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*Published in:*  
Vulnerability in Developing Countries

2009

[Link to publication](#)

*Citation for published version (APA):*

Prowse, M., & Bird, K. (2009). Vulnerability, poverty and coping in Zimbabwe. In W. Naude, A. U. Santos-Paulino, & M. McGillivray (Eds.), *Vulnerability in Developing Countries* (pp. 118-155). United Nations University Press.

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# Vulnerability, poverty and coping in Zimbabwe

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*Kate Bird and Martin Prowse*

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### 1 Introduction

Statistics and trends are hardly able to convey the magnitude of the current crisis in Zimbabwe. Its economy is shrinking fast, with gross domestic product contracting by 40 per cent between 2000 and 2007. Agricultural production (by volume) has reduced by 50 per cent in the same time period, and as of May 2007 inflation was around 300 per cent per month. An estimated 80 per cent of adults in the economically active age group are unemployed and over 85 per cent of Zimbabweans are now categorized as poor. Moreover, the HIV incidence rate is one of the highest in the world, and life expectancy for women, at 34 years, has declined from 65 years a decade ago.<sup>1</sup> In some parts of the country, 50 per cent of pregnant women are having their children at home, unattended by a trained medical practitioner. Recent bouts of speculation assert that Zimbabwe is now heading for total collapse and perhaps even conflict (Evans 2007).

There have been many attempts to explain how a once relatively prosperous country such as Zimbabwe has experienced such a profound decline. Adverse climatic conditions and the persistence of HIV/AIDS can only partly explain the high levels of poverty and vulnerability. Many analysts agree that politics, poor governance and the weakening of the rule of law are major causes. Harassment by state actors, insecure land and housing tenure, and macroeconomic meltdown have impacted harshly on livelihoods. Declines in wellbeing have been compounded by

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*Vulnerability in developing countries, Naudé, Santos-Paulino and McGillivray (eds), United Nations University Press, 2009, ISBN 978-92-808-1171-1*

declining access to increasingly fragmented local and national markets, to basic agro-inputs and to public services of even a rudimentary standard.

Particular attention has been paid to government policies such as the fast-track land reform programme and Operation Murambatsvina, which have undermined agricultural production and swept away lives and livelihoods, respectively. Although the outcomes of these policies are clear for all to see and judge in media accounts, the reasons for their implementation are harder to discern in populist discourses. Just as politics, in the form of explicit support for the Zimbabwe African National Union-Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF), pervades so many aspects of life in Zimbabwe now, politics underpinned and drove these destructive state interventions.

It is not the purpose of this chapter to catalogue the frighteningly rapid decline of Zimbabwe, or to offer a partial and long-sighted account of the international and domestic politics that contributed to the enactment and implementation of both aforementioned fiascos (although we do touch upon both below). The aim of this chapter is to use five contextualized life history interviews, conducted and written by Kate Bird, to act as a window on current processes of impoverishment and adverse coping in three geographical spheres: peri-urban, urban and rural. The study areas (Mhangtivi, Bulawayo, and Makoni)<sup>2</sup> were selected purposively and were chosen to (i) be representative of both urban and rural Zimbabwe, (ii) to include Shona and Ndebele populations, and (iii) to include a community of mobile and vulnerable people. Three individual study sites were then selected in collaboration with a local non-governmental organization (NGO). These sites were: (i) Plot Shumba, a peri-urban site 30 minutes drive from Mhangtivi, where households live in small, fragile, temporary structures; (ii) Mzilikazi, an inner-city high-density residential area in Bulawayo; and (iii) Zenzele village, Makoni district, a wealthier-than-average communal area village. Each location highlights key aspects of Zimbabwe's recent economic and political turmoil.

First, we offer a brief description of each area's characteristics and the livelihood strategies conducted in this location. Second, we further contextualize the life histories by offering a summary of one or two major drivers of impoverishment and adverse coping in each location, as well as relevant wider details. So, in the case of Plot Shumba, the peri-urban location, we outline the drivers of the fast-track land reform programme and HIV/AIDS, in addition to details on labour markets. In the case of Mzilikazi we outline the drivers of the authoritarian state and Operation Murambatsvina, as well as details on urban poverty and state repression. And in the case of Zenzele village, we outline the drivers of fragmented and imperfect agricultural input markets and distorted agricultural output markets. Third, and most importantly, the study catalogues for each

location how current adverse forms of coping appear to be creating irreversible losses of wellbeing. In this respect, the chapter utilizes arguments made by Hoddinott (2006) based on his work on persistent effects of the rainfall shock in 1994–1995 in Zimbabwe.

Hoddinott (2006) assesses the extent to which households at different income levels drew down livestock holdings in the face of a moderate rainfall shock, and the influence of the shock on the body mass index (BMI) of husbands, wives and children. Hoddinott (2006) finds that the rainfall shock substantially reduced crop and total household income and increased the sale of livestock, with the extent of sales strongly influenced by pre-shock asset-holding levels. Moreover, Hoddinott (2006) notes that, although the rainfall shock did not affect the BMI of husbands, the BMI of wives did fall, although this was mitigated by the sale of livestock, with wives' BMI recovering the following year. Highly significantly, the BMI of children aged 12–24 months was adversely affected by the rainfall shock, and whereas children from wealthy households recovered their lost growth trajectory, children in poorer households did not: they suffered a permanent loss in height, human capital formation and potential earnings.<sup>3</sup>

There are two key points regarding our use of Hoddinott's (2006) findings as a peg on which to hang our arguments – these relate to methods and inference, and the type of shock. First, Hoddinott's conclusions are drawn from detailed panel survey data and in this sense are robust, using quantitative measures. In contrast, this chapter mainly uses life history data, and the small sample size and purposive site selection mean that the conclusions drawn are necessarily tentative and suggestive. This is not to say, however, that qualitative data are necessarily weak or anecdotal. Numerical methods, such as surveys, are good at capturing states or conditions (Ellis 2000), whereas qualitative methods are good at capturing processes (Murray 2002). Although not representative in a strict sense, qualitative research can highlight key themes and processes that may be “typical” of individuals with similar sets of socio-biographical characteristic in similar circumstances. Second, Hoddinott's (2006) findings are based on a “conventional” singular shock, for which risk-sharing and insurance mechanisms have been honed through generations. Current shocks in Zimbabwe are multiple and complex, with conventional shocks overlain by massive governance and macroeconomic failings, which, in our view, are undoubtedly increasing the likelihood of permanent losses of wellbeing. Moreover, Hoddinott's (2006) work is restricted to rural resettlement areas in Mashonaland Central Province (which lies to the north of Harare), in Mashonaland East Province (which lies south-east of Harare) and Mutanda in Manicaland Province. Although certain current shocks in Zimbabwe are broadly covariant (such as inflation),

many hazards are differentiated across urban and rural spheres, creating different patterns of vulnerability and adverse coping strategies.

The structure of the chapter is as follows. Section 2 outlines how Zimbabwe relates to the fragile states discourse, summarizes who in the development literature constitute fragile groups, introduces some important distinctions within the literature on coping strategies and outlines a simple scheme of coping strategies. Section 3 offers contextualized life histories from the three locations outlined above. In the last section, we argue that the tentative findings from this research surely add weight to arguments that the international community should be more, rather than less, proactive in delivering aid to Zimbabwean people.

## 2 State fragility and Zimbabwe

To be able to understand how the Zimbabwean case relates to the *fragile* states discourse, we need to understand current definitions of *fragility* and associated terms. Within international development, a common classification of fragile states – used for example, by the UK's Department for International Development (DFID) and by the Development Assistance Committee of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD-DAC) – is where the state cannot or will not offer basic services and functions to the majority of the population (Warrener and Loehr 2005). A related but distinct approach is that taken by Torres and Anderson (2004), who recast the notion of fragile states as difficult environments where the state is unable or unwilling to productively direct national or international resources to alleviate poverty. Using this notion of difficult environments, DFID (2005) differentiates developing countries along two axes: (i) political will, and (ii) institutional capacity, creating a four-stage typology:

- *good performers*: sufficient capacity and political desire to maintain relationships with development-related international actors;
- *weak but willing*: limited capacity;
- *strong but unresponsive*: tendency towards repression; and
- *weak-weak*: lacking both capacity and political desire.

As is described through this chapter, the Zimbabwean state currently fits into the third category: strong but unresponsive (and with a tendency towards repression). The state cannot be seen to be failing because it is too pervasive, and in many ways has become parasitic on the populace, crushing dissent with increasingly ruthless vigour. It is not yet clear the extent to which the tentatively constructed power-sharing government will be able to address these governance concerns.

Cammack et al. (2006) argue that DFID's definition of fragility fits only one broad donor approach – that of *functionality*, where the lack of institutional capacity and political desire to reduce poverty reflect a poorly articulated social contract (see Murshed 2006). In addition, state fragility is also variously defined by donors in terms of *outputs*, where the state in question fosters and propagates insecurity and conflict, and *relationships*, where communication and collaboration with other states are fraught and tense (Cammack et al. 2006).

