



Zimbabwe Roundtable – 25th March 2009

Report of the First Meeting of the Post Conflict People Zimbabwe Working Group:

Post Conflict People held a roundtable discussion to bring together those interested in Zimbabwe and its reconstruction. This was the first stage of designing a new plan for donor engagement in the country. Currently, the donor community is unprepared to engage with Zimbabwe whilst Zanu-PF does not meet their human rights requirements. However, there is growing consensus in the post-conflict community that without engagement now, the situation in Zimbabwe will grow more precarious. This will lead to greater humanitarian and reconstruction challenges when Mugabe has lost power. With some preparatory work now however, the international community could contribute greatly to a smoother and more effective reconstruction programme.

Post Conflict People's Role

PCP can provide a fairly neutral, international platform for projects that may otherwise be rejected for being too closely associated with Britain and its government, or for having a clear profit motive. The organisation is also able to act in a flexible way due to its independence. Any plan for reconstruction in Zimbabwe will have to include some level of engagement with the current Zimbabwean administration, and PCP should lead any scoping exercises on how best to do this, and on how best to involve other stakeholders (governments, the private sector and NGOs). In this way, PCP will act as a central point through which to channel ideas on assistance to Zimbabwe, and will build up a focused dialogue to determine actions.

Level of approach

The Working Group intends to be realistic about its capabilities, and will structure its approach accordingly. For example, although Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration was identified as a major challenge, it is beyond the scope of the Group's current capabilities and so will not be a key focus initially. China's links with Zimbabwe, stimulation of commercial agriculture, and lack of restorative justice were also noted as issues for later consideration. Similarly, the Group intends to be tactical about the level at which it targets its efforts; for example contacts with middle-ranking rather than senior members of Zanu-PF, MDC and the military should be fostered. This is because these levels are more accessible and are also vulnerable to social welfare problems resulting from decisions by the senior members of the administration.

The roundtable identified key issues for consideration in Zimbabwe's reconstruction, and then discussed some ways in which the Working Group could contribute practically. The following issues were broadly addressed:

International Engagement

As exemplified by DFID's Protracted Relief Programme, there are ways of engaging in Zimbabwe through NGOs, private sector organisations and other third parties that allows DFID (and other contributing donors) to deliver assistance to the most needy by taking into consideration local capacity and



international restrictions while avoiding bureaucratic bottlenecks. While PRP does not deliver assistance through the Zimbabwean government, coordination and communications with the government at all levels, especially local and provincial, is necessary for this programme to succeed. PCP / The Working Group will encourage these approaches, but must lobby for acceptance in the donor community that aid flows to Zimbabwe are necessary now and cannot wait until the political balance of the government is more favourable. It will also investigate methods of aid accounting to protect the recipients of aid, perhaps by working with the Harare branch of Transparency International. As part of promoting international engagement, the Group will provide specific examples of what the international community, NGOs and the private sector can constructively do.

Private sector:

Lack of foreign exchange reserves within Zimbabwe has made it difficult to keep the public sector functioning. There is an opportunity for public and private sector integration whereby foreign companies are paid to set up a private sanitation system, refurbish the road system and so on. This brings foreign reserves into the economy and also should in theory be accompanied by high-quality public services. As a priority, the indigenous coal industry needs rehabilitation. Also, due to its history of international sanctions, Zimbabwe previously had a very healthy light industry sector due to its need for self-sufficiency. This light industrial sector could be refurbished with the setting up of a small commercial fund to offer credit to small and medium sized enterprises, of which there is a large number in disrepair in Zimbabwe. This fund would prioritise refurbishment of existing factories.

Media / Communications

Throughout the meeting the Working Group referred to the unreliability of press information on Zimbabwe and South Africa. On the ground contacts must be utilised to counter this. In addition, it was argued that without a coherent advocacy programme to influence western governments to get aid flowing, international strategies to reconstruct Zimbabwe will fail. There are significant challenges to setting up any independent media in the country, which will have to be resolved to effect political change or promote the rule of law. It was suggested that the Group work with its media contacts to establish how best to bring about media reform in Zimbabwe.

Exiles

There is a huge skills shortage in Zimbabwe due to the exodus of the educated population. The Group will look at plans for the return of qualified people elsewhere to see if there is potential for a similar scheme to be set up for Zimbabwe. This will link in with any establishment of a small commercial fund.

Future Plans

1. The Working Group will meet again, at least within three months of the first meeting.
2. Before this time, PCP will produce on donor engagement in Zimbabwe. PCP will produce the initial draft skeleton report, which will be completed with technical detail as provided by members of the Working Group. This will be used to put together the strategy paper. This report is intended to add value to that produced by the multi Donor Trust Fund.
3. In addition to the follow-up meeting of the Working Group in London, the Working Group will organise a roundtable in Johannesburg, the format of which is to be decided. The roundtable will include South African private sector representatives, Zimbabwean private sector, civil society, Zimbabwean and South African government representatives, and any key identified individuals. The purpose of this roundtable will be to establish exactly what Zimbabwe requires for effective reconstruction in the absence of an ideal or even acceptable political situation, and to find out what people in Zimbabwe want.