



# Traversing the Environmental Push Factors to the Zimbabwean Migration into Southern Africa from 2000 to 2025: Implications to School Leadership

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## ABSTRACT

Zimbabwe started implementing the Fast-Track Land Reform in February 2000 when the Mugabe government took most of the farms from the four thousand white farmers who had held them since the colonial era to redistribute them to the blacks. This triggered a plethora of migrations all over the globe, with the mainstream of the migrants housed in South Africa, Botswana, Mozambique, and Namibia, regionally. This current qualitative desktop study used Zimbabwe as a case to explore the environmental push factors prompted by the land reform implementation, and how education has been affected. The environment, as a push factor, has been ignored in the Zimbabwean turbulence discourse; arguably, Jared Diamond explicitly reveals that even in the early 1500s, the major determinant of the collapse of the kingdoms was the environment. The findings indicate that the land reform programme was the chief cause of the environmental-related migrations of Zimbabweans to Southern Africa and globally. These factors prompt migrants to seek economic refuge, better living conditions, health care, access to resources, and relief from various pressures. The study concludes that the worst is not yet over, as the situation continues to deteriorate, with migration still on the high. The paper recommends that the Zimbabwean government and people take proactive initiatives to fix the environmental policies, demographic, social, health, economic, political, and governance factors to arrest the exodus, thereby restoring education. This can be achieved by employing Indigenous Knowledge Systems, *Ubuntu* philosophy, decoloniality strategies, case studies on African solutions for African problems, and wide stakeholder consultations. The study contributes literature on the land reform programme in Zimbabwe and how it prompted high migration rates, affecting families and educational provision.

*Keywords: Educational Provision, Environmental Factors, Migration, School Leadership, Zimbabwe.*

## INTRODUCTION

Globally, issues pertaining to migration and environment as a push factor and the ramifications to school leadership have been silent in literature. Hence, Diamond and Ordunio pose these hard-hitting questions: “Why did history unfold differently on different continents? Why did wealth and power get distributed in the way they now are and not in some other way? Why is it that the native Americans, Africans, and Australian Aborigines were not the ones who conquered Europe?”<sup>1</sup> Viewed through a historical lens, these

<sup>1</sup> Jared M. Diamond and Doug Ordunio, *Guns, Germs, and Steel*, vol. 521 (Books on Tape New York, 1999).

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questions lead to the reasons behind the current Zimbabwean migration saga; more than meets the eye is at play here, and this study seeks to explore them in depth.

The Zimbabwean migration has its roots sunk in the fast-track land reform programme that the Zimbabwean government implemented in February 2000,<sup>2</sup> which is still ongoing, having mutated into different versions, and attracting innumerable twists and turns, consequences, and implications.<sup>3</sup> Amongst these are the environmental factors and the education costs. Arguably, a country in turbulence, like Zimbabwe, where over eight million citizens are projected to have migrated into the diaspora, often suffers from a near-total collapse of the state, displaying symptoms such as a shortage of resources, including teachers, forced migrations, breakdown in communications, health care, and other state-run services.<sup>4</sup> Of the millions of Zimbabweans forced to escape into the diaspora, the mainstream was destined for neighboring countries, South Africa, Botswana, Mozambique, and Namibia, due to geographical proximity and other environmental push factors, such as industrialisation differentials, in the case of South Africa.<sup>5</sup>

The subject of Zimbabwean migration into the region has deepened over the years, granted that it is nowhere approaching an end, and the multitudes continue to cross into regional neighbours, with South Africa being the most targeted, to seek healthier prospects. Lately, the protracted nature of the crisis has prompted regional governments and their populace to become antagonistic due to the strain placed on their economies, particularly with the rising unemployment statistics in the region, prompting these migrants and the host countries' citizens to contest for jobs and other amenities.<sup>6</sup>

Having laid this background, it becomes imperative to stress the rationale for the current study. This paper argues that the environmental push factors that have caused the current Zimbabwean migration crisis in the region and globally have been downplayed over the years. Furthermore, until these push factors are addressed, these migrations shall continue, as the environmental conditions continue taking their toll on Zimbabwe. These environmental push factors driving the Zimbabweans into migration are directly linked to land rights<sup>7</sup> and displacements, persistent droughts, compromised political freedom, rights,<sup>8</sup> and persecutions, human rights violations, shelter, stewardship, and race and gender,<sup>9</sup> amongst others. Educational provision is grossly affected in such an environment, which is the critical dimension this study seeks to explore, particularly with regard to Educational Leadership.