Zimbabwe performs inconsistently across these varied criteria of fragility. In terms of *functionality*, the Zimbabwean state certainly has the institutional capacity to reduce poverty and increase wellbeing across all sections of the population, but it has none of the political desire. Instead, increased repression, militarization and politicization have been the norm since at least 2000. As for *outputs*, and despite fears to the contrary, it appears that Zimbabwe has not directly exported many spillover effects thus destabilizing neighbours. Its main export has been people, with mass emigration to South Africa and beyond. Moreover, the cloud that has engulfed Zimbabwe has had a silver lining for some regional countries: Zimbabwean tobacco farmers now produce in Zambia, Mozambique, Tanzania and Malawi; some horticultural production has shifted to South Africa; manufacturing has moved to Botswana and South Africa; and tourist receipts from Victoria Falls now accrue to Zambia. State failure in Zimbabwe has certainly led to strained relationships with many development partners (for example, the International Monetary Fund departed in 1997), but not with Southern African Development Community governments (which until recently have been loathe to criticize Mugabe) or trading partners such as Iran, China and Russia (which have increased their involvement in the Zimbabwean economy). In sum, Zimbabwe is certainly fragile, if not failed, in terms of functionality, but in terms of outputs and relationships the picture appears mixed.

### 2.1 *Fragile groups in Zimbabwe*

Although the title of the UNU-WIDER conference for which this chapter was prepared refers to *fragile* groups, the development literature more usually refers to *vulnerable* groups. These commonly include children (particularly orphans), the sick, people with physical and mental impairments, widows and widowers, the elderly and the landless (Babirye 1999; Mijumbi and Okidi 2001). Moreover, the Chronic Poverty Research Centre has shown that social marginalization, discrimination and disadvantage are linked with *ascribed status* (e.g. ethnicity, race, religion and caste), oppressive labour relations (e.g. migrant, stigmatized and bonded labourers) and being an *outsider* (e.g. migrant labourers, refu-



gees and internally displaced people, those without the documents necessary to access citizenship rights) (CPRC 2003: 45). People identified as belonging to these groups may be more exposed to risk, owing to their poor capabilities, their low functioning and their failure to accumulate and retain assets.

However, describing a group as fragile or vulnerable masks the fact that individuals and categories of people may be differentially vulnerable to specific risks at particular times (Bird and Shinyekwa 2005: 73). For example, Marcus and Wilkinson (2002: 37) note that not only can “the term ‘vulnerable group’ be stigmatizing”, but it “can be inaccurate, camouflaging the strengths of marginalized and disadvantaged people and their contributions to society, and presenting a falsely homogenous picture of diverse situations”.<sup>4</sup> From this viewpoint, the use of the terms *fragile* and *vulnerable* encourages a view of groups and individuals as “passive” and non-responsive, emphasizing weakness, a lack of agency and an inability to cope (Hewitt 1998; Bankoff 2001). In contrast, any attempt at understanding individual or group fragility or vulnerability must focus on actors’ capacity and ingenuity to respond, as Moser (1998: 3) states:

Analysing vulnerability involves identifying not only the threat but also the resilience or responsiveness in exploiting opportunities, and in resisting or recovering from the negative effects of a changing environment. The means of resistance are the assets and entitlements that individuals, households, or communities can mobilize and manage in the face of hardship.

We now turn to the literature on the strategies and activities employed by those under situations of duress, commonly referred to as coping strategies.

## 2.2 *Coping strategies and resilience*

The term *coping strategy* emphasizes the ability of households to decide and select appropriate activities in light of their assets and endowments.<sup>5</sup> This is not to deny that coping activities are circumscribed by constraints and the availability of opportunities but to flag up the agency and capacity of individuals, households and communities to strategize. Within the coping strategy literature, there are some straightforward distinctions.

First, there is a difference between idiosyncratic (individual) and co-variant shocks. The effect of idiosyncratic shocks – for example, the illness of a family member – can be insured against within a community to a certain degree. It is more difficult to recover from shocks that operate at an aggregate level, affecting entire communities, countries and regions

(covariant shocks), because risk cannot be shared (Dercon 2000). Second, households adopt a range of sequenced coping strategies in order to respond to shocks. These can be divided into two groups: *ex ante* risk-management strategies and *ex post* risk-coping strategies. The former can be further divided into strategies that avoid the impact of shock (sometimes termed *shock reduction*) and those that ameliorate the worst effects of a shock (sometimes termed *shock mitigation*). The latter can be divided into strategies internal to the household and those within the wider community (external). These simple distinctions are illustrated in Figure 5.1, which, following Sinha and Lipton (1999), utilizes the term *damaging fluctuation* (DF) instead of shock.

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Lack of assets, both private and collective, drives poor people into deeper and more intractable poverty after a shock. Those with few material, financial, natural or social assets are vulnerable to relatively minor shocks, especially if bunched and unpredictable. Without assets to form the basis of effective coping strategies and resilience, people can experience catastrophic declines into persistent poverty and, more to the point, face increased morbidity and reduced life expectancy. Poor people without reserves may adopt forms of adverse coping that may support short-term survival while undermining wellbeing in the medium to long term. Such adverse coping can entail the liquidation of crucial productive assets, the reduction of consumption in ways that have potentially irreversible welfare effects (eating smaller amounts of less nutritious food, avoiding essential medical expenditures, withdrawing children from school) or the adoption of behaviour that undermines trust and social standing (theft and begging, engagement in commercial sex work, abandoning children with their grandparents) (CPRC 2003).

The following life histories illustrate recent processes of impoverishment in Zimbabwe. These demonstrate how such adverse coping not only is leading to the tragic loss of life and increased incidence of illbeing, but is impairing future generations through the creation of irreversible outcomes that will scar Zimbabwe for decades.

### 3 Contextualized life histories

The five simple life histories presented in this section are as follows. From Plot Shumba, the peri-urban area included in our study, we present case studies of two young women living with AIDS. We describe where they live and draw wider observations about life in Zimbabwe from the shocks that have affected their community. To provide some background to key drivers of impoverishment in Plot Shumba, Boxes 5.2 and 5.3 below offer an overview of, respectively, the fast-track land reform programme and changes in rural labour markets. We also offer details on the HIV pandemic in Zimbabwe.

From Mzilikazi, Bulawayo, we discuss the experiences of a young man who was orphaned as a child, got drawn into gang-related crime as a teenager and is now unemployed. Again, we use this example to discuss wider issues facing urban Zimbabwe and to show how the sequenced and composite shocks experienced in his life so far will make an exit from poverty extremely difficult, even when economic recovery occurs in Zimbabwe. To offer some contextual detail, we summarize state repression and Operation Murambatsvina and describe recent urban poverty trends.

Finally we present the stories of two rural households where grandparents are struggling with poverty and ill health to bring up their grandchildren. We use these stories to illustrate how many children are growing up in poverty having been orphaned by AIDS or while their parents seek work in urban areas. To frame this discussion, we offer details on imperfect and distorted agricultural input and output markets in rural Zimbabwe.

### 3.1 *Plot Shumba*

Plot Shumba is a privately owned peri-urban site around 30 minutes drive from Mhangtivi, the main regional town, and easy walking distance from the high-density suburb of Matemba. In Plot Shumba, 58 households live in small, fragile, temporary structures scattered over 3 acres of a 66 acre piece of rain-fed agricultural land. The land is used extensively as grazing for a small herd of cattle, sheep and goats belonging to the plot owner. Plot Shumba developed gradually as a settlement between the early 1970s and the late 1990s, with the owner's permission. Residents tended to move to the Plot because they had nowhere else to go – they had lost their commercial farming or mining job and therefore their home; they were unemployed, had lost contact with their rural home or had work but could not afford urban rents.

In the late 1990s the community came to the attention of “agents of the state” and since 1998 the community has been evicted and its members have had their homes and assets destroyed three times. Community members have suffered various forms of harassment and social, political and economic exclusion, ranging from being refused medical treatment because of community membership through to retailers refusing to sell them food during the 2003 food security crisis. For about 18 months between 2005 and late 2006 the community received food aid (distributed by local NGOs), but distribution to this community was then stopped because of World Food Programme (WFP) shortages. The range of livelihood activities undertaken by women has not changed a great deal since 2000: casual labour (*maricho*) and casual domestic work; small-scale local trading (food, grass brooms, fresh milk, non-timber forest products, firewood); backyard industries (hairdressing, bicycle repair, making doilies, tailoring/needlework); growing horticultural crops; and some informal commercial sex work. Households also engage in gold panning and crushing gold ore (conducted by men) and receive support from NGOs. However, the tighter application of environmental and licensing regulations has limited some of these livelihood strategies (see Box 5.1). Bans on gold panning, the cutting and selling of firewood and vending without a licence are now observed. If caught by members of the Zimbabwe Re-

## Box 5.1 Vending licences: Official requirements

Official requirements for obtaining a vending licence are:

- Application forms: application forms should be bought from the council at a cost of ZW\$300,000.
- Health screening: a prospective vendor must be screened at his or her own expense for communicable diseases such as TB. At the time of the research the cost of health screening was ZW\$2.5 million, which most prospective vendors considered to be too high.
- Police clearance: prospective vendors should be cleared by the police for any criminal record. Those with criminal records are denied licences. This was introduced during operation Murambatsvina (May/June 2005), when the government argued that a number of informal traders were involved in crime and the sale of stolen goods.
- Licences for a particular type of vending are issued on the condition that a certain quota for each category has not been exceeded.

Traders who sell herbs and other traditional medicines must register with the Zimbabwe National Traditional Healers Association. The association charges a fee for registration and an annual membership subscription.

Unofficial requirements for the issuance of a vending licence include:

- Proof of party affiliation and paid-up membership.
- “Money for drinks” for council officials to speed up the process and to ignore official requirements such as health check-ups and criminal records.
- “Gifts” to officials in the form of merchandise to be sold by the vendor.

Each licence stipulates the products a vendor can sell. A licence issued for the sale of fruit and vegetables is not valid for the sale of other products. This limits the vendors’ opportunities to identify and occupy niches, which change as the economy collapses.

public Police or municipal police – dubbed *tight grip* – community members risk being physically assaulted, having their commodities confiscated or destroyed or having to pay a fine or bribe (in cash or kind). Evading detection takes time and further reduces the viability of a number of livelihood activities.

