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What Went Wrong With Zimbabwe's MDC-T?

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Synopsis

This paper attempts to identify the key issues that made the Movement for Democratic Change led by the late Morgan Tsvangirai (MDC-T) a weak political party. Although the time period under discussion largely deals with the GNU years (2009-2013), the lessons are not only relevant to the MDC-T now led by Nelson Chamisa, but also to its countless splinter parties. This analysis identifies twenty-one lessons that have to be addressed in order to revive the opposition and to develop it into a unified front that will be able to effectively compete against Zimbabwe African National Union – Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF).

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Table of Contents

| | Page |
|--|-----------|
| 1. Introduction | 1 |
| 1.1 Demonstrate leadership | 2 |
| 1.2 Institutions are more important than individuals | 2 |
| 1.3 Delegate and do not overstretch | 3 |
| 1.4 Listen and re-establish a culture of debate | 4 |
| 1.5 Use resources efficiently | 5 |
| 1.6 Effective internal communication is critical | 5 |
| 1.7 Take a systematic approach rather than check-the-box | 6 |
| 1.8 Never assume a damn thing | 8 |
| 1.9 Plan, prepare, and take opportunities | 8 |
| 1.10 Engage the security sector | 9 |
| 1.11 Focus on your goals | 10 |
| 1.12 My enemy's enemy is my friend | 11 |
| 1.13 Under-promise and over-deliver | 11 |
| 1.14 Improvise, adapt and survive | 12 |
| 1.15 Consistency on key Issues is imperative | 12 |
| 1.16 It's the media, stupid! | 13 |
| 1.17 Simplify your message | 14 |
| 1.18 Practice what you preach | 15 |
| 1.19 Reconciliation starts in-house | 16 |
| 1.20 Do not take people for granted | 17 |
| 1.21 Sometimes there can be no middle ground | 17 |
| 2. Conclusion | 18 |
| 3. References | 19 |

1. Introduction¹

Less than six years ago, in September 2012, Zimbabwe’s leading opposition political party, the Movement for Democratic Change led by the late Morgan Tsvangirai (MDC-T) celebrated its 13th anniversary at White City Stadium in Bulawayo. The venue was awash with red party slogans and memorabilia. Inside the stadium, thirteen cakes were arranged around a centrepiece of the party’s symbol, a large, welcoming open palm.

For years, the palm had stood in stark contrast to the clenched fist of the Zimbabwe African National Union – Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF), the ruling party. But by then, it had already lost some of its attractiveness. On that hot day in Bulawayo, the atmosphere should have been entirely celebratory. As MDC-T members streamed into the stadium, the joy at celebrating with their leaders the party’s survival despite thirteen years of attacks was palpable. But they grew increasingly restless as Tsvangirai – characteristically – left them waiting for hours to bake in the hot sun.

When he finally appeared, Tsvangirai released thirteen doves to mark the party’s years of existence. One did not break for freedom but flew straight into the thirteen-piece cake, where it perched just long enough for me to snap a photo. The image has stayed with me as the dove, a symbol of the MDC-T’s commitment to peace, turned that principle on its head: peace seemed to be demanding its slice of the cake. Perhaps it was emblematic of the ‘it is our turn to eat’ attitude that had become endemic in some quarters of the party.²



Figure 1: Dove sitting on cake during the MDC-T’s thirteenth party celebrations.
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To be clear, I have written elsewhere about how former President of Zimbabwe Robert Mugabe and ZANU-PF have been primarily responsible in pushing the country into a series of major political and economic crises.³ I have also argued that the 2013 election (as is also the case with many other elections in Zimbabwe) was not free and fair.⁴ Yet, the MDC-T that competed in the 2013 election was a weak party. This begs the question, what went wrong with the MDC-T during the Government of National Unity (GNU) years? More importantly, what lessons can the opposition learn from those mistakes?

This analysis is largely limited to the GNU years (2009-2013). Since then, the party has split into numerous smaller parties. Nonetheless, the lessons identified in this paper may not only be useful for the MDC-T led by Nelson Chamisa, but also for the opposition at large. Scrutinising the flaws of the opposition at this point in time is crucial given that they will face

a much stronger ZANU-PF now led by President Emmerson Mnangagwa. Under the Crocodile, as Mnangagwa is known, the party has strategically focused on rebranding itself while organising itself in military fashion. Consequently, the opposition will have to be much smarter if they want to not only stay relevant, but ultimately survive. Zimbabwe's opposition parties would be foolish to dismiss the euphoria surrounding ZANU-PF following Mugabe's removal from office.

In his *Rules for Radicals*, Saul Alinsky wrote, "To build a powerful organisation takes time. It is tedious, but that's the way the game is played – if you want to play and not just yell 'Kill the umpire'." ⁵ If the MDC-T and its myriad of splinter parties wish to do more than shout from the stands, they need to make dramatic internal changes. If they do not, their leaders might better spend their time writing their parties' obituaries.