For this qualitative study, data were collected from primary and secondary sources, and the anchor questions were: What environmental factors push the Zimbabwean migrants out? How do migrations affect the livelihoods and education of the migrants' children? Is there a way forward regarding the migration crisis, and its effect on Educational Leadership and provision? The researchers strongly feel that the current study provides some empirical answers to these questions.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

The current Zimbabwean migration, unlike in the past, is a household strategy of livelihood diversification intended to reduce risks associated with a lack of capital, shelter, political uncertainty, and loss of self-worth.<sup>10</sup> Remittances from Zimbabwean migrants are the driving force behind their migration to Southern

<sup>2</sup> Aurelia Segatti and Loren B. Landau, *Contemporary Migration to South Africa A Regional Development Issue* (Washington: The International Bank for Reconstruction and Development, 2011).

<sup>3</sup> Inocent Moyo, "Zimbabwean Dispensation, Special and Exemption Permits in South Africa: On Humanitarian Logic, Depoliticisation and Invisibilisation of Migrants," *Journal of Asian and African Studies* 53, no. 8 (December 22, 2018): 1141–57, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0021909618776413>.

<sup>4</sup> Dana Burde, "Weak State, Strong Community: Promoting Community Participation in Post-Conflict Countries," *Current Issues in Comparative Education* 6, no. 2 (January 1, 2004), <https://doi.org/10.52214/cice.v6i2.11379>.

<sup>5</sup> World Bank, "Industrialization in Sub-Saharan Africa: Seizing Opportunities in Global Value Chains," World Bank Group, 2021.

<sup>6</sup> Jonathan Crush and Daniel S Tevera, *Zimbabwe's Exodus: Crisis, Migration, Survival* (African Books Collective, 2010).

<sup>7</sup> Deborah Potts, "'Restoring Order'? Operation Murambatsvina and the Urban Crisis in Zimbabwe," *Journal of Southern African Studies* 32, no. 2 (2006): 273–91.

<sup>8</sup> Maserole Christina Kgari-Masondo, "'A Superstitious Respect for the Soil'? Environmental History, Social Identity and Land Ownership—a Case Study of Forced Removals from Lady Selborne and Their Ramifications, c. 1905 to 1977" (Stellenbosch: University of Stellenbosch, 2008).

<sup>9</sup> Sandra Bhatasara, "Women, Land and Poverty in Zimbabwe: Deconstructing the Impacts of the Fast Track Land Reform Program," *Journal of Sustainable Development in Africa* 13, no. 1 (2011): 316–30.

<sup>10</sup> Moyo, "Zimbabwean Dispensation, Special and Exemption Permits in South Africa: On Humanitarian Logic, Depoliticisation and Invisibilisation of Migrants"; World Bank, "Industrialization in Sub-Saharan Africa: Seizing Opportunities in Global Value Chains."

Africa and other regions, as they maintain ties with their homeland and families.<sup>11</sup> The fast-track land reform, the destruction of urban settlements during ‘Operation Murambatsvina’, a move which saw millions lose their urban dwellings in the name of removing urban squatters, the unemployment and lack of shelter triggered by the land reform when millions lost their jobs at the farms,<sup>12</sup> were the critical factors pushing Zimbabweans to other countries. Political violence against opponents of the ruling Zimbabwe African National Union-Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF) of Mugabe was the most crucial push factor, as thousands fled their homeland to avoid imminent incarceration or death, particularly towards the 2008 elections.

Environmentally related migration is frequently a household strategy to diversify risk and enhance survival. According to the New Economics of Labor Migration (NELM) Theory,<sup>13</sup> migration occurs due to political, demographic, economic, social, and environmental reasons. It further asserts that these manifest in a macro, meso, and micro nature and setting, as illustrated below.<sup>14</sup> This explains the Zimbabwean environmental migration well, hence its relevance to this study.