In contrast to women, men reported that their livelihood activities had altered considerably since 2000. Previously they relied mostly on commercial farm work. However, since 2000 gold panning and small-scale vending have become more significant.<sup>6</sup> Disruption to the agricultural

sector, driven by the fast-track land reform, resulted in a marked decline in agricultural activity and employment (see Boxes 5.2 and 5.3). Some are still involved in unlicensed vending and firewood collection but these activities tend to be ad hoc, owing to the risk of arrest.

Overall, people at Plot Shumba were struggling to find work at the time the fieldwork was conducted. This is partly because of widespread unemployment, but their reputation as supporters of the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) makes finding work more difficult, as does their lack of a ZANU-PF membership card. Many also lack proper ID papers and have “alien” status. In the current political climate, such people are the last to be offered jobs or provided with services. Clearly, the settlement has been strongly affected by the land invasions surrounding fast-track land reform processes. Instead of focusing on those directly displaced by the fast-track land reform, the following life histories of Angel and Linah from Plot Shumba further illustrate the channels of decline in the context of state repression. Both narratives, as well as the further three life histories later in the chapter, are accompanied by a “map” that depicts the trajectory of the wellbeing of respondents through time.<sup>7</sup>

*Life history interview with Angel: Young, destitute, and desperately sick*

Angel lives alone with her 19-month-old baby in a small tin shack (around 2.2 metres by 1.7 metres) in Plot Shumba. She is very ill with AIDS and tuberculosis and her illness has made her very weak, making it difficult for her to speak or move. Her skin is dry and her hair is thin, brittle and reddish brown rather than black. She is thin and gaunt and her appearance is such that she could be either male or female and almost any age from mid-teens to early forties (although she is actually only 25). Angel’s illness was only confirmed in February 2006 when the NGO working in her community offered her HIV testing. She has been diagnosed with TB and cannot start anti-retrovirals until her TB has been successfully treated. Unfortunately, owing to her late diagnosis she started treatment only a month before our interview in July 2006. Angel looked so ill when we met that it seemed unlikely she would survive.

Angel had her first child when she was 12, but carried on going to school until Form 2 (the second class in secondary school). At this stage she had to drop out because her family ran out of money. She left her baby with her mother’s family (when he was 21 months old) and as a 14 year old moved to a town in the Midlands near Plot Shumba to look for work. Luckily, she found some and worked as a “house girl” for a middle-class family. But after a year she had to leave – her “madam” was not paying her and she felt exploited. Having nowhere to go, she

## Box 5.2 Fast-track land reform

Frequently, media representations of Zimbabwe's crisis depict the "war veteran" movement as a militia arm of ZANU-PF. Although the war veterans were certainly integral to the chaotic appropriation of white-owned farmland from 2000, relations between ZANU-PF and the war veterans (nomenclature that obscures the much broader constituency – including many retrenched workers from urban areas – of this political force) were not always so close-knit. From 1997 the war veterans were a key political threat to the continued hegemony of Mugabe's ZANU-PF. To stave off possible political defeat, Mugabe co-opted the veterans through generous payments including pensions. He also gave them the green light to invade white-owned commercial farms.

Zimbabwe's fast-track land reform is closely linked to the revision of the country's constitution in 2000, which asserted the state's right to seize land from large-scale farmers for redistribution. A national referendum in February 2000 rejected the proposals but, despite this loss, the government amended the constitution and passed a new Land Acquisition Act in April 2000, which legalized compulsory acquisition (Kinsey 2004). In June 2000, Mugabe announced the fast-track land reform programme, stating that it was necessary to correct colonial imbalances in land ownership (*CAJ News*, 6 March 2007). In the meantime, farm invasions began during the early months of 2000 (Chaumba et al. 2003). These may have been spontaneous or orchestrated by the war veterans. They also coincided with a regional rainfall shock and harvest failures that were so severe that they precipitated demands for food aid (Potts 2006).

A study of some of those involved in farm invasions at the peak of the fast-track land reform process shows that they were either young men with a desire for land or female-headed households, often widows and divorcees, fleeing social stigma in communal land areas. Settlers were either the relatively rich or the relatively poor (as proxied by cattle ownership). Wealthier households with large numbers of cattle were found to be able to straddle communal and "invaded" land and create patron–client relations with the poorer settlers through the loaning of cattle for draught power in return for the provision of labour. Poorer households had few assets and had little to lose, and were found to make their living through casual labour, poaching and possibly theft (Chaumba et al. 2003).

In June 2002 around 3,000 white farmers were ordered to leave their farms (Addison and Laakso 2003), and by August 2002 the fast-track land reform was completed. More than 5,000 white-owned com-

## Box 5.2 (cont.)

mercial farms were seized (IRIN, 22 February 2007), and, by the end of 2002, only 600 white farmers remained in the country (Sachikonye 2003). Over 10 million hectares of land had changed hands, with 300,000 farmers gaining access to plots of 5–10 hectares and over 50,000 farmers gaining access to plots large enough for commercial farming. The process was chaotic and access to plots was mainly organized through ZANU-PF party structures. Instead of an equitable process of redistribution to the landless, it became highly politicized and patronage systems came into play. In the end, a number of members of the black political elite gained large tracts of high-quality land (Scarnecchia 2006), held for speculation rather than productive farming. Importantly, the land reform process has displaced thousands of farm workers, many of whom were first-, second- or third-generation immigrants from Malawi, Zambia and Mozambique and were regarded by many Zimbabweans as “aliens” and outsiders (see Box 5.3).

moved to Plot Shumba in 2002 and built a shack. But in February 2003 the army demolished Plot Shumba as part of the state’s drive against squatter settlements and informality (called Operation Mariawanda). Angel was severely beaten and spent a month sleeping in the open at the long-distance bus shelter (along with others from the Plot). The landowner obtained a court order enabling them to move back and the residents rebuilt their homes.

In February 2004, Angel’s cousin helped her to get a job at a local small-scale goldmine selling beer. While she was there she met a gold panner and fell in love. But the mine owner went bankrupt in August 2004 and she lost her job and her home and was forced to return to Plot Shumba with her boyfriend. For a while things looked up – Angel made a living selling vegetables. She became pregnant in 2004 and gave birth to their first son in March 2005. However, that same month her boyfriend was killed when the mine he was working in collapsed, killing him and three other men. Angel stayed at Plot Shumba until it was demolished during Operation Murambatsvina. Afterwards she had to rebuild her shack again. Now unable to care effectively for herself or her son (who despite his 19 months does not walk, talk or make eye contact), Angel relies on local networks and the NGO for her and her son’s survival. In all likelihood, this support has not been sufficient for either mother or son. See Figure 5.2 charting Angel’s history.



## Box 5.3 Rural labour markets

In the early 1990s, work on commercial farms was mainly shunned by black Zimbabweans, and demand was filled by migrant Malawians, Mozambicans and Zambians. However, by 2000 this had changed, and around three-quarters of farm labourers were Zimbabwean. Both “alien” and domestic farm workers tended to be the poorest sections of rural communities and they were locked into a patron–client system with estate owners. Although they had weak employment rights and often lacked political rights (for example, “aliens” only gained the right to vote in local elections in 1998) (Sachikonye 2003), they were ensured some security from the estate owner and management.

After the fast-track land reform programme, newly resettled farmers had little ability or willingness to engage non-household labour, and over 100,000 farm workers lost their jobs and were evicted from their homes. Some migrant workers were forcibly relocated by the authorities to marginal areas of the country with little infrastructure (such as the Lower Zambezi valley). Displacement from farms has reduced access to housing, health and education services by workers, who are often forced to move to squatter camps or informal housing in urban or peri-urban areas, such as Plot Shumba. Former farm workers were legally entitled to a severance package from their employers, but only 25 per cent of these employers received timely compensation from the government, which made it difficult for them to provide their workers with severance pay. (Sachikonye 2003)

*Life history interview with Linah: Wayward adolescent or victim of child abuse?*

Linah is a 16-year-old orphan who is both a figure of fun in Plot Shumba and thoroughly socially integrated into her community. One of her nicknames translates as “the hedonist” or “fun seeker”, the other (behind her back) is Moneylink (the system for sending remittances home). Linah was orphaned when she was a toddler and came with her older sister to live with her grandmother in Plot Shumba. Their household also includes two male cousins – her mother’s sister’s sons – who moved in when her aunt died. Even though Linah is still in her teens, her life has had a number of twists and turns. She has never been to school and ran away at around the age of 11 to live with a 23-year-old man in the local town of Matemba. The relationship broke down and she returned to her grandmother’s house at Plot Shumba. Her rebellious, and sometimes promiscuous, behaviour caused her grandmother to throw her out when she was