1.1 Demonstrate leadership

When one former ZANU-PF minister was asked about the MDC-T's weaknesses, he cited lack of leadership as one of the top three, as "Tsvangirai showed serious lack of preparedness to lead and was greatly damaged with the issues that involved women and the Legend of the Seas fiasco." ⁶ Although Tsvangirai's "sexcapades" cost the party dearly, there were also other instances when a lack of leadership held the party back. ⁷

During the GNU years, Tsvangirai seemed more focused on shoring up his own power than abiding by the MDC-T's principles. ⁸ He deserves enormous credit for his early party-building work and his endurance, despite repeated physical attacks. But his appetite for liberty and democracy – the MDC-T's *raison d'être* – seems to have waned in the wake of challenges to his authority. Like Mugabe, Tsvangirai became the authoritarian enemy that he was once fighting against. Instead of demonstrating that the MDC-T was different from ZANU-PF, Tsvangirai, taking a page from Mugabe's handbook on how to maintain power, amended the party constitution that limited the party president's terms in office to two terms. ⁹ Despite the disintegration of the party, Tsvangirai's interest in sitting on the party's throne hardened during the GNU period. His waning popularity meant that Tsvangirai and his inner circle inevitably needed to increasingly rely on more threats, bribery and violence in an attempt to retain their positions (as was the case with Mugabe). When Elton Mangoma, a long-time friend of Tsvangirai and founding member of the MDC-T, recommended in the aftermath of the GNU that Tsvangirai should do the honourable thing and step down, he was assaulted by alleged party members before he was suspended. ¹⁰

Opposition parties will be up against a newly reformed ZANU-PF, which means they would have to take a hard look at what went wrong and learn from their mistakes. The issues unpacked below happened under Tsvangirai's watch, but the underlying message is that there is a great need to transform the opposition at large.

1.2 Institutions are more important than individuals

Related to the previous point, one of the key things that opposition parties need to deal with is to establish a greater reliance on institutions rather than individuals. The French diplomat and economist, Jean Monnet, famously noted, "Nothing is possible without men, but nothing is lasting without institutions."



The MDC-T has fallen into the same trap as ZANU-PF under Mugabe by organising itself around an individual rather than institutions. The party name, with the ‘T’ specifically referred to Tsvangirai. It suggested that he personified the party to the point where it would implode without him. Consequently, MDC-T became conscious of the fact that Tsvangirai is the party, and the party is Tsvangirai. As noted by former U.S. Ambassador to Zimbabwe, Charles Ray, who severed in Harare during the GNU years, “I was not convinced that leadership succession in the MDC was any clearer than it was in ZANU, but was based more on personality. This appears to have been validated by the brouhaha over the appointment of Nelson Chamisa to head MDC after Tsvangirai's death.”¹¹

One political expert notes that “this is not just an issue with regards to Tsvangirai. The MDC-T in general relies heavily on individuals to play specific roles within the party. When those individuals are temporarily unavailable [for whatever reason], they are inept to bring in substitutes to fulfil those roles in the interim.”¹²

1.3 Delegate and do not overstretch

“The building of many mass power organisations to merge into a national popular power force cannot come without many organisers”.¹³ That is how the MDC was born – it was an amalgamation of a multitude of organisations and organisers, but many of those have now disappeared.

The GNU created a vacuum within the MDC-T (as a party) but it also gave birth to new opportunities. The MDC-T recruited numerous smart, experienced, and energetic technocrats who were deployed in government, the Prime Minister’s Office, and the party.¹⁴ Yet, some party insiders complain that many of the newly recruited staff were underused because “everything was politicised” as argued by Toendepi Shonhe, the MDC-T’s Director-General during the GNU period.¹⁵ Some of these savvy individuals were unhappy about their lack of responsibilities while others simply became uninspired because their talents and skills were not being used.¹⁶ This was a huge mistake, as it negatively impacted on the party’s productiveness as a whole.

While there were party members with idle hands, there were also a number of senior MDC-T party officials in government who were completely overstretched. Some individuals, like Tendai Biti, Elton Mangoma, Nelson Chamisa, and Douglas Mwonozora wore way too many hats during the GNU years. For example, Biti was the Minister of Finance, a chief negotiator within the GNU, a chief negotiator within COPAC, JOMIC co-chair, Member of Parliament, and Secretary-General of the party.¹⁷ The tasks required of each of the above roles were too big for one individual and it was unreasonable to expect him to perform each position optimally.

Naturally, hardworking individuals within any organisation tend to take on more than some of their peers. However, with regards to some of the above individuals, they were also organisers, which meant they had enormous responsibilities they were not always able to fulfil. “Organisers are not only essential to start and build an organisation; they are also essential to keep it going. Maintaining interests and activity, keeping the group’s goals strong and flexible at once, is a different operation but still organising”.¹⁸ Although the above-mentioned individuals are all gifted in their own ways, they were overstretched in their responsibilities. The work as an organiser is simply too demanding. “An organiser’s working schedule is so continuous that time is meaningless; meetings and causes drag endlessly into the early morning hours; any schedule is marked by constant unexpected unscheduled meetings; work pursues an organiser into his or her home, so that either he is on the phone or there are people dropping in.”¹⁹



If the opposition is to revive itself, opposition parties need to focus more on delegating responsibilities, creating a clear division of labour, and supporting rather than overstressing organisers so as to maximise their productivity.