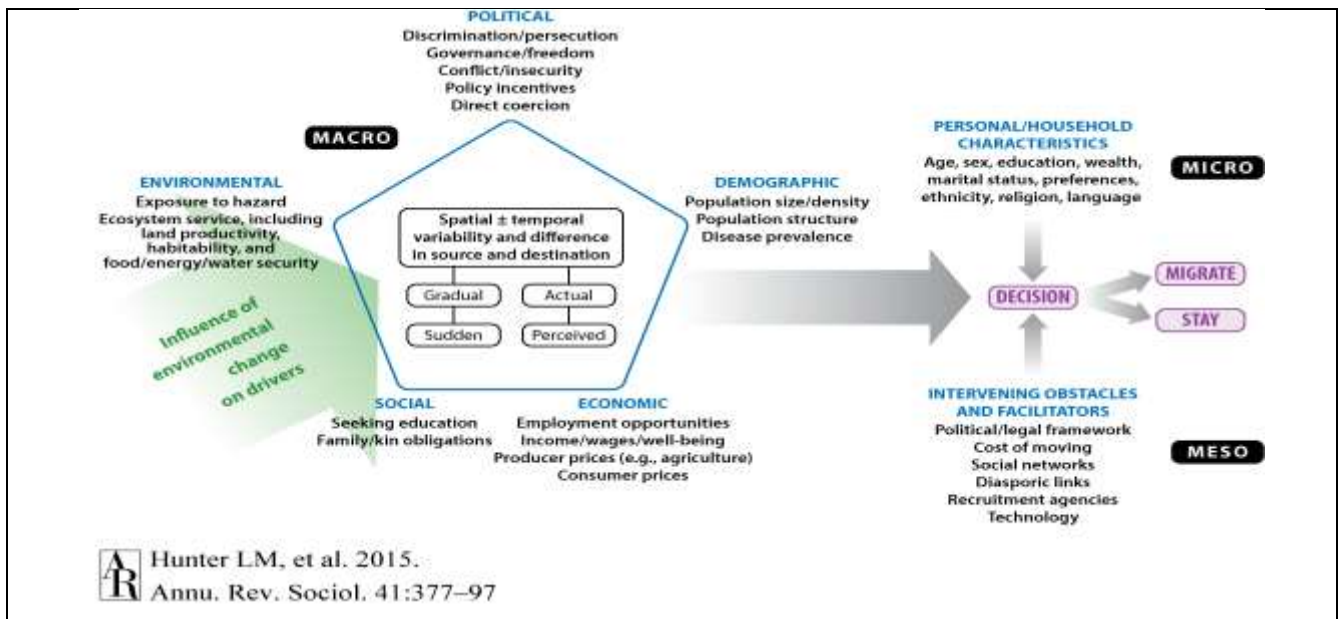


Figure 1: Environmental migration

When the mass movement from Zimbabwe started in 2000, the migrants temporarily moved to countries in Southern Africa in search of employment or other economic opportunities, returned home regularly, and sent remittances while away.<sup>15</sup> These migrants saw Zimbabwe as a much more desirable place to live and did not wish or intend to settle in Southern Africa permanently.<sup>16</sup> Rather, they had been forced into temporary circular migration by the crisis in Zimbabwe and intended to return for good once the catastrophe was resolved.<sup>17</sup> The political climate in Zimbabwe remains unstable, posing challenges for meaningful return migration, as those who are often perceived as opposition supporters or critics of the government may be targeted and harassed by political authorities.<sup>18</sup> Their safety, peace of mind, and general well-being can be taken from them by intimidation or persecution. Parties are frequently

<sup>11</sup> Walter Chambati, “Restructuring of Agrarian Labour Relations after Fast Track Land Reform in Zimbabwe,” in *Outcomes of Post-2000 Fast Track Land Reform in Zimbabwe* (Routledge, 2014), 141–62.

<sup>12</sup> Bhatasara, “Women, Land and Poverty in Zimbabwe: Deconstructing the Impacts of the Fast Track Land Reform Program.”

<sup>13</sup> Oded Stark and David E Bloom, “The New Economics of Labor Migration,” *The American Economic Review* 75, no. 2 (1985): 173–78.

<sup>14</sup> Lori M. Hunter, Jessie K. Luna, and Rachel M. Norton, “Environmental Dimensions of Migration,” *Annual Review of Sociology* 41, no. 1 (August 14, 2015): 377–97, <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-soc-073014-112223>.

<sup>15</sup> Daniel Tevera and Lovemore Zinyama, *Zimbabweans Who Move: Perspectives on International Migration in Zimbabwe* (Idasa and Queens University, 2002).

<sup>16</sup> Daniel Makina, “Migration and Characteristics of Remittance Senders in South Africa,” *International Migration* 51, no. s1 (July 22, 2013), <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2435.2012.00746.x>.

<sup>17</sup> Crush and Tevera, *Zimbabwe’s Exodus: Crisis, Migration, Survival*.