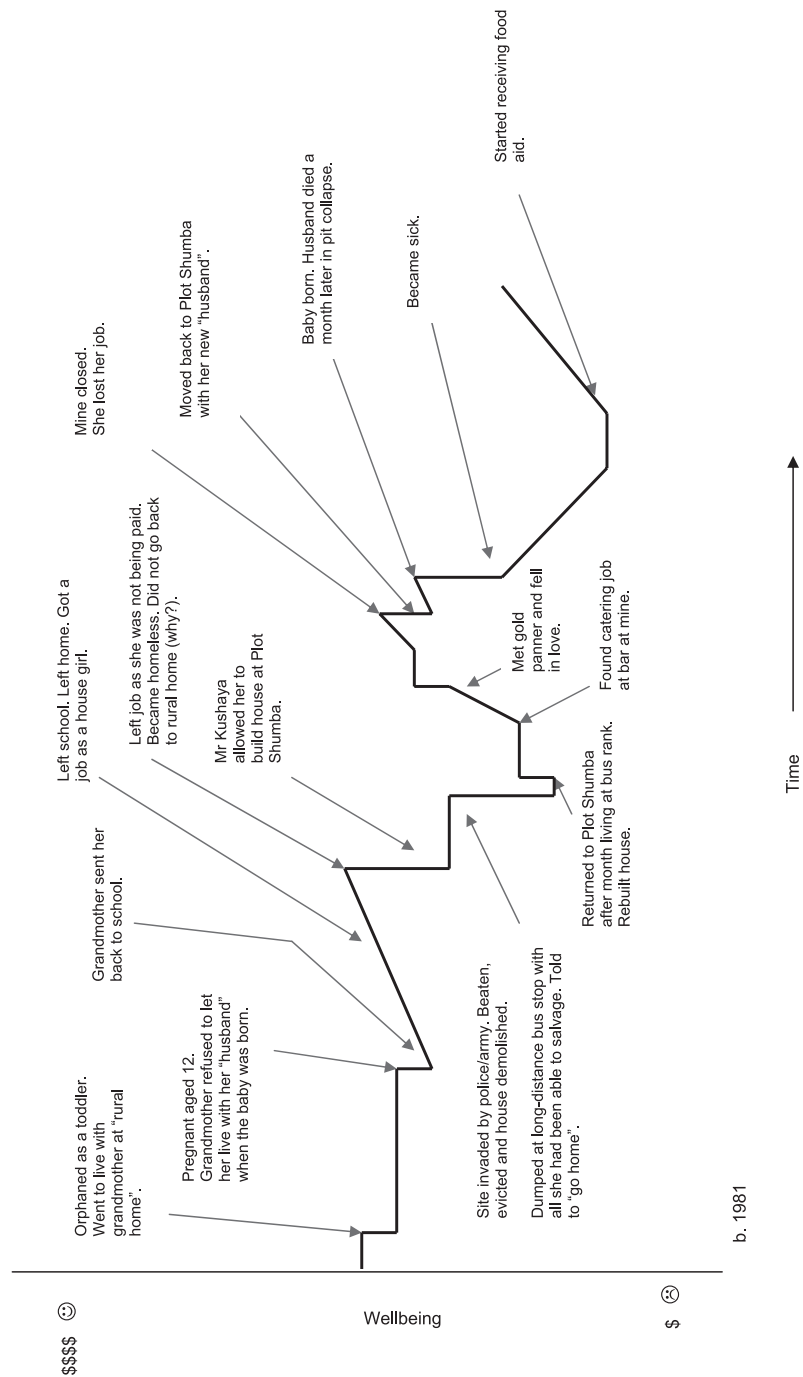


Figure 5.2 Wellbeing map: Angel Muponda.

around 13 years old. Linah found herself on the street in the local town, and to survive she turned to informal commercial sex work.

During this time she met a man at the Matemba Rural Council and he became her regular boyfriend. She moved back in with her grandmother and stopped sleeping with other men. Then she became pregnant. When I met Linah she was around 5 months pregnant. But she was not sure when the baby was due because of her inability to afford the consultation charge (US\$2) for a pre-natal check. As she is HIV positive, and without a check-up, it is unlikely that she will be able to have her baby in hospital. Without a hospital birth, it is unlikely that she will receive Nevaraprin during labour to prevent the mother-to-child transmission of HIV or that the baby will get follow-up treatment. It is also unlikely that she will receive formula to be able to feed her baby and will, instead, breastfeed (potentially increasing the risk of transmission). After she was tested and her HIV status confirmed, she told her boyfriend. He told her that he loved her anyway and would stay with her. At the time of the interview, she had not seen him for two weeks. Figure 5.3 charts Linah's history.

Both Linah and Angel are HIV positive and their stories show how poverty and marginality combined to increase their chance of risky behaviour. Angel's story reveals how a series of events has driven her into severe poverty and close to death. Assuming that Angel's TB is cured and her health improves on a sustained ART programme, having dropping out of school at 14 her employment opportunities will be limited, even if the Zimbabwean economy recovers. Having had her home demolished twice, she has almost no household possessions and no productive or physical assets. Although she is well liked by the people in Plot Shumba, they are similarly destitute. She is disconnected from her rural home and marginalized from mainstream society and will thus find it hard to use social or political networks to improve her wellbeing. Angel's son is growing up in destitution and the 19 month old's life chances are very extremely limited, if he manages to survive infancy.

Linah's story illustrates, perhaps, how difficult it is for elderly grandparents to raise children alone. Linah needed more guidance and protection than she received. Once her grandmother had thrown her out, earning alternatives other than commercial sex work were limited. Being HIV positive, with no education and with a baby to support, her options are extremely limited. Like Angel, she has no physical or productive assets and her networks are with other very poor people. In the future, her best hope is to find casual work and accumulate enough to move into livelihood activities with a higher return – opportunities that are extremely circumscribed in the current political climate.

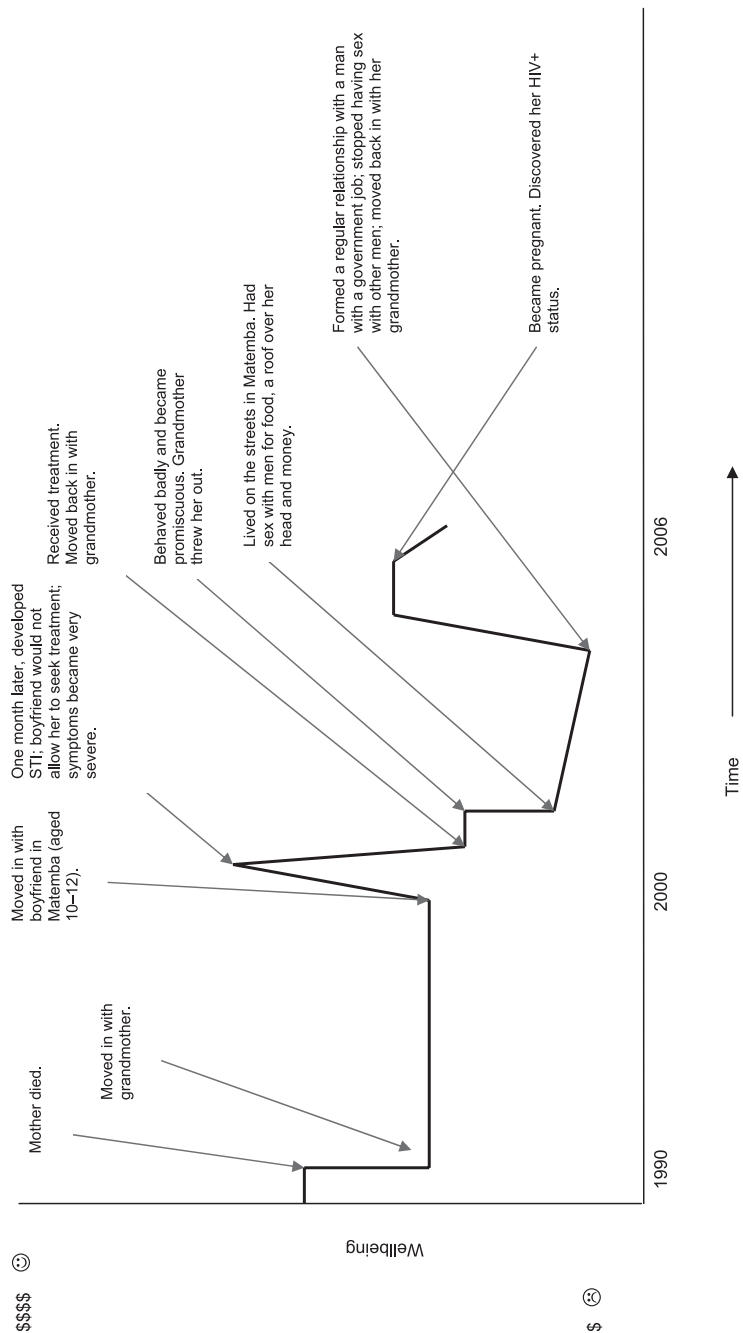


Figure 5.3 Wellbeing map: Linah.

HIV is a key element in both of these life stories. The HIV/AIDS pandemic in Zimbabwe has been a significant factor in poverty trends both before and after 2000. Official UN statistics show that the HIV infection rate is 24.6 per cent, one of the highest in the world. Other studies offer varying statistics. A national statistically significant sample of women applying for pre-natal care found the HIV rate to be 21 per cent in 2004, although the high proportion of women giving birth at home suggests that many of the poorest women were not included in this study (thus lowering the rate). A different assessment, based on a survey of micro-credit recipients, found that around 40 per cent of households displayed signs of being affected by HIV (using chronic illness as a proxy) (Barnes 2003).

Although around 3 million people in Zimbabwe are HIV positive, only 50,000 of them have access to anti-retroviral therapy treatment. Zimbabweans can expect to die younger than anyone else in the world: as mentioned before, the life expectancy of a Zimbabwean woman today is just 34 years, and a Zimbabwean man can expect to live to 37 years. HIV-affected households have a greater proportion of household members who are economically inactive, are less likely to seek medical treatment owing to a lack of funds and have a lower monthly income, indicating the vicious circle of impoverishment and HIV-positive status (Barnes 2003). The impacts of HIV on wellbeing are multiple and interlinked. For example, chronically ill households are more likely to miss meals, eat poorer-quality food, use wild foods and focus food provision to the economically active household members (to the detriment of others). We can see these factors at work in the case of both Angel and Linah, limiting not only their own life expectancies but also those of their children, who are the future for Zimbabwe in years to come.