1.4 Listen and re-establish a culture of debate

George Mitchell, who was U.S. Senate majority leader as well as well as one of the chief architects of the Good Friday Agreement, which brought peace to Ireland, notes in his memoirs, “the most important lesson of my political life” is “to listen”.²⁰ But listening in a party context can only take place where there is a culture of debate. Even before the GNU years, the MDC-T leadership began to stifle debate, treating those who oppose key issues as enemies rather than establishing a culture where disagreement is welcomed or at the very least considered.²¹

One human rights activist counters thought that one of ZANU-PF’s strengths is that the party does not tolerate debate.²² Alex Magaisa, Tsvangirai’s former chief of staff in the latter’s role as Prime Minister, similarly notes, “People outside ZANU-PF like to criticise its seemingly rigid, command and control structure as inflexible and undemocratic but it is also part of its strength.”²³ However, the MDC was originally founded on democratic principles, the leaders have to demonstrate that in their own practices. As argued by the former Minister of Constitutional and Parliamentary Affairs, Eric Matinenga, “It is important that we accept that people have different views which need to be expressed freely and even if we don’t agree with them, we must take responsibility to protect the person who makes those views.”²⁴

As noted, during the GNU years, there were many savvy individuals who were party members of the MDC-T. However, the lack of respect for different opinions and a failure to listen to opposing perspectives stifled debate with the result being that party officials with good ideas were frequently side-lined. During the GNU years, some party officials came up with a the so-called “Kumbudzi scenario”.²⁵ In Shona, it means herding goats. The officials warned that if the MDC-T attempts to go into an election without making serious reforms then “we were going to be trashed by ZANU-PF “and the MDC-T would be left with herding goats.”²⁶ Instead of taking the warning seriously, Tsvangirai’s faction took it as an attack on his leadership.

Failure to rely on in-house expertise also resulted in a situation where the MDC-T has increasingly become more dependent on external consultants and ‘experts’ to advise the party.²⁷ Consequently, policies are externally formulated rather than organically grown from within. This could have a negative impact, given the gap between some of the local realities and so-called ‘expert’ advice. If the party is unable to source views from within, policies will also lack local buy-in. For example, MDC’s “JUICE” plan, was highly influenced by South African academic Patrick Bond instead of carefully developed by party officials themselves.²⁸ The result has been that there was a mismatch between what the MDC-T needed to promote versus what someone outside the process thinks is important (see criticism of JUICE in section 1.18).²⁹ This is not the same as saying that the MDC-T should not consult outsiders, as they could make valuable contributions towards their policy debates with new perspectives. However, the MDC-T should not become reliant on outside consultants at the expense of in-house expertise.



1.5 Use resources efficiently

Members of the MDC-T have long complained of a lack of resources, bemoaning ZANU-PF's refusal to grant resources to the party. In the past ZANU-PF has blocked the MDC from receiving state funding in terms of the Political Parties (Finance) Act. In contrast, ZANU-PF benefits considerably from state resources, which they have traditionally abused for their own ends.³⁰ There is no doubt that ZANU-PF has been much better financed than MDC-T throughout the entire GNU period. That said, the MDC-T should have made efficient use of the little resources that the party had at its disposal.

Tsvangirai's lavish lifestyle has been under public scrutiny for some time.³¹ Then there are also other less well-known examples of bad choices that he made at the expense of the party. For example, in December 2012, months before the general election, Tsvangirai allegedly went to Monaco with about 15 members of his friends and family. Zimbabweans do not approve of this type of flamboyancy. Furthermore, a few weeks before the 2013 elections, Tsvangirai supposedly bought two flashy vehicles for his then newly wedded wife – Elizabeth. Another party official similarly alleges that several properties were also acquired by the Tsvangirais during the period in the run-up to the election.³² One party official claims that many individuals within the party were angry because Tsvangirai and his kitchen cabinet spent this money in accordance with their self-interests while the party's election campaign was under-financed.³³

Some party members also allege that several of Tsvangirai's members of his kitchen cabinet, notably Ian Makone, Theresa Makone, and Dennis Murira, developed shrewd ways of looting the party's resources.³⁴ For example, Murira would ask campaign workers to submit receipts to him for campaign related jobs like printing flyers. He required the receipts in order to demonstrate some form of accountability to party donors. After campaign workers would submit the receipt for a particular job, Murira would again ask them to return to the printers to ask for another receipt because he supposedly lost the originals. This would happen two or three times, which allowed looters to double dip: three party donors would each receive a receipt for the same printing job.³⁵

To be clear, ZANU-PF's track record is much worse than the MDC-T with regards to corruption.³⁶ However, based on their previous behaviour, voters may well be concerned whether the opposition would act any differently from ZANU-PF had they been endowed with more resources. While the MDC-T does not have control over ZANU-PF's corruption, they can control their own behaviour. If their goal is self-enrichment, they should continue to loot party resources, but if they truly aim to unseat ZANU-PF and to establish a government that is accountable to the people of Zimbabwe, they have to spend party resources in accordance with this goal. As the South African struggle hero Abu Baker Asvat once wrote, "money is temporary, honour is permanent."³⁷ Fighting for true liberation requires sacrifices.

1.6 Effective internal communication is critical

Good communication within the party itself will clear up many of the issues that are mentioned in this analysis. No organisation can function adequately without efficient and effective internal communication.

MDC-T has a mammoth problem with regards to intra-party communication. It is concerning that even high-level officials within the same party speak with different voices on the same issue - ranging from Tsvangirai's sexcapades to sanctions removal - within a short space of time.³⁸ Consequently, the



message to lower levels and the public at large becomes distorted, creating the impression that the MDC-T members are serial flip-floppers.³⁹ Therefore, the opposition needs to strengthen internal communication, especially when it comes to policies on important issues (see section 1.16).

One of the problems that the MDC-T has experienced even before the GNU is that party leaders were concerned about (both real and imagined) spying.⁴⁰ They were afraid that ZANU-PF and the intelligence services had infiltrated the party and therefore they acted secretly. The result is that they were always paranoid about who knows what within the party. Nonetheless, being careful about a handful of issues is different from making sure that party officials are on the same page.