<sup>18</sup> Francis Musoni, “Border Jumping and Migration Control in Southern Africa,” *Migration Studies* 10, no. 2 (2022): 283–89, <https://doi.org/10.25071/1920-7336.40949>.

prohibited from participating in political activities, including campaigns, rallies, and protests, in the face of threats, sponsorship, and surveillance.<sup>19</sup> One cannot face justice in a politicised and polarised legal system of this nature. In Zimbabwe, it is not unusual for political and governmental agents to monitor and spy on citizens. This limits their freedom of speech, association, and movement and exposes them to arbitrary detention, physical violence, and other human rights abuses if discovered. As a result of this situation, the majority of migrants have decided to establish permanent residence in the local "comfort zones" in which they have found themselves.<sup>20</sup>

The conflict over succession that resulted in Robert Mugabe's removal from office in a coup d'état in November 2017 has not improved Zimbabwe's political or economic circumstances.<sup>21</sup> Furthermore, the widely believed stolen elections by Mnangagwa's ZANU-PF, of 2023, have left an even darker cloud hovering over Zimbabwe, followed by the arbitrary handling of parliamentarians from the main opposition party. Over 90% of Zimbabweans are unemployed, and it is not false to claim that if the migrants return, they will experience underemployment and unemployment when they arrive, which will lead to unstable finances and restricted access to resources. The percentage of employment in the unorganized sector is 95%, with the remaining 5% mostly made up of menially compensated civil servants.<sup>22</sup> These push factors prompt more migrations and cause those who left not to dream of returning.

In contrast to the past, when only men would migrate, women and children these days join the current exodus of Zimbabweans into Southern Africa.<sup>23</sup> For them and their future generations, Southern Africa (and other countries across the globe) is not just a transitory sanctuary but also a permanent home in this new migratory mode. The majority of those who migrate are highly educated and skilled; thus, their absence from the local economy has detrimental effects, and this puts a heavy burden on the Zimbabwean government. The economic contributions made by these highly qualified individuals to the countries they migrate to surpass their home country's Gross Domestic Product (GDP).<sup>24</sup> Since qualified immigrants might not be able to find acceptable job opportunities when they return home, that avenue becomes closed.

Reviewed literature on the turmoil that shook Zimbabwe since the land reform programme indicates that many teachers left the country, and some work in the private and informal sectors.<sup>25</sup> Others left the country entirely. All industries, including education, were affected by the brain drain. Coltart, the former Minister of Primary and Secondary Education, further corroborated this claim at a press conference on April 9, 2010, when he disclosed that forty-five thousand teachers had left their positions searching for better opportunities overseas.<sup>26</sup> The government responded by lowering the requirements for Trainee Teachers to enter Teachers' Colleges to fill the obvious void with individuals who had previously been ineligible. The response to this initiative came from the younger generation. These young trainees decided to enter the informal sector now because it offers greater rewards than teaching after graduating, passing up the teaching profession, and putting their credentials away for hypothetical use in the future.<sup>27</sup> This resulted in the schools' persistently retaining low staffing levels and outrageous teacher-to-student ratios.

<sup>19</sup> Divane Nzima and Khangelani Moyo, "Escaping the 'Diaspora Trap': A Narrative of Struggle and Resilience by an Unskilled Zimbabwean Migrant in South Africa," *Sozialpolitik. Ch 2*, no. 2023 (2023): 2–5.

<sup>20</sup> Moyo, "Zimbabwean Dispensation, Special and Exemption Permits in South Africa: On Humanitarian Logic, Depoliticisation and Invisibilisation of Migrants."

<sup>21</sup> Moyo, "Zimbabwean Dispensation, Special and Exemption Permits in South Africa: On Humanitarian Logic, Depoliticisation and Invisibilisation of Migrants."

<sup>22</sup> Marcel Erlinghagen and Karsten Hank, *Transnational Family Relations of German Emigrants*, ed. Marcel Erlinghagen and Karsten Hank (Wiesbaden: Springer Fachmedien Wiesbaden, 2024), <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-658-44543-0>.

<sup>23</sup> Jonathan Crush, Abel Chikanda, and Godfrey Tawodzera, "The Third Wave: Mixed Migration from Zimbabwe to South Africa," *Canadian Journal of African Studies / Revue Canadienne Des Études Africaines* 49, no. 2 (May 4, 2015): 363–82, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00083968.2015.1057856>.

<sup>24</sup> Primrose Zvikomborero Joylyn Bimha, "Legalising the Illegal: An Assessment of the Dispensation of Zimbabweans Project (DZP) and Zimbabwe Special Dispensation Permit (ZSP) Regularisation Projects" (University of Cape Town, 2017).

<sup>25</sup> Edward Shizha and Michael T Kariwo, *Education and Development in Zimbabwe* (Springer Science & Business Media, 2012).

<sup>26</sup> Manguvo Angellar, D Whitney Stephen, and Chareka Ottilia, "The Crisis of Student Misbehavior in Zimbabwean Public Schools: Teachers' Perceptions on Impact of Macro Socioeconomic Challenges," *Int. J. Educ. Adm. Policy Stud*, 2011.

<sup>27</sup> Shizha and Kariwo, *Education and Development in Zimbabwe*.

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The Environmental Migration, Turbulence, and Decoloniality Theories inform the study, and each is briefly outlined next.