### 3.2 *Mzilikazi, Bulawayo*

Mzilikazi is an old, fairly central and well-established inner-city high-density residential area in Bulawayo that used to house the town's wealthier skilled and semi-skilled black workers. The area is well laid out and spacious, and homes have piped water and electricity. Houses tend to be semi-detached brick bungalows with two or more bedrooms, tin, asbestos or tile roofs and small gardens. However, the appearance of prosperity and calm is misleading. The area has been deeply affected by Zimbabwe's recession and unemployment is high. A number of households depend on sub-letting in order to cover their basic living costs. Overcrowding has intensified following Operation Murambatsvina, because many of the outhouses that residents had constructed in their backyards to provide a source of rental income were demolished. Some of the

Box 5.4 Livelihood activities of selected men and women in Mzilikazi

Men	Women
<u>Decades ago, when their children were young</u>	
<p>Husbands of the key informants were employed as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• city council worker (slashing grass by rivers and roads and spraying for mosquitoes)</li> <li>• domestic workers</li> <li>• post office worker (deliveries) (later a driver for the post office)</li> <li>• salesman/driver for a manufacturing company</li> <li>• selling vegetables from their urban “garden”</li> <li>• vending: buying bread for resale</li> <li>• electrician for the National Railways (later, self-employed electrician)</li> </ul> <p>Other men in Mzilikazi at that time:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• furniture makers (carpenters)</li> <li>• self-employed builders</li> <li>• cross-border traders</li> <li>• hairdressers</li> <li>• raised and sold poultry</li> </ul>	<p>The key informants were employed as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• domestic workers</li> <li>• domestic workers</li> <li>• domestic workers</li> <li>• vending home-made brooms</li> <li>• selling vegetables from their urban “garden”</li> <li>• catering in formal beer halls</li> <li>• vendor selling roasted mealie cobs</li> <li>• vendor selling fruit and sweets</li> <li>• vendor selling second-hand clothes</li> <li>• tailor in a clothing factory</li> <li>• agricultural casual labourer (paid in kind, in clothes)</li> </ul>

“landlords” now share their small homes with a second family. Crime is a serious problem, much of it perpetrated by criminal gangs (*tsotsies*).

Only a few residents are still in formal employment, and most rely on income-generating strategies covering illegal, semi-legal and legal activities. Vending is now a key (though risky and unreliable) source of livelihood. “Everyone has become a vendor” is an oft-cited phrase, despite the fact that a vendor without a licence risks harassment (see Box 5.4).

Many older residents in Mzilikazi receive pensions or welfare grants, but they are almost worthless because their purchasing power has been eroded by inflation. Remittances do not provide widespread or reliable support. The average level of wellbeing is reported to have collapsed in

## Box 5.4 (cont.)

Ten years ago

Four out of the six husbands had died, the remaining two were:

- electrician
- salesman/driver

Other men in Mzilikazi at that time:

- some ex-council workers became plumbers (to fill a demand that was previously filled by the council)
- hairdressers

- domestic workers
- vending home-made brooms
- vending roasted mealie cobs
- vending vegetables
- working in an old people's home as a cleaner/orderly
- cross-border trading (until her passport expired - her father was Zambian so she is finding it difficult to get a new passport; she has to formally renounce her right to Zambian nationality)

Some of the changes in livelihood activity are due to changes in opportunity and others are due to changes in their age.

As of August 2006

Five out of the six women are now widows. The remaining husband was:

- salesman/driver

- vending sweets
- vending fruit
- horticulture

Some people do not have a livelihood. They rely on support from social welfare, which gives them food handouts, or on whatever their children can give them.

*Source:* Focus group discussion with a group of older women, August 2006, Mzilikazi, Bulawayo.

recent years. Newly poor residents appeared to be stunned by both the rapidity and the depth of their poverty and were being driven into unfamiliar forms of coping. Illegal or adverse coping strategies are increasing: commercial sex work, crime (housebreaking, mugging), illicit beer brewing, gambling and drug dealing. Teenagers and young adults have been drawn into these activities to make a living, deepening the generation

gap between the old and the young. Older people report that they live in perpetual fear of the youth. Under-aged prostitution is widespread.

The life story of Blessing illustrates how crime has become a livelihood choice for the unemployed and alienated youth of urban Zimbabwe.

*Life history interview with Blessing: The livelihood choice of urban unemployed youth?*

Blessing (22) is an orphan and currently lives with his stepfather. He was an only child, never knew his father, and his mother fell ill when he was 9 years old, and died shortly afterwards. He dropped out of school at this age as his stepfather would not pay for his education. He has been unemployed ever since. He can remember nothing good about his childhood after his mother died. During the interview Blessing said he was hungry and had no way of getting food. His clothes were dirty and he had not washed recently. He looked miserable.

Blessing lived for a part of his childhood with his stepfather and for a few years with his paternal grandmother. He was thrown out by his step-parents in 1999 when he was 16 and lived on the streets. The following year, he moved in with his grandmother. After realizing that his grandmother “could not cater for his needs”, he joined the *tsotsies* and started going into town with them to steal. Caught by the police, he was sentenced to two-year prison term (2001–2002). Life in prison was very tough and Blessing turned his back on the gangsters. After his release he moved in with his grandmother, tried to find a job but could not because he lacks a national ID and a birth certificate (his paperwork had not been organized by the time his mother died). To keep himself busy, Blessing joined a youth centre and became part of a dance troupe that tours Bulawayo to put on performances. They make some money from dancing but he would “like to diversify” because he recognizes that as he gets older he will not be able to maintain the quality of his performances. Also, he does not make enough money from dancing and he often goes hungry. He would like to become a vendor, selling fruit and vegetables, but knows the risks involved from police harassment of vendors. He says that, to reduce the risk, he would sell locally in Mzilikazi rather than in the city centre.

Unfortunately, his grandmother died in August 2005 and he moved back in with his stepfather. Until recently Blessing’s stepmother was part of this household but she left shortly before I met him. He has a poor relationship with his stepfather and since his stepmother left his stepfather’s behaviour has deteriorated. He is a violent man and Blessing is afraid of him. He is locked out of the house while his stepfather is at work and has to spend the day outside. Blessing says that he cannot talk to him and cannot ask him for help.



Figure 5.4 shows how sequential shocks have marred Blessing's life, almost before it began. By the age of 9, both of his parents had died and he had dropped out of school. Now functionally illiterate, long-term unemployed and with a criminal record, he is unlikely to access formal sector employment. It is difficult to see a way out for Blessing. His best hope is that the economy begins to recover soon, generating employment, and that he can pick up unskilled manual work – an unlikely scenario in the short term. Moreover, networks are likely to play an important role in recruitment processes, and Blessing is poorly connected. His story is replicated many times over in places like Mzilikazi. Illegal or adverse coping strategies are increasingly being adopted, limiting future life chances. Until alternative livelihood options present themselves, it is likely that areas such as Mzilikazi, despite its middle-class heritage, will continue to be blighted by crime.

The life story of Blessing, and of those in Mzilikazi more broadly, reflects urban poverty trends in Zimbabwe. Urban poverty in Zimbabwe declined through the 1980s. In 1981, around 30 per cent were below the minimum wage in high-density areas in Harare and by 1991 this had fallen to 10–15 per cent, making urban Zimbabweans amongst the wealthiest and most secure anywhere in Africa (Potts 2006). But during the 1990s urban poverty increased, mainly owing to stabilization policies associated with structural adjustment, and it has mushroomed since 2000 (Potts 2006). By 2006, the vast majority of Zimbabweans were living beneath the poverty line; over 85 per cent of Zimbabweans were defined as poor by the Consumer Council of Zimbabwe (cited in Potts 2006; see also Hawkins 2006).

The experience of those pursuing disparate illegal livelihoods in Mzilikazi give some indication that the real power brokers in Zimbabwe are the security services: the army, the Central Intelligence Organization (CIO) and the police. Although there are splits within and between these, the soldiers and the CIO ultimately hold power. We close this urban section showing how the state security sector misuses its power with a summary of Operation Murambatsvina and through cataloguing recent examples of state oppression in Zimbabwe (Box 5.5).