1.7 Take a systematic approach rather than check-the-box

During the GNU period, the MDC-T was unable to take a systematic approach to deal with important issues. Rather, they tended to take a check-the-box approach. A systematic approach is purposeful, orderly, efficient, and organised. A check-the-box approach, in contrast, is sloppy and careless, done without much effort, and it gives the illusion that action has been taken to sufficiently deal with whatever had to be dealt with. A systematic approach to key issues is particularly important, especially with regards to engaging the Southern African Development Community (SADC), the Zimbabwean diasporas, youth, and rural voters.

The way that the MDC-T engaged the Southern African Development Community (SADC) exemplified the party's check-the-box approach. While ZANU-PF had a permanent ambassador in some of the SADC capitals, ready to speak on behalf of Mugabe, Tsvangirai sent Jameson Timba in to do a few hit-and-run missions to a small group of countries. He was hoping to convince them of the MDC-T's righteous cause.⁴¹ The MDC-T largely focused their efforts on a handful of capitals, and they did so very minimally. One former Western ambassador notes that one of the MDC-T's biggest mistakes was to bank too much on the Western support while neglecting the region. This was a mistake given that (1) "many of [the regional leaders] came from and belonged to liberation movements similar to Zanu-PF"⁴² and (2) the importance of SADC's role in relation to Zimbabwe's transition. If you want to comprehend the relationship between different SADC capitals, you have to understand the interplay between the heads of state and government. Those relationships could make or break their foreign policy towards one another. That said, it was, quite frankly, an insult to some of the SADC leaders to receive Timba rather than Tsvangirai himself in order to make the MDC-T's case, especially at such a crucial moment in the run up to the election.⁴³

Engaging China similarly required a systematic approach. ZANU-PF has a long-term relationship with China, dating back to the liberation years. When Zimbabwe's crisis reached its peak, China stepped in and provided a life line to ZANU-PF. China has also used its veto on the United Nations Security Council to block discussions on human rights in Zimbabwe, which also had a negative impact on the opposition. The MDC-T therefore needed a strategic approach to China because it has played a huge role in obstructive a possible transition.⁴⁴ Of course Tsvangirai visited China in May 2012, but it was never clear whether he had a strategic goal in mind before he went there, what his plan was, and whether the visit had any actual impact. As argued earlier, there is a difference between checking boxes and taking a systemic approach to achieve your goal.

According to the International Organisation for Migration, there are between 500,000 and 4 million Zimbabweans living abroad.⁴⁵ Zimbabwe's population in 2013 was around 13 million,⁴⁶ which means the diaspora is potentially a major resource. Engaging the Zimbabwean diaspora is an issue that was

not only neglected during the GNU years, but arguably for much longer before that. There have been some hit-and-run exercises when MDC-T officials met with Zimbabweans in Johannesburg and London, but there has arguably not been a concerted effort to establish a mutually beneficial relationship between the MDC-T and the diaspora.⁴⁷ This is in stark contrast with the massive efforts that were made by the Albanian diaspora in the United States⁴⁸ and South Africa's African National Congress' efforts in exile.⁴⁹ These groups were well organised in terms of getting their diasporas to contribute financially to their efforts back home. The community in exile also benefitted from this relationship because they were able to secure their say in terms of policy making.

The MDC-T also failed to take a systemic approach to engaging the Zimbabwean youth, a group that represents a large percentage of potential voters. On the eve of the election it was estimated that nearly 2 million Zimbabweans under the age of 30 were unregistered.⁵⁰ One expert claims that "I think it was because they partly thought that they already bagged the youth. Their perception was that ZANU-PF represents yesterday's news and the youth will automatically vote for the MDC-T."⁵¹ Furthermore, "the MDC-T neglected the youth because in their calculation there weren't enough young people on the voters roll."⁵² One has to keep in mind that ZANU-PF did everything in its power to retard the voter registration process, especially in areas where MDC-T had strongholds.⁵³ However, this factor does not negate the fact that that the MDC-T did not have a proper strategic approach to the youth. For its part, ZANU-PF made it 'cool' to support Mugabe by rolling out stylish t-shirts, baseball caps, and songs about Uncle Bob.⁵⁴ On Sundays, in the period leading up to the elections, the then Minister of Indigenisation, Saviour Kasukwere, had a weekly two-hour long social media discussion with youths.

Finally, with regards to rural voters, Ambassador Ray notes, "I never saw evidence of the MDC working to redress the imbalance of ZANU's influence in the rural areas. It was never enough to just control the urban areas, since the majority of the population ... is rural."⁵⁵ In fact, 67 per cent of the population lived in rural areas during the time of the 2013 election, which meant that MDC-T had to do a major campaign to win over the hearts and minds of rural voters. However, by and large, the



Figure 2: the late Tsvangirai sitting next to Chamisa during a campaign in rural Zimbabwe in the run-up to the 2013 election. ©Nelson Chamisa

MDC-T's campaign was focused on what party leaders think of as their traditional voters in urban areas. The photograph in figure 2 was posted by Nelson Chamisa on 23 March 2013 and was taken in rural Zimbabwe. Although the duo made an effort to court rural voters, the photograph also illustrates the disconnect between the MDC-T and rural voters. Chamisa slouches in the couch as if he was posing for a Hugo Boss shoot. His extravagant suit stands in stark contrast with what the surrounding potential voters were wearing.