### Environmental Migration Theory

This theory explains how environmental factors influence human migration. Migration is regarded as a coping strategy to deal with unique vulnerabilities and cope with environmental stress from various angles: social, political, economic, and cultural.<sup>28</sup> The theory cites environmental push factors such as droughts, natural disasters, and socio-political and economic factors.<sup>29</sup> Whatever the push or pull factors, the theory advances that migration is undertaken as an adaptation strategy for survival in dealing with a diversity of macro, meso, and micro factors.<sup>30</sup>

### Turbulence Theory

This study is grounded in the turbulence theory because of the tumultuous social, political, and economic climate prevailing in Zimbabwe.<sup>31</sup> Turbulence is defined as an unanticipated force that rocks the surroundings.<sup>32</sup> Relatedly, turbulence is an environmental upheaval brought on by abrupt instability created by job losses, mass emigration, and economic collapse. Recessions, natural disturbances, and poor political decisions are critical causes, too. Turbulence should be viewed from both a positive and a negative angle by school leadership. In 2013, Shapiro and Gross published their work supporting Turbulence Theory. Four categories were used to categorize the theory: light, moderate, severe, and extreme.<sup>33</sup> As the country progresses from the light to the severe stage, the turbulence's intensity and damage increase. At this point, the force is unfathomably high, and control would be lost. This aircraft metaphor on turbulence suggests that the increasing force of turbulence causes a great deal of harm. The question of whether the force is internal or external arises—internal forces originate from people within the school, whereas external forces come from people outside of it.

### Decoloniality Theory

This theory looks at eradicating the colonial influences that are still present in modern cultures; these are lingering effects of past oppression that are clinging to societies that have gained freedom. Decoloniality seeks to dismantle these structures and make room for other lifestyle options on Earth because it is based on the theory that colonialism is the basis for the daily operations of capitalism, modernity, and imperialism.

Decolonial aesthetics, universality, and epistemic decolonization are ways in which this is accomplished. The theory seeks to create just and equal societies in addition to criticizing historical discrimination.<sup>34</sup> This theory is pertinent to the research because it sheds light on the power dynamics and disparities in knowledge, power, resource exploitation, and distribution standing between the Global North and the South. Once more, land redistribution, a move to stop colonial land-grabbing, is the reason Zimbabwe is currently in this situation. Finally, the theory provides a framework for a critical perspective that can be used to comprehend and address political, social, and economic inequality.

## METHODOLOGY

The primary methodology for this study was the qualitative literature review approach, which included several peer-reviewed journal articles and reports, together with document and conceptual analysis of secondary data sources. Documents, photographs, or artifacts that offer first-hand recollections or concrete

<sup>28</sup> F. Gemenne, "Why the Numbers Don't Add up: A Review of Predictions and Forecasts for Environmentally-Induced Migration," *Global Environmental Change* 21, no. S1 (2011): S41–49.

<sup>29</sup> Hunter, Luna, and Norton, "Environmental Dimensions of Migration."

<sup>30</sup> Alex de Sherbinin et al., "Migration Theory in Climate Mobility Research," *Frontiers in Climate* 4 (May 10, 2022), <https://doi.org/10.3389/fclim.2022.882343>.

<sup>31</sup> Brian R. Beabout, "Urban School Reform and the Strange Attractor of Low-Risk Relationships," *School Community Journal* 20, no. 1 (2010): 9–30.

<sup>32</sup> Michael E Brown and Linda K Treviño, "Ethical Leadership: A Review and Future Directions," *The Leadership Quarterly* 17, no. 6 (2006): 595–616.

<sup>33</sup> Joan Poliner Shapiro, *Ethical Educational Leadership in Turbulent Times* (Routledge, 2013), <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203809310>.

<sup>34</sup> Anibal Quijano, "Coloniality and Modernity/Rationality," *Cultural Studies* 21, no. 2–3 (2007): 168–78.

proof about a historical subject under study are used as sources for the systematic literature review. The present investigation utilised electronic publications of reports, theses, conference proceedings, company reports, and government publications as sources of literature to be explored and studied for the systematic literature review. The search was conducted using keywords derived from the study's objectives, such as educational provision, environmental factors, migration, proactive, school leadership, Southern Africa, and Zimbabwe. About forty articles were retrieved from the internet during the search process, which provided thousands of articles from various scholarly sites and journals. The researchers first read and evaluated the abstracts and titles of the papers before finally selecting them. The full texts were then read and analysed in depth.