Operation Murambatsvina took place in May/June 2005 and was described by the government as an attempt to control the “economic saboteurs” operating the black market and to improve the quality of the urban housing stock by ensuring that planning permissions and building regulations were obeyed. Three alternative explanations have been suggested: (i) the desire to punish opposition supporters, many of whom are urban based, and to tighten control over the population; (ii) to disperse potential sources of political agitation from urban areas to rural areas (in rural areas people can be “disciplined” more easily and less

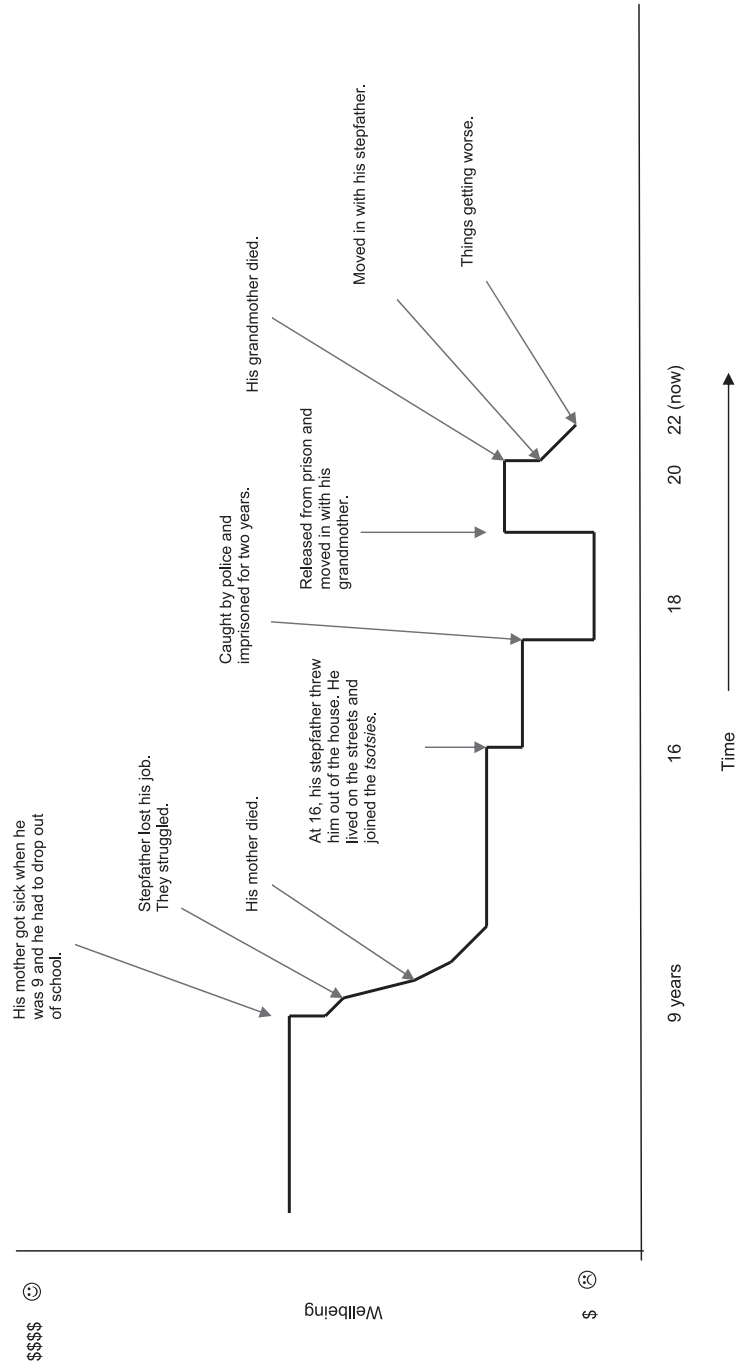


Figure 5.4 Wellbeing map: Blessing Dhlami.

## Box 5.5 Recent examples of oppression

Examples of the misuse of state power between January and May 2007 include:

- A crackdown on the opposition in early 2007, following accusations from Mugabe that they were trying to topple the regime on behalf of Zimbabwe's former colonial master, Britain. Violence and repression were used to suppress the independent media, harass human rights defenders and intimidate opposition leaders and peaceful demonstrators.
- In February 2007, in reaction to growing unrest over the economy, police outlawed rallies and demonstrations in Harare and other parts of the country regarded as opposition strongholds. Using tear-gas, batons and water cannons, police scuttled a rally that Morgan Tsvangirai, leader of the Zimbabwean opposition Movement for Democratic Change (MDC), was to hold at Zimbabwe Grounds in Highfield to launch his 2008 presidential election campaign (*Financial Gazette*, 1 March 2007).
- In March 2007, Morgan Tsvangirai and several other members of his party were detained in a police raid in the capital, Harare. Scores of police officers in riot gear, wielding AK-47 assault rifles, barricaded all the roads around Harvest House, the MDC headquarters in Harare. Police confirmed a crackdown on "perpetrators of violence" (IRIN Africa 2007).
- Four members of the opposition MDC were prevented from leaving Zimbabwe, including one MP, Nelson Chamisa, who was badly beaten when travelling to a meeting in Brussels. A significant number of activists and opposition supporters are still being arrested and tortured throughout Zimbabwe. Trade and student union members have been harassed and arrested (UK MPs Hear Statement on Zimbabwe, 26 March 2007).
- Opposition supporters were denied state-supplied food aid. In a public statement, Charumbira, president of Zimbabwe's Council of Chiefs, confirmed that traditional leaders had been ordered to consider only ZANU-PF supporters on programmes initiated by the government. "We cannot afford to continue feeding the enemy because they are sell-outs", he said. ZANU-PF denies using food aid as a political weapon (ZIMOnline, 31 January 2007).

Source: Proudlock (2007).

transparently); and (iii) with the informal sector crushed, control of the economy returns firmly to the government and the dependence of the population on the state for food increases, reducing the scope for opposition.

Operation Murambatsvina targeted illegal structures and informal businesses, demolishing buildings, vending sites and other informal business premises without planning permission and driving the informal sector underground. The operation resulted in the loss of livelihoods for those previously working in the informal sector. It is estimated that some 650,000–700,000 people were directly affected through the loss of shelter and/or livelihoods (Tibaijuka 2005). Government figures state that almost 95,000 dwelling units were destroyed, displacing some 570,000 people, with a further 98,000 losing their livelihoods in the informal sector (Potts 2006).

The United Nations also estimated that, after Operation Murambatsvina, at least 114,000 were living in the open without shelter and the government curtailed international assistance to internally displaced people (Human Rights Watch 2005). Few were able to access alternative government accommodation (Operation Garikai) owing to strict conditions, including evidence of formal employment and a monthly salary (Human Rights Watch 2005). The police intimidated and beat displaced people and forcibly moved them to transit camps, after which the government assigned them to rural regions on the basis of their identity numbers. These relocations have placed an additional burden on rural areas, which now have additional people to house and feed in place of the remittances they may previously have received. The operation has had a long-run impact. The police have enforced stringent licensing regulations more tightly and the requirement that all vendors sell only from covered premises generates a powerful barrier to entry. Also, new regulations have been introduced to control the informal sector, and those applying for a vending licence now have to obtain police clearance (see Box 5.1). People without IDs (e.g. “aliens”) or with criminal records are denied licences. Many people are still in effect homeless and the large numbers of urban households that depended on renting backyard property in order to cover their basic living costs have lost an important source of income. These factors are reflected in the case of Mzikazi and in the limited opportunities available to Blessing, whose wellbeing is unlikely to improve in either the short or the long term.

### *3.3 Zenzele village, Makoni district*

Zenzele village is in Mutoro Ward, about 40 kilometres from Rusape town in the relatively rich Shona heartlands. The village is wealthier than the average village in a communal area, despite its sandy soils with very low fertility. For many households, a year-round income and food

source are derived from access to several cultivable wetlands, where vegetables, water yam (*madhumbe* or *magogoya*) and small amounts of rice are grown. For others, annual dryland farming is reliant on the unimodal pattern of rainfall. Many households in the village have both small (chickens, goats, rabbits, guinea fowl and pigs) and large livestock (mainly cattle and donkeys). Poor households tend to be limited to a couple of chickens and livestock numbers are dwindling through cattle rustling, disease,<sup>8</sup> distress sales and slaughter for festive occasions or as payment to meet contingencies.<sup>9</sup>

The (group) village headman retains strong control over his community, and governs Zenzele and 48 other villages. Zenzele was selected as one of the three field sites to be visited in August 2006 because the village headman is famous in Zimbabwe for having resurrected the traditional practice of *Zunde ra Mambo*. This is a form of highly localized taxation that, in theory, generates a food store to protect local food security. Zenzele is wealthier than many others in the communal areas and has an active *Zunde* scheme. As a result, it is likely that this village illustrates a better-than-average example of a communal farming area in Zimbabwe. However, despite the *Zunde ra Mambo* scheme and the involvement of WFP and a local NGO, there were a number of food-insecure households.

Until recently, agriculture was the main livelihood strategy in Zenzele, with men and women involved in agriculture throughout much of the year. Agro-processing activities converted some of the local produce for local consumption or sale either within the community or on the local or national market. Although agriculture is still significant, many households are now involved in the collection of natural resources from common lands (Boxes 5.6 and 5.7 on agricultural input and output markets, respectively). These activities include: collecting clay for pottery-making or bricks (large amounts of wood are required to fire kilns for these activities); cutting reeds/grass for roof thatching; cutting and selling firewood (despite being illegal); and gathering and eating/selling wild foods (e.g. mopane worms, wild mushrooms, collecting, roasting and selling termites, and catching, roasting and selling field mice).

Considering the frequency of natural resource collection as a livelihood strategy, a surprisingly large number of households have family members in regular salaried employment working mainly in urban areas (39 people in 22 households). However, remittances from these households were unreliable, mainly because inflation reduced the amount they were able to send to families. Instead, reverse remittances were flowing, with rural relatives sending urban-based family members food (mostly grain).

Casual labour (*maricho*) is an important source of livelihood in Zenzele village, but is associated (by the non-poor) with the “lazy” poor,

## Box 5.6 Fragmented and imperfect agricultural input markets

Before the start of the economic collapse, Zimbabwe had considerable success in improving yields in maize through the adoption of green revolution technologies (hybrid seeds and carefully timed fertilizer applications). This resulted in a rapid increase in maize production during the 1980s and 1990s but, as the economy moved into sharp recession, the use of hybrid maize seeds has declined substantially, because they have become scarce and expensive. Over 70 per cent of smallholders are now using open pollinated varieties (OPVs) (Bird et al. 2006). Attempts to support food production have included the distribution of improved OPV seeds and fertilizer by humanitarian programmes (Rohrbach et al. 2004). Unfortunately, these programmes have been marred by poor-quality seed and poor labelling (including a lack of information about whether the seeds are hybrid or OPV) (Rohrbach et al. 2004).

