formal employment as majority of working-age population; universal access to reliable electricity and clean water; independent judiciary ranked in top quartile of African nations; inflation below 5% as structural norm; Zimbabwe achieving investment-grade sovereign credit rating.

These phases are not rigid. Progress will be uneven and the external environment will throw surprises. What matters is the direction of travel and the consistency of commitment to the underlying framework.

SECTION 6

6. Why This Time Can Be Different

The sceptical reader — and there should be sceptical readers, because scepticism is healthy — will reasonably ask: why would this time be different? Zimbabwe has had reform programmes before. It has had IMF engagements, development plans, and policy announcements. The gap between stated intention and delivered reality has been wide and consistent.

The answer is not that the politics have necessarily changed — that is for Zimbabweans to assess and for time to reveal. The answer is that the cost of inaction has never been higher, and the tools for transformation have never been more accessible.

- A young population with no memory of pre-crisis Zimbabwe is increasingly unwilling to accept managed decline as a permanent condition
- The diaspora, now large and established enough to constitute a genuine economic force, is watching and waiting
- The global investment community has demonstrated — through Rwanda, through Botswana, through Mauritius — that it will commit capital to African economies that demonstrate credible reform
- The energy transition, with its voracious appetite for lithium and other minerals Zimbabwe possesses in abundance, has placed the country at the centre of one of the defining economic stories of the next thirty years
- The academic and policy literature on what works in development transformation is more robust than at any prior point in Zimbabwe's post-independence history

> ***The window is open. It will not remain open indefinitely.***

Zimbabwe's potential has never been in doubt. What has been in doubt is whether the political and institutional conditions for realising it could be created. This blueprint argues that they can be — and sets out, in the papers that follow, the specific, actionable steps required to build them.

SECTION 6B

6b. What This Blueprint Is Not

A framework of this kind invites mischaracterisation. In the interests of clarity, and to preempt the deflections that often substitute for engagement with substantive policy arguments, it is worth stating plainly what this blueprint does not represent.

Not a Party Manifesto

This blueprint is not affiliated with any political party, electoral campaign, or political movement in Zimbabwe or elsewhere. Its arguments do not endorse or oppose any candidate or party. Where its conclusions resemble positions held by any political actor, that is because the evidence points in a consistent direction — not because of political alignment. Readers across the political spectrum are invited to engage with the ideas on their merits.

Not a Prescription for Blind Market Liberalisation

This blueprint does not argue that deregulation, privatisation, and market liberalisation are ends in themselves. The failure of ESAP demonstrated precisely that technical market reforms imposed without institutional foundations, social protection, and political legitimacy do not deliver development. What this blueprint argues for is a capable developmental state — one that sets clear rules, enforces them consistently, invests strategically in public goods, and creates the conditions in which markets can function and broadly distribute their benefits.

Not Anti-State or Anti-Government

Strong institutions require a strong state. The argument here is not for a minimal state, but for a capable one — a state whose civil service is professional and merit-based, whose procurement is transparent, whose regulatory environment is predictable, and whose public investments are productive. Zimbabwe's problem has never been too much state. It has been a state whose capacity has been hollowed out and whose resources have been misdirected. Rebuilding that capacity is central to this blueprint.

Not Dependent on Foreign Aid

The transformation envisaged here is not premised on foreign aid or external rescue. It is premised on creating the domestic institutional conditions — property rights, monetary stability, rule of law — that make Zimbabwe an attractive destination for private investment, both from its own diaspora and from international capital markets. Development finance institutions and bilateral partners have a role to play, particularly in infrastructure financing, but as catalytic partners rather than primary funders. Zimbabwe's transformation must be owned and driven by Zimbabweans.

Not a Denial of Historical Grievances

This blueprint does not pretend that Zimbabwe's history is uncomplicated or that historical injustices — colonial land dispossession, the violence of the liberation war, the Gukurahundi atrocities, the suffering of the hyperinflation years — can simply be set aside in the name of forward momentum. Acknowledging the past honestly is not incompatible with a determined focus on the future. Indeed, durable development requires social cohesion, and social cohesion requires that historical grievances are addressed rather than suppressed. This is not the primary focus of this series of papers, but it is not absent from its assumptions.