## PRESENTATION OF RESULTS /FINDINGS

This section of the study presents the data generated from the reviewed studies on the implications of the environmental migration of Zimbabweans into Southern Africa (in particular) on educational leadership and management. The research was guided by the following questions: What environmental factors push the Zimbabwean migrants out? How do migrations affect the livelihoods and education of the migrants' children? Is there a way forward regarding the migration crisis, and what is the effect on educational leadership and provision?

In another study by Jones, professionals came to the point of being forced to migrate to Southern African countries, mainly due to proximity, ease of periodic return home, easy visa conditions, and illegal crossing opportunities.<sup>35</sup> Even though most interviewed migrants did not like the hostility they encountered, predominantly in South Africa and Botswana, they testified that life was good there and that they would brave the calamities. Chikore (a pseudonym) said:

*I looked for money everywhere in Zimbabwe, and we were making money. There is nothing that I could not do. I did all things in Zimbabwe. I drove kombis; I went to Chiadzwa to dig for diamonds; I sold petrol; I ordered a bale of clothes — transporters like Eagle Liner and Phadziri know us — [and] we sold in flea markets. I tried all those things. I had my profession in mechanics, but I had set it aside because there was no money. It came to a point where I could not realise the money. From there, I decided to come to Jozi. I did not like Jozi, but I loved the way of living when I came here to shop, and I knew that it could be better for me here.*<sup>36</sup>

In another study by Vanyoro, the researcher gives the example of a woman, under the pseudonym Regina, who fled Zimbabwe to continue her education in South Africa due to family financial hardships.<sup>37</sup> She had to hunt for work to pay for her education because of her limited options and financial difficulties. Her story highlights the wider problem of adolescents in Zimbabwe experiencing financial challenges in educational financing.<sup>38</sup> Relatedly, another study by Dendere found that 'Operation Murambatsvina', which targeted illegal urban settlers and affected thousands of vulnerable urban communities primarily reliant on informal trade, made migration even worse. Another study states that this operation, which involved demolishing homes and businesses, resulted in the forced relocation of millions of people.<sup>39</sup>

Evidence from a study conducted in Zimbabwe by Magaramombe demonstrates that the main cause of the large-scale migration into Southern Africa was the economy's collapse following the disastrous land reform programme that was implemented by the Mugabe government. The dollar's collapse caused businesses to close, inflation to plummet, and hyperinflation to erupt, which caused the unemployed population to move south. Tasiyana (a pseudonym) had this to say: "*The severe Zimbabwean economic crisis, characterised by hyperinflation and widespread unemployment, played a*

<sup>35</sup> Hywel Jones, "Welsh Speakers: Age Profile and out-Migration," *Welsh in the Twenty-First Century*, 2010, 118–47.

<sup>36</sup> Jones, "Welsh Speakers: Age Profile and out-Migration."

<sup>37</sup> Kudakwashe Vanyoro, "The Political Work of Migration Governance Binaries: Responses to Zimbabwean 'Survival Migration' at the Zimbabwe–South Africa Border," *Refugee Survey Quarterly* 42, no. 3 (2023): 286–312.

<sup>38</sup> Vanyoro, "The Political Work of Migration Governance Binaries: Responses to Zimbabwean 'Survival Migration' at the Zimbabwe–South Africa Border."

<sup>39</sup> Chipso Dendere, "The Impact of Voter Exit on Party Survival: Evidence from Zimbabwe's ZANU-PF" (ScholarWorks@ Georgia State University, 2015).

crucial role in driving migration. The currency became practically useless, with money disappearing when deposited in banks, and a severe scarcity of goods in shops.”<sup>40</sup>

Based on a similar study by Kgari-Masondo and Chingwanangwana, it was found that most teachers who left Zimbabwe went to South Africa. H1, a school head, reports, “This is a tough one, and a very sensitive one too. I prefer to speak out of the camera (laughs). The current political environment is tense and has led to its economic slumber; most teachers are headed for South Africa.” This applies to health and other professionals, too.<sup>41</sup>

A recent study by Moyo revealed that unemployment sits at 90% in Zimbabwe and that 95% of the people are in the informal sector.<sup>42</sup> Hank and Erlinghagen, in a similar study, postulate that the 5% formally employed population is mainly in government, and their remuneration is a pittance. He further argues that this has drastic consequences for educational funding. The migrants, together with their families, may face discrimination and xenophobia, both in the host countries and back home if they return to Zimbabwe, as they may be perceived as outsiders or failures. This manifests through limited access to services, social exclusion, physical harassment, and verbal abuse.<sup>43</sup> Violation of family rights also occurs when return migrants leave part of their family in their home country. Inadequate and unsuitable living conditions can also cause gross violations of their human rights. Gender-based violence against female migrants (and the girl child) also poses a threat, exacerbating vulnerability and limiting their participation in society.<sup>44</sup> This also applies to the girl child left in the home country, most of whom remain leading child-headed households.