Availability of seed and key agro-chemicals is highly variable, and even farmers with the money to purchase the increasingly expensive inputs have not been able to obtain them during the last four growing seasons. Some inputs are available, but selectively. For example, “new farmers” who benefited from land allocations following the fast-track land reform, now receive subsidized fuel and fertilizer from the state. But they commonly sell these inputs on the parallel markets, finding this more profitable than growing price-controlled grains. When seed and agro-chemicals are available on the open market, hyper-inflation puts their cost beyond the reach of many producers.

Without fertilizer, yields are very low, driving many households into a downward spiral of food insecurity, income declines and an inability to purchase the next season’s agricultural inputs (Bird et al. 2006: 7). Diesel shortages since 2000 have made transport scarce and increasingly expensive, hampering rural producers’ access to markets.

who “don’t plan”. In addition a minority of individuals are involved in artisanal activities, including carpentry, blacksmithing and tailoring. Some villagers have other income-generating activities, including beer-brewing and NGO-supported projects such as soap-making, honey-harvesting and oil-pressing. Barter appears increasingly important, and individuals from neighbouring villages come to barter maize for other food products, utensils, soap, matches and new and second-hand clothes. For example, a finished clay pot is bartered in exchange for a bowl full of maize or a chicken. The two life histories below vividly illustrate the negative impact of sequenced and composite shocks on the lives of individual children and older people.

## Box 5.7 Distorted agricultural output markets

Maize, wheat and white sorghum are now classified as “restricted crops” in Zimbabwe, meaning that they can be sold only to the state-owned and -administered Grain Marketing Board (GMB) at below export parity. Liquidity problems mean that the GMB does not collect these crops post harvest, requiring farmers, even very poor ones, to pay their own transport to GMB depots. Richer communal farmers club together to hire transport, but this is expensive and is likely to exclude poorer farmers and those with limited marketable surplus. These, and other farmers, rely on illegal “side marketing” and beer-brewing.

The sale of maize by the GMB at subsidized prices further distorts local and national food markets. Anecdotes suggest that trade *within* GMB warehouses creates margins for certain officials (buying maize at the consumer market price, reselling at the higher GMB purchase price), and jokes in circulation during 2006 told of lorries driving round in circles, leaving one exit having bought at the consumer price, entering the facility at another entrance and selling at the GMB purchase price, without unloading.\* Despite commercial maize mills functioning at a fraction of their capacity, new mills are apparently being constructed by senior ZANU-PF officials because GMB will prefer party-owned mills rather than go to the private sector.

It could be expected that producers might shift towards the production of uncontrolled small grains such as sorghum and millet. But such grains are labour intensive, are vulnerable to *quelea* attack and do not benefit from substantial consumer demand. For example, local and national markets are poorly integrated and producers struggle to sell surpluses. The effects of decades of AREX promotion of hybrid maize is difficult to wipe away.

Tobacco used to be Zimbabwe’s main national industry and foreign exchange earner, contributing 25–30 per cent of total earnings and at least 6 per cent of total national employment (Woelk et al. 2001). But since 2000 production has collapsed (from 200,000 to less than 50,000 tons per annum) with many of the large-scale white farmers leaving the country to farm elsewhere in the region.

Cotton in many ways mirrors the development of maize production in Zimbabwe, with a highly successful local breeding programme and integrated pest management techniques. At the end of the 1970s, over 90 per cent of Zimbabwe’s cotton was produced by large farms. Through the 1980s, government policy supported increased smallholder involvement, and by 1990 smallholders were responsible for over 50 per cent of production (Keeley and Scoones 2003). “Single

## Box 5.7 (cont.)

channel” marketing ensured input provision, high-quality produce and competitive prices for growers (Tschirley et al. 2006). This relied on the monopsony enjoyed by the Cotton Marketing Board (CMB), which enabled prices to be fixed through negotiation with the Commercial Farmers Union, and these negotiations delivered farmers the highest prices in the region (Tschirley et al. 2006). During the 1990s, the cotton sector was gradually liberalized but strict quality controls were maintained, and before economic collapse cotton farmers were able to access inputs and seed relatively easily. However, by 2001 out-grower schemes had become increasingly important, because they enabled smallholders to access inputs (Tschirley et al. 2006). Within the context of economic collapse, the conditions of cotton’s success – credit, high productivity and excellent-quality cotton exports – have been hard to sustain and there is now a danger that quality control will decline and Zimbabwean cotton will fail to maintain the excellent prices it has enjoyed on world markets.

In the context of market collapse and reduced multinational investment, large-farm to small-farm linkages such as out-grower schemes and conventional contract farming arrangements have taken on a particular significance in Zimbabwe. Cut flowers and horticultural exports dropped to just US\$2 million in 2001/2002, but bounced back to US\$37.3 million in 2003/2004, at a time when production became increasingly smallholder driven, owing, in part, to the restructuring of the agricultural sector following land reform. In the context of input scarcity, the supply chains of some smallholder horticultural crops have been vertically integrated (Masakure and Henson 2005), and contract farming offers some “islands of normality” in the context of widespread market failure (Shepherd and Prowse 2007).

\* In February 2007 the Grain Marketing Board was reportedly buying maize at ZW\$52,000 per ton and selling it to politically connected millers at ZW\$600 per ton, who then would sell the subsidized maize at exorbitant prices (*Zimbabwe Independent* 2007).

*Life history interview with Natalie and Isaac: Reversible ill health and food insecurity?*

Natalie (57) and Isaac (66) look after seven grandchildren. Two are orphans, but the others were left with them by their daughters when the children were young because the daughters could not afford to raise them in town. The daughters are having a difficult time and none of



them has sent any money for over two years. They do not currently support Natalie and Isaac or even visit their own children, but say they will do so when they have some money. Natalie and Isaac have no money for school fees for the children. Previously one of their sons sent money regularly, but as he has got married he now has other obligations.

In 1999 Isaac lost his job with the dairy board, where he worked as a mechanic. In 2000 Isaac began to have problems with his legs. This illness worsened and he began to have problems walking and now he can walk only very slowly and tentatively, supported with a stick. The local clinic diagnosed high blood pressure, and Isaac received tablets that improved the condition. Unfortunately, the clinic has been unable to supply further tablets, so the condition has deteriorated again. Isaac also has slurred speech, which started in 2002, and a painful shoulder.

Natalie has also been unwell with what she describes as a "sore stomach". Although she received some treatment from the local clinic, this has not cured the symptoms, which are now so severe that she is unable to work. Natalie reported that since they became sick they do not have the strength to farm their land, cultivating only 2 of their 8 acres. This provides them with enough food only for three months of the year. The children are too young to work all the land, but sometimes do casual work for food. The household is regarded as one of the poorest households in their community and over the last couple of years they have received food aid for limited periods from the village headman and the World Food Programme (but this has never been enough to last through to the next harvest and they have had to limit their meals). Figure 5.5 charts Natalie's history.

Growing up in poverty has limited the life chances of Natalie and Isaac's grandchildren. The lack of money for school fees has already resulted in one child dropping out of school. The saddest aspect of this story is that Natalie's and Isaac's health could be easily and cheaply improved through the intervention of a community health worker and the money to pay for transport and treatment. With these simple interventions, the fortunes of the household would be at least partially reversed.

*Life history interview with Lovemore and Anna: Raising children in a high-dependency ratio household*

Lovemore Samuel Zenzele (74) is the brother of the local chief. Despite this, he was described by others in his village as one of the poorest people they knew. He is very frail and suffers from painful and swollen legs. His wife, Anna (84), has only partial sight in one eye. Between them, they look after five orphaned grandchildren ranging in age from 9 to 20. They struggle to feed the family and to keep the children clothed and in school.