Not a Substitute for Democratic Legitimacy

Policy frameworks, however well-argued, do not substitute for democratic legitimacy. The ideas in these papers are offered as a contribution to public debate, not as a technocratic programme to be implemented above or around democratic processes. Ultimately, the transformation described here must be chosen, mandated, and held accountable by Zimbabwean citizens through legitimate political processes. This platform's role is to inform and enrich that democratic conversation, not to replace it.

SECTION 7

7. What Follows: The Blueprint Series

This founding paper is the first in a series. Each subsequent paper will take one of the five pillars and develop it into a concrete, actionable policy proposal — with specific recommendations, international precedents, implementation considerations, and honest assessments of the obstacles involved.

1. Currency and Monetary Reform — the path to a stable, credible monetary framework
2. Paper 2: Currency and Monetary Reform — the path to a stable, credible monetary framework
3. Paper 3: Infrastructure Development — financing and building the physical foundations of a productive economy

4. Paper 4: Governance and Institutional Reform — rebuilding the rule of law and public sector capability
5. Paper 5: Agricultural and Resource Productivity — unlocking the value of Zimbabwe's land, minerals, and energy transition positioning
6. Paper 6: Diaspora Re-engagement — turning brain drain into development capital

Together, these papers constitute a blueprint — not a government programme, not a party manifesto, but a contribution to the national conversation about Zimbabwe's future. They are written to be debated, challenged, improved, and ultimately, acted upon.

Zimbabwe's potential has never been in doubt. What this series of papers sets out to demonstrate is that the path to realising it is clearer than many believe — and that the time to walk it is now.

REFERENCES

References

[1] UNESCO Institute for Statistics / World Bank (2022). Literacy rate, adult total (% of people ages 15 and above) — Zimbabwe. https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SE.ADT.LITR.ZS?locations=ZW

[2] World Bank (2025). GDP (current US$) — Zimbabwe. World Bank Open Data. https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.MKTP.CD?locations=ZW

[3] University of Oslo / ESAP Review (1997). Winners and Losers of Structural Adjustments in Zimbabwe. https://www.duo.uio.no/handle/10852/17294; and Economic Structural Adjustment Programme impacts study (2000), ScienceOpen. https://www.scienceopen.com/document_file/dcfb148a-a735-4285-bd5e-8cfa23cdbc2a

[4] Government of Zimbabwe (2020). National Development Strategy 1: 2021–2025. Harare: Government Printer. Published via United Nations Zimbabwe. https://zimbabwe.un.org/en/153007-2021-2025-national-development-strategy-nds-i

[5] International Monetary Fund (2025). Article IV Consultation — Zimbabwe 2025. IMF Executive Board Press Release. https://www.imf.org/en/news/articles/2025/10/02/pr-25323-zimbabwe-imf-executive-board-concludes-2025-article-iv-consultation

[6] Wikipedia / Reserve Bank of Zimbabwe sources (2025). Zimbabwean ZiG. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zimbabwean_ZiG. Note: The ZiG, introduced April 2024, is Zimbabwe's sixth currency reform attempt since 2000.

[7] Economy of South Korea, Wikipedia (sourced from World Bank data). South Korea's real GDP expanded at an average of more than 8% per year from 1962 to 1989. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Economy_of_South_Korea

[8] World Bank (2025, April). Rwanda Economic Update: Rwanda's Economy Registers Robust Growth in 2024. https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2025/04/01/rwandas-afe-economy-registers-robust-growth-in-2024-despite-global-challenges

[9] Trading Economics / World Bank (2024). Zimbabwe GDP per capita: approximately $1,421, equivalent to 11% of the world average. https://tradingeconomics.com/zimbabwe/gdp-per-capita

[10] World Bank (2024). GDP per capita (current US$) — South Africa: $6,267. World Bank Open Data. https://data.worldbank.org/country/south-africa

[11] International Labour Organization (2022). Zimbabwe Labour Market Assessment. ILO Publication. Approximately 80% of Zimbabwe's employed population works in the informal sector. https://www.ilo.org/sites/default/files/wcmsp5/groups/public/@ed_emp/documents/publication/wcms_861874.pdf

Zimbabwe Blueprint Initiative

Comments, critiques, and contributions are welcomed.