1.8 Never assume a damn thing

The MDC-T should heed the advice to “never assume a damn thing”. Party members made too many decisions based on assumptions, resulting in bad outcomes.

For example, during November 2011, there was a group within Tsvangirai’s inner circle that strongly believed that the MDC-T should push for an early election, because they somehow believed that they would win.⁵⁶ The assumption was, quite frankly, wrong. It was wrong because major reforms required under the Global Political Agreement (GPA) had not (and the bulk have still not) been implemented. This meant that reforms related to the constitution, security sector, media, electoral process and so forth have not been dealt with and therefore there was no evidence to suggest that the playing field had been levelled.⁵⁷ At the time there was also no evidence whatsoever to suggest that the MDC-T was popular enough to win an election under conditions where a free and fair election was virtually impossible.

In 2012, Tsvangirai’s kitchen cabinet was apparently shocked after Freedom House released a survey claiming that the MDC-T’s popularity has dwindled since 2010 and that Tsvangirai’s ratings have been going down.⁵⁸ This same group was apparently again astonished when, only a few months later, Afrobarometer released similar findings.⁵⁹ If Tsvangirai’s inner circle relied more on research, they would have concluded much earlier that the MDC-T would have had to step up its game to push for implementation of the GPA and to gain the public’s trust and support. Instead, Tsvangirai sat back, exploited his position, and assumed that MDC-T was on top of the world. When Biti argued that the party needed to take the surveys seriously, they were somehow dismissed and projected as Western attempts to replace Tsvangirai as party leader.⁶⁰

Reflecting on what went wrong, Jessie Majome, who was Deputy Minister of Justice, Legal and Parliamentary Affairs and later Deputy Minister for Women's Affairs, Gender and Community Development during the GNU years, also opines that one of the MDC-T’s biggest weaknesses was failure to demand and push for greater implementation of the GPA.⁶¹ Had more decisions at the top being based on research instead of assumptions, the MDC-T arguably would have pressed harder for the GPA’s implementation when they had the chance to do so.

1.9 Plan, prepare, and take opportunities

Planning is key as an organisation cannot move into any strategic direction without a proper plan. A good plan also requires an accurate assessment of the situation, as that will determine your policy and political options. Part of the MDC-T’s problem with regards to planning is that the party lacked evidenced-based analysis during the GNU period,⁶² an issue also alluded to in the previous section. Planning can only be effective if the opposition parties have a realistic understanding of the environment in which they operate. Furthermore, planning takes cognisance of the environment by mapping out a host of scenarios, each with alternative plans. It thus demands a lot of preparation. Some risks can be managed by going through different scenarios and by figuring out what would be the most optimal way of acting should things not go according to plan A. This is exactly where ZANU-PF officials are brilliant; they are able to play chess on two boards at the same time and they generally seem to be two steps ahead of the game.

In October 2012, Zimbabwe’s main political parties hosted the Second All Stakeholders Conference. Some observers claim that there was a remarkable difference between ZANU-PF and MDC-T’s preparedness for the event. ZANU-PF supposedly put a lot of time and effort into preparing their delegates for the event. Many ZANU-PF members showed up with the then draft document (and

supporting outreach documents) together with extensive propositions about the future Constitution. They also sang from the same song sheet, reinforcing one another's support and objections to the draft Constitution. In contrast, MDC-T members were by and large poorly prepared and it was unclear whether they had a plan of action on how to use the event to bargain for a better Constitution. In short, observers argue that their approach seemed ad hoc rather than methodical (see lesson 1.7).⁶³ Consequently, after the Second All Stakeholders Conference, the MDC-T was arguably in a much weaker position. The reason being, that ZANU-PF mainly utilised what negotiation experts refer to as positional bargaining. In practice, it meant they strategically raised more issues of disagreement compared to MDC-T, which ended up putting them into a better bargaining position. One party official recalls, that Tsvangirai took the Conference for granted, which is why the MDC-T missed out on some key opportunities.⁶⁴

Even as early as the end of 2010, despite the fact that there were some MDC-T officials (notably Eric Matinenga, Douglas Mwonozora, Tendai Biti, Jessie Majome, and Obert Gutu) who were tremendously serious about the constitution making process, some MDC-T leaders failed to see the significance of this historic moment. At least one MDC-T minister complained about Tsvangirai's lack of engagement with the constitution-making process.⁶⁵ On another occasion, in a small meeting attended by this author at the grand Meikles hotel at the end of 2010 with Nelson Chamisa, the then Minister of Information, Communication, and Technology, Chamisa surprisingly remarked that the Constitution-making process was not that important as the MDC-T would change the constitution when the party came into power. It demonstrated a lack of making use of an opportunity, as imperfect as it was. In politics, it is not always possible to change the cards that you are dealt, but it is about how you play them. Nonetheless, as one Western diplomat use to say to me, "the MDC-T never miss an opportunity to miss an opportunity."