In a study by Weda and de Villiers, it is reported that surveillance and monitoring by state and political agents are not uncommon in Zimbabwe. This restricts the freedom of association, movement, and expression, and once caught, there is exposure to physical harm, arbitrary detention, or other human rights violations.<sup>45</sup>

Studies have indicated positive returns to migration, where there is return migration. To support innovation and the economy, returnees typically bring improved education, professional experiences, and enhanced skills. More still, there is bringing in of capital, investing in new ventures, creating jobs, and fostering international business relationships; they play a crucial role in the economy and contribute to economic growth.<sup>46</sup> There is also the benefit of cross-pollination of knowledge and the introduction of new technologies learned abroad. Remittances from foreign financiers are still received by some migrants even after their prolonged return. Cross-cultural and societal exchanges are fostered, and this also applies to the development of global networks and social capital.

## DISCUSSION

The implications of the Zimbabwean migrations into Southern Africa, regarding educational leadership and provision, are the focus of this section. The fast-track land reform and ‘Operation Murambatsvina’ disenfranchised millions of people of their land rights and shelter, both Blacks and Whites. This relegated people to third-class citizenry. The land is considered a home for the living, the dead, animals, and plants. Dispossession of land, whether for Black or White, meant uprooting them from their very livelihood, which disturbed the entire ecosystem.<sup>47</sup> The migrations were a reaction to the reality on the ground, echoing what is spelled, by the Environmental Migration Theory, that migration is a quest for survival. When people are threatened, they change their perceptions of reality.

<sup>40</sup> Godfrey Magaramombe, “‘Displaced in Place’: Agrarian Displacements, Replacements and Resettlement among Farm Workers in Mazowe District,” *Journal of Southern African Studies* 36, no. 2 (June 2010): 361–75, <https://doi.org/10.1080/03057070.2010.485789>.

<sup>41</sup> Maserole Christina Kgari-Masondo and Bernard Chingwanangwana, “Examining the Pragmatism of *Unhulized* Leadership in Schools Amid Socio-Political and Economic Turbulence in Zimbabwe: The Experiences of School Heads and Teachers in Marondera District,” *Leadership and Policy in Schools* 24, no. 3 (July 3, 2025): 590–602, <https://doi.org/10.1080/15700763.2024.2313015>.

<sup>42</sup> Inocent Moyo, “Zimbabwe’s Unemployed Youth: On Waithustlinghood, Struggle for Survival and Political Activism,” *Social Sciences & Humanities Open* 8, no. 1 (2023): 100535, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ssaho.2023.100535>.

<sup>43</sup> Erlinghagen and Hank, *Transnational Family Relations of German Emigrants*.

<sup>44</sup> Musoni, “Border Jumping and Migration Control in Southern Africa.”

<sup>45</sup> Zenzele Weda and Rian de Villiers, “Partial and Virtual Return: The Willingness of Migrant Zimbabwean Teachers in South Africa to Participate in Skills Transfer,” *Journal of International Migration and Integration* 22, no. 3 (2021): 849–64.

<sup>46</sup> Moyo, “Zimbabwean Dispensation, Special and Exemption Permits in South Africa: On Humanitarian Logic, Depoliticisation and Invisibilisation of Migrants.”

<sup>47</sup> Kgari-Masondo, “‘A Superstitious Respect for the Soil’?: Environmental History, Social Identity and Land Ownership—a Case Study of Forced Removals from Lady Selborne and Their Ramifications, c. 1905 to 1977.”



For education, several drawbacks were suffered. Firstly, the fast-track land reform programme resulted in millions of people being displaced through evictions, and new occupancy for those who were reallocated to the land. Learners had to move, some to where there were no schools, and some to countries where the education systems were different, yet still others dropped out for various reasons, chief amongst these being loss of revenue by the parents. There was a huge urban-to-rural internal migration due to the fast-track land reform and 'Operation Murambatsvina'. This put a serious strain on the rural schools, which were already deprived of resources, resulting in a drop in the quality of education provided.

It emerged from the study that almost all of the odd 4000 White Commercial Farmers were dispossessed of their land and left the country. Most of the White farmers who lost their land had built schools for their workers' children; these were vandalized and or closed in the majority of cases. A strain was put on the remaining schools countrywide, and school heads and teachers had to grapple with large classes, against dwindling resources. Kgari-Masondo asserts that when people are angry, it affects their attitude to land.<sup>48</sup> The *Ubuntu* philosophy, which emphasises love, care, sharing, and empathy, was heavily compromised.