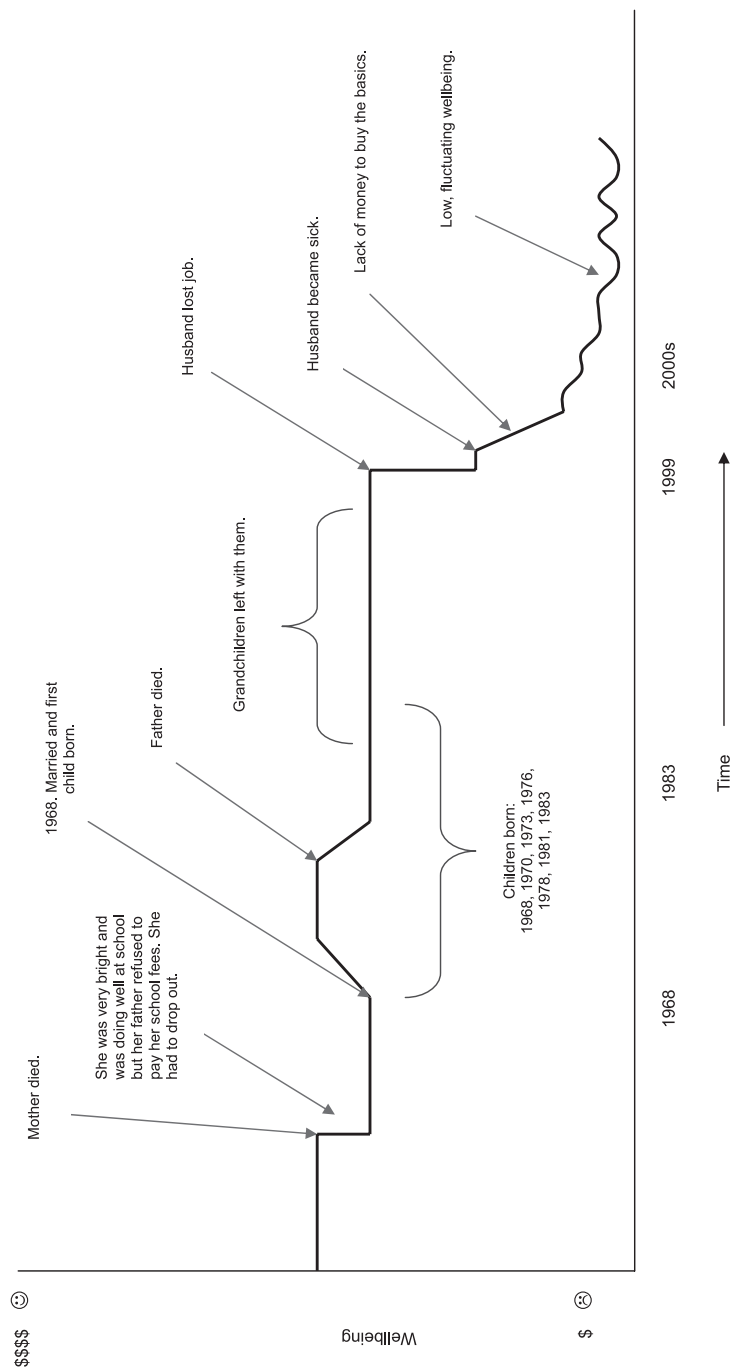


Figure 5.5 Wellbeing map: Natalie Musanhi.

When asked to describe changes in their standard of living over time, Mr and Mrs Zenzele said that they were better off when they were a young couple. During part of their adult life the couple lived in Bulawayo. Their return to Zenzele in 2001 was precipitated by the death of one of their adult daughters. Now responsible for three grandchildren, the couple could not afford to raise them in the city. Soon after, Lovemore lost his job and moved back to the village to join the family. Another daughter died in 2003, leaving two more children to be cared for by the grandparents, who have very limited resources.

The couple have 2–3 acres of land but must rely on others to cultivate it. They depend on the village headman to plough and plant the seeds and on their grandchildren to weed the fields and bring the harvest in. They get support from different people in the community, and have also received food aid from the WFP. Looking to the future, Anna needed treatment for two ailments and has a referral letter from the local clinic, but cannot afford the bus fare to the clinic. Without a more reliable income (or remittances from the children's parents), it is likely the household will continue to be food insecure and that the children will all have to drop out of school, affecting their future life chances. Figure 5.6 charts Lovemore's history.

These two case studies (Natalie and Isaac, and Anna and Lovemore) illustrate how the loss of work in old age can trigger a downward well-being trajectory for a whole household. In both cases, wage earners lost jobs at a time when the economy was starting to contract. Without a pension or support from their extended families, the households have had to rely on their limited physical ability to cultivate crops and on the support of members of the community. Moreover, in both cases, the additional needs imparted by an extended household unit have stretched meagre resources, and declining health has limited their ability to maintain the household's food security. The children in these households spend much of each year facing food insecurity and struggle to stay in education. This is likely to have a long-run negative impact on their development. Limited education will be difficult to make up later, and physical stunting and (possible) cognitive impairment caused by long-run malnutrition will be compounded by the absence of energetic and proactive parenting. These children will inherit few, if any, assets, limiting their chances of marriage and future livelihoods. These factors will combine to constrain their chances of escaping poverty.

#### 4 What more can donors do to limit permanent loss of wellbeing?

Should donors provide support to poor people in fragile and failed states? Put bluntly, yes. Without humanitarian intervention and without

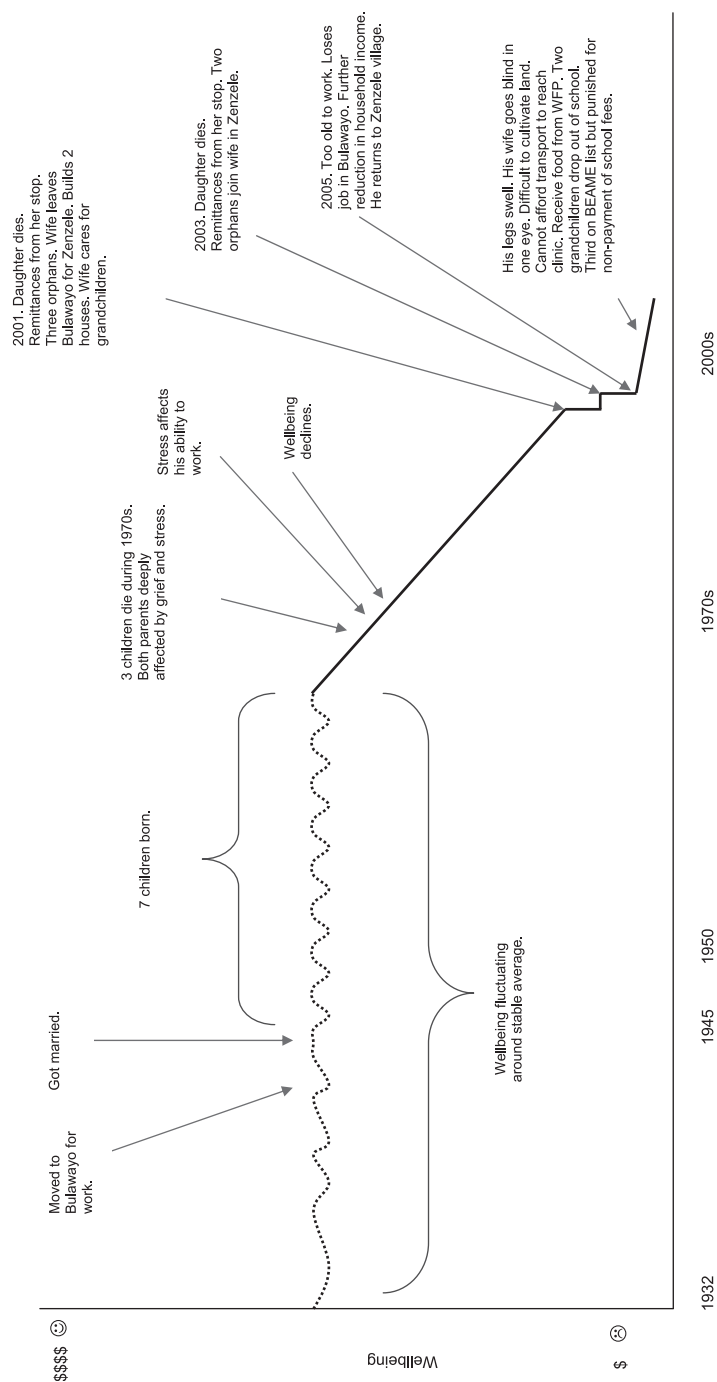


Figure 5.6 Wellbeing map: Lovemore Samuel Zenzale.

the type of intervention that helps to slow the erosion of assets and the decline in livelihoods into adverse forms of coping, the poor and very poor are likely to be driven into long-term poverty that is very difficult to reverse. Therefore, there are strong ethical grounds for providing such support. Many bilateral donors have signed up to the human-rights-based approach to development. For those that have, then “strong but unresponsive” states are just the types of environment in which the key duty bearer (the government) is likely to be abdicating responsibility for delivering the rights of a large proportion of the population. In such a situation, other actors arguably should step in, if they can.

One argument against intervention is that such an act (even through NGO partners and those directly in support of poor communities) will delay regime change. This argument appears to presuppose a route to regime change, which, in our opinion, is unproven (i.e. that without humanitarian and development support, the citizenry will rise up to depose despotic leaders and find alternative and more benign leaders to govern the country). Furthermore, evidence suggests that regime change involving violent conflict, rather than broad-based political change, imposes disproportionate costs on the poor, who need longer than other groups in society to rebuild their asset base and to recover pre-conflict levels of wellbeing. Multilateral and bilateral donors need to take great care in thinking through aid modalities for “strong but unresponsive” states. This is particularly so in a country where any external involvement is likely to be interpreted through a politicized and highly partisan lens. As a result, there may be strong arguments for bilateral donors, and in particular DFID, funding interventions to Zimbabwe through the European Union or the UN system.

## Notes

1. This figure is based on data collected by the World Health Organization in 2004 and may now be down to 30 years (Howden 2006).
2. The names of all people and many places and organizations have been changed in this chapter to protect anonymity.
3. For further and contrasting approaches to persistent poverty and poverty traps see the Special Issue of the *Journal of Development Studies* (2006: 42(2)) and Bowles et al. (2006).
4. See also Prowse (2003).
5. This section draws in places from Busse (2006).
6. Mining has overtaken agriculture as the main foreign exchange earner in Zimbabwe, with gold contributing half of this. The government plans to take a 51 per cent stake in all new mining investments. For example, Impala Platinum from South Africa has recently invested US\$800 million in the attempt to double production at one mine. Whereas formal gold output fell by 30 per cent in 2004, informal mining has seen a boom, with

an estimated 200,000 deriving livelihoods from gold panning. However, the state has clamped down on informal mining to control incomes derived from this livelihood strategy, allegedly arresting over 16,000 informal miners (see *BBC News*, 28 December 2006, at <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/africa/6214431.stm>), accessed 22 January 2009).

7. These maps draw on the method of presenting life histories used by Davis (2006).
8. Associated with the suspension of free dipping services and declining access to veterinary services.
9. E.g. to hire transport to take sick family members to hospital or to transport bodies.

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