1.10 Engage the security sector

Zimbabweans often tell a joke that goes like this: "Why do they call elections 'general elections' in Zimbabwe?" The answer is; because generals usually determine the outcome of the results." There is a lot of truth in the joke as the November 2017 military coup demonstrated. The security sector has been responsible for keeping ZANU-PF in power, which is why they have to be considered in any grand plan aimed at democratic transformation. After the MDC-T won the March 2008 election, they entered into secret discussions with Mugabe's representatives.⁶⁶ It was alleged that Uncle Bob was ready to step down. In fact, senior MDC figures were confident that he would do so. However, this did not happen and one of the reasons was because the MDC-T leaders failed to deal with the fears held by hardliners: those with blood on their hands did not know what was going to happen the day after the transition and therefore ZANU-PF pull out of the talks. Between 1990 and 2009, there were 65 former heads of state or government who were prosecuted globally for serious human rights or financial crimes.⁶⁷ It means looters and those who have committed serious atrocities have real fears that they will face prosecution in a post-transition period.

Ambassador Ray similarly concurs and argues that during the GNU; "The MDC never effectively reached out to the military, police, and security sector to try and identify the individuals within those agencies who were either sympathetic, or at least willing to be pragmatic."⁶⁸ The problem is that the MDC-T confused security sector reform with engaging the of the security sector. The former process is long-term, it deals with the relationship between the security sector and the people, and it aims to fundamentally change the professionalism of the military, police, intelligence, and other security structures.⁶⁹ Usually, security sector reform takes place during, and particularly, after a major

transformation. However, the latter process – engagement - should be an ongoing political activity that has to play an important role during the negotiations leading up to a potential transition. Security sector reform is generally much more open compared to the engagement efforts, which by and large happens behind closed doors. The main goal of engaging the security sector should be to get the military, police, and intelligence to support a democratic transition.

During the GNU period, Tsvangirai’s security ‘experts’ were under the impression that they were engaging the security sector when MDC-T officials attended National Security Council (NSC) meetings.⁷⁰ Those meetings should never have been seen as the primary forum for engaging the security establishment. Rather, other backchannels should have more actively been created. Consequently, the MDC-T failed to make peace attractive to the security establishment - the very group who has helped to solidify ZANU-PF’s hold on power.⁷¹ One moment the MDC-T threatened this group that they would be punished in a post-transition period, and the next the party made hints that amnesty could be on the table.⁷² It sent conflicting messages within a very short space of time.⁷³ What was lacking was a systematic and concerted effort to engage the security sector in a manner that would have made peace and a transition attractive. To a certain extent, Tsvangirai thought that by simply offering amnesty without linking it to the transition process would neutralise this group, which was not the case.

1.11 Focus on your goals

A political party without goals is like someone getting into a car without knowing where he or she is driving to. There is a lot of scientific evidence linking success to goals.⁷⁴ Therefore, everything the party does should be subservient to the party’s goals.

If the MDC-T followed this line of thought, it would have focused much more on the important things it needed to do in order to win the 2013 election, instead of sometimes blindly muddling through. If the MDC-T’s goal during the GNU years was to win the election, then more resources would have been invested into campaign financing or building the party than spending on Tsvangirai’s private expenses. To be clear, it is uncertain where Tsvangirai received money for all his personal expenses, but some of the major ludicrous expenses reported by newspapers during the GNU period include: reportedly paying off an out-of-court settlement to Locadia Karimatsenga Tembo,⁷⁵ paying for a luxurious wedding to Elizabeth Macheke attended by “more than 800 guests”,⁷⁶ and paying for housing and other expensive to his then South African girlfriend, Nosipho Regina Shilubane.⁷⁷ One MDC-T officials puts it this way: “How is it that America’s billionaire president paid \$130,000 hush money to Stormy Daniels while our Prime Minister (Tsvangirai), a leader of a poor country, paid \$350,000 to Locadia?”⁷⁸ Meanwhile, party officials complained during the GNU years that the MDC-T did not have enough resources to run an effective election campaign.

As part of this lesson, it is important to distinguish one’s goals from your position. The former provides greater guidance in decision making than the latter, especially in a negotiation context.⁷⁹ The example in the next section demonstrates how the MDC-T failed to become a stronger force that would have been able to compete during the 2013 election as Tsvangirai was preoccupied with his position instead of focusing on his goal.

1.12 My enemy's enemy is my friend

Throughout the GNU years, Tsvangirai forgot about the proverb that 'my enemy's enemy is my friend.' Matinenga observes that the problem with the MDC-T is that "Everyone wants to be a leader and we cannot have such a thing."⁸⁰ The MDC-T should have worked hard during the GNU years to build a strong pact with the MDC-N (led by Welshman Ncube) and other smaller parties against their overarching enemy, ZANU-PF. One former Western ambassador to Zimbabwe similarly notes that the MDC-T "would have achieved far more if they had managed to put their differences aside."⁸¹

In June 2013, weeks before the general election, Tsvangirai made a last-ditch effort to form some form of an alliance with MDC-N.⁸² If the party had a clear goal in mind (the lesson of the previous section), for example, to form and build a strong alliance with other smaller parties in advance of the 2013 election, then they would have engaged Ncube much earlier. Instead, Tsvangirai continued to snub Ncube at every opportunity possible, which made it unlikely that MDC-N would have agreed, at the last minute, to a grand coalition. It is no secret that when the principals to the GNU met, those present at the meeting included Mugabe, Tsvangirai, and Arthur Mutambara, who claimed to have been the leader of the smaller MDC faction. Mugabe included Mutambara because he sought to divide and rule Tsvangirai and Ncube. The former's decision to exclude Ncube however was, arguably, based on emotion: Tsvangirai excluded Ncube based on his position, his personal distaste for the man, rather than what ought to have been the MDC-T's primary goal, - winning the election. Other MDC-T officials acknowledged the importance of working with (rather than against) the MDC-N, which is why for example they developed a working relationship in the Committee of 7, which included the Constitutional Parliamentary Committee's (COPAC) co-chairs from the three parties to the GPA.⁸³

1.13 Under-promise and over-deliver

Shortly after the formation of the MDC, the party campaigned for rejection of the ZANU-PF authored Constitution during the 2000 Referendum, which marked ZANU-PF's first major defeat at the polls.⁸⁴ Many Zimbabweans supported the MDC since then because the party created the perception that it will treat people with dignity and respect, and that the MDC-T would deliver in a whole range of areas where ZANU-PF has failed. When the MDC-T joined the GNU in 2009, people's expectations continued to be fairly high, but faith in the MDC-T already started to crumble by 2012.⁸⁵ One of the reasons arguably related to expectations.

Some business and political leaders believe that one should "under-promise and over-deliver", but the MDC-T has done almost exactly the opposite. Delivery starts with basic issues, such as following up on discussions with party members to much bigger issues, like election promises. One expert on Zimbabwe remarked; "MDC-T officials are notorious for not showing up for scheduled meetings, and when they do, they [are disorganised] ... ZANU-PF officials tend to be better in terms of keeping to their time slots or at least rescheduling their appointments ...If the MDC-T cannot operate at such a basic level, how can they run a government?"⁸⁶

Although it was not always the MDC-T's fault for under-delivering during the GNU years as their officials were often blocked by ZANU-PF,⁸⁷ there are many instances where the party could have performed much better, or at the very least communicated their successes in areas where they performed well. The MDC-T's performance in facilitating economic growth and some form of economic stability are vital areas that were largely under-promoted, despite their success. Further

reasons for underperforming relate to lack of organisation, planning, preparation, internal communication, and other issues unpacked in this paper.

1.14 **Improvise, adapt and survive**

Upon the creation of the GNU, the MDC-T moved from being in opposition to being in government. When they made this move, as Titus Gwemende argues, the MDC-T did not have enough people with government experience, especially compared to ZANU-PF.⁸⁸ Majome thinks that the MDC-T was “naïve ... it was premised on the conviction that MDC-T was on the side of justice and therefore the party was going to do well and do good.”⁸⁹ But, while it is easy to be in opposition, it is much harder to be in government. The reason being that the role of the opposition is, quite simply, to oppose. However, to govern is much tougher, as it entails that the party has to be able to take responsibility, come up with policies, focus on implementation, and administer programmes. If the party fails (or is seen as failing) to deliver, it will lose support.

One has to acknowledge that the MDC-T worked within a system (from national to local government) that their leaders did not create. Most of the time, this system was under-resourced and dysfunctional and the MDC-T had to try to improve it along the way. Sometimes, the system was downright hostile towards the MDC-T, as was the case with regards to the security sector. However, the MDC-T arguably struggled to adapt to its new role in government. Still, “[the] basic requirement for the understanding of the politics of change is to recognise the world as it is. We must work within it and its terms if we are to change it to the kind of world we would like it to be.”⁹⁰

As argued earlier, the MDC-T was weak because it lacked good analysis of the environment in which it operated and the party leaders did not plan accordingly. But beyond that, they needed to be much more creative in creating opportunities where there were none. Simply put, the MDC-T failed to improvise, adapt and survive. Political parties “must be resilient, adaptable to shifting political circumstances, and sensitive enough to the process of action and reaction to avoid being trapped by their own tactics and forced to travel a road not of their choosing”.⁹¹

Another change that the MDC-T had to deal with was the fact that many of their officials left the MDC-T in order to take up government positions, which in turn left a major vacuum within the party.⁹² The party essentially imploded. Suddenly, some party officials had to fulfil several roles at once or they had to assume new duties previously occupied by other party members. This was arguably a big shock for the MDC-T, and they failed to mitigate the consequences. On the other end of the spectrum was ZANU-PF, which had to create more space and responsibilities for party members within the structures of the party as some of them were no longer ministers. Thus, while MDC-T officials were busy learning the ropes within government and ministries, ZANU-PF was able to regroup and reorganise their party machine, which is what took them into the 2013 election.⁹³

1.15 **Consistency on key Issues is imperative**

Some would argue that “in the politics of human life, consistency is not a virtue”.⁹⁴ The reason being that political situations could be fluid, which in turn means that one has to improvise, adapt and survive (as argued in the previous section). However, the problem with MDC-T during the GNU period is that it was consistently inconsistent on key policy issues like land reform, sanctions, amnesty, media reform,⁹⁵ and China.⁹⁶ One journalist recalls asking Biti on four different occasions about the party’s position on sanctions, each time getting a different answer.⁹⁷

The MDC-T's policy inconsistency was dangerous as it led to schizophrenic policy positions (internally),⁹⁸ which weakened the party's ability to control their external communication. This in turn, created confusion amongst the MDC-T's supporters, thereby further weakening the party. It is arguably for this reason why a former ZANU-PF minister reasons that one of the biggest problems with MDC-T was that it suffered from "ideological bankruptcy".⁹⁹

During the GNU years, those who observed the media and attended public discussion like those hosted by SAPES Trust would have noticed that, compared to MDC-T, ZANU-PF often seemed more willing and comfortable to send a wide variety of party actors to engage the public. This was not only a matter of experience. Rather, ZANU-PF was clearer on what they stood for (internally) which allowed them to stick to their script (externally). The MDC-T relied too much on a small group of individuals to engage the public. Perhaps they feared that they failed to cultivate enough people who were adequately able to confidently engage the public on a host of issues. However, as argued earlier, if people within the top ranks of the party have different perspectives about the same issue and then engage the public based on that, the end result will be a distorted message, whether the party official has experience or not (see lesson 1.6).

1.16 It's the media, stupid!

Of all the mistakes that MDC-T made, this was probably one of the most significant ones: they lacked effective communication with the media and thereby also the public at large. In a country like Zimbabwe, where the state media daily poison Zimbabweans with the ruling party's propaganda, your key priority should be strategic messaging and communication. In addition to schizophrenic policy positions which negatively impacted external messaging, which was the focus of the previous section, the MDC-T made three interrelated mistakes: (1) it showed ugly signs of mistreating the media, (2) it did not have a proper communication structure in place, and (3) the party failed to push hard for media freedom.¹⁰⁰

Firstly, the MDC-T underestimated the importance of the media. Arguably, up until 2008 and 2009, the private media gave the MDC-T a bit of a free hand (given that the party was the underdog). However, when the MDC-T joined the GNU, the media rightfully viewed the party as being part of government, and thereby also a contributor towards both problems and solutions. Some would argue that the MDC-T had certain expectations about the media. According to a media insider, Tsvangirai voiced his anger at the private media as they became more critical about him and his party. He expected the media to treat him and his party with kid gloves. Some journalists even received a "tongue lashing" after they wrote negative reports about MDC-T.¹⁰¹ In fact, during the GNU years, Tsvangirai's people had on a few occasions, physically assaulted a number of journalists.¹⁰² In the eyes of several media practitioners, the MDC-T started to do to the media what ZANU-PF had done to them for years, albeit not to the same extent.¹⁰³ The MDC-T's imprudence with regards to the private media arguably cost the party dearly. In an environment, where the public media is totally controlled by ZANU-PF, it was utterly important to actively engage the private media, because that was the most important avenue that MDC-T had at its disposal to talk to the public.

Secondly, the MDC-T was overly dependent on one or two individuals rather than a professional public relations department (see lesson 1.2). For example, when the Prime Minister's spokesperson, Luke Tamborinyoka, got into a car crash, the MDC-T had to scramble to find a replacement for him. If they had a media machine in place someone could have replaced him on the spot.¹⁰⁴ Moreover, during the GNU years, Douglas Mwonozora was the MDC-T's spokesperson. In addition to his role in relation to

the media, he was also a COPAC co-chair, and a Member of Parliament. As was the case with Biti, it could be argued that Mwonzora was overstretched (see lesson 1.3). One MDC-T official who knew Mwonzora says that his primary passion was the Constitution making process.¹⁰⁵ Then again, engagement with the media is a full-time job, you cannot engage the media ad hoc (see lesson 1.7). If the MDC-T had a proper public relations structure in place to fill the vacuum in the interim, the party would not have had to be too worried that Mwonzora will not be able to give the media the attention that they deserved and required.

In terms of social media, the MDC-T was also very late in seizing the opportunities that this type of communication has to offer, especially in terms of reaching potential young voters. Although the party was relatively active on Facebook, it did not tap into other social media forums, especially Twitter and WhatsApp until shortly before the 2013 election, which was too late. There are a few exceptions of MDC-T officials - Tendai Biti, Obert Gutu, Jameson Timba, and, most notably, Jessie Fungai Majome - who were active on these platforms. However, one never got the sense that social media efforts were strategically directed or encouraged by the party.

It is important to contrast what the MDC-T was doing compared to its competitors. While the MDC-T struggled to engage the media, ZANU-PF officials re-marketed and re-branded their party. One journalist said that they almost did a 360 in the way they engaged with the private media. While the MDC-T withdrew from the media, ZANU-PF became more accessible.¹⁰⁶ Another journalist used to remark to me that the Minister of Justice, Patrick Chinamasa, would even welcome journalists into his house late at night to go over ZANU-PF's positions on certain matters while sitting in his pyjamas. This anecdotal evidence demonstrates how ZANU-PF became more accessible, which enabled them to more effectively get their message across.

A final criticism of the MDC-T is that although party leaders were more active in promoting media freedom in earlier years, they missed key opportunities during the GNU years to elevate the issue.¹⁰⁷ The MDC-T might argue that some of their officials raised the issue a few times, but again, one needs to emphasise that they need to differentiate between putting out a press statement or making a speech, and really 'making a stink' about important issues (see lesson 1.7). Although the MDC-T had almost gone silent regarding press freedom during the GNU years, party leaders only picked up the issue in the last two weeks or so before the 2013 election.¹⁰⁸ Given all the links with the state and ZANU-PF, why were there so few complaints regarding propaganda via the Zimbabwe Broadcasting Corporation (ZBC), *The Herald*, *The Patriot*, StarFM and ZiFM?

1.17 Simplify your message

Political parties can possess the finest policies in the world, but if they cannot translate them into slogans that are catchy and resonate with the average individual, then they might as well throw them into the dustbin of history.

During the GNU years, some of the MDC-T policies lagged behind and needed to be updated and redefined. About two to three years after joining the GNU, the MDC-T finally woke up when they created a multitude of policies, and many of these were particularly related to the economy. One of example of those policy proposals included JUICE, which originally stood for Jobs, Upliftment, Investment, Capital and Ecology.¹⁰⁹ The last aspect – ecology – was later on replaced with 'Environment'