Data generated pointed to the devastating effects of land reform on the civic front. The environment created by the fast-track land reform and 'Operation Murambatsvina' sparked wide-ranging turbulences in the social, political, economic, and cultural domains. This makes the Turbulence Theory relevant to this study. For school heads, the turbulence created was both external and internal. The economy collapsed, triggering hyperinflation and the liquidity crunch, pushing teachers into the private and informal sectors, respectively, and some went abroad in their thousands. For educational leadership, the failure of the economy also meant a collapse in educational funding; case studies reviewed under the data generation column indicated this. School heads were forced to make do with meagre resources, and in many cases, they were forced to compromise on standards and instructional supervisory expectations. Some researchers have lamented that Zimbabwe's education, counted among the best in Africa, is on the verge of collapse.<sup>49</sup>

The environmental migration set in motion by this turbulence saw millions of Zimbabweans moving into countries in Southern Africa, and abroad, with South Africa alone being touted to be housing over two million migrants, which has far, and wide-reaching implications that are still ongoing. Issues of social injustice, manifest in the form of denied access to land, infrastructure, quality education, shelter, health care, political rights, and human rights violations, are at the centre of the migration from Zimbabwe. For educational leadership, there are violations of charters, such as the children's right to education, and the policy of free primary tuition.<sup>50</sup>

Positively, the return migrants bring home cultural exchange enrichment, repatriated cash and goods that will improve the economy, their livelihoods, and their international social, academic, and business networks. Skills and technology transfer become the other win that the return migrants bring home. On the contrary, the family fragmentations that occur either way still stand to harm the education and welfare of the children.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Given the findings and discussion of the current study, the following recommendations are made: That there be increased changes within the Zimbabwean political, economic, and employment opportunity environment will see more Zimbabweans returning home, and those who have not left staying. Furthermore, there is a need to restore land and other rights that have been taken away from the migrants and the remaining citizens. The Zimbabwean Government has to prioritise engaging all stakeholders in education to come up with a model of financing education; the current one has failed. Regional corporation and synchronized migration and border control laws within the SADCC are the lasting solution to migration and return migration, smooth flow, and sustainable solutions. Lastly, there is a need to consider the long-standing connectedness among Southern African countries, economically, socially, culturally,

<sup>48</sup> Kgari-Masondo, "'A Superstitious Respect for the Soil'?: Environmental History, Social Identity and Land Ownership—a Case Study of Forced Removals from Lady Selborne and Their Ramifications, c. 1905 to 1977."

<sup>49</sup> UNESCO, *Global Education Monitoring Report: Migration, Displacement and Education – Building Bridges, Not Walls* (UNESCO, 2019), <https://doi.org/10.54676/XDZD4287>.

<sup>50</sup> Zimbabwe Government, *Zimbabwe Education Act* (Harare : Government Printers, 1987).



politically, and historically, when dealing with migration issues; the needs and rights of the migrants should be balanced with the migration laws and policies in the region.

## CONCLUSION

To deal with the Zimbabwean migration crisis, a consortium of proactive strategies is required, and this calls for everyone involved to play their part in bringing about the desired change. The study concludes that migration from Zimbabwe is still alive even today, and some of the push factors that made people leave the country are still making their grip, a case in point is the human rights abuses, unemployment, and hyperinflation, with the new Zimbabwe Interbank Gain (ZIG) new currency tumbling fast daily. Political reforms heavily influence migration and return migration. Conditions back home (Zimbabwe) also influence the return migration, such as the political climate, which has improved since the time of Mugabe's ouster, political stability, and security, as well as the prospects of finding employment, which influence the choices of the migrants. However, the study concludes that there are still more cons than pros in the Zimbabwean migration turbulence. Strong social networks and family ties between Zimbabwe and its Southern African neighbours enable migration and return migration, signalling transnational connections. Many Zimbabweans who migrated to Southern African countries intended to stay temporarily and return home, but the Zimbabwean environmental crisis has prolonged, forcing most of them to decide to stay permanently in the host countries. However, the study established that Zimbabwe's neighbouring governments and populace are becoming restless and aggressive due to mounting pressures on their economies. This is seen in the xenophobic attacks, together with the tightening of emigration and employment laws. Education, alongside other public services, such as health, continues to take a heavy knock on the head, as the economy continues to tumble. There is a need to come up with strategies to revamp educational funding and teacher training, to include Indigenous systems and knowledge, such as the *Ubuntu* philosophy and extensive community engagement. Current efforts by the Second Republic in Zimbabwe, to re-examine the land reform programme and unlock value in the land, accompanied by repossessing and redistributing idle and over-allocated land, will create positive vibes that could help alleviate the migration crisis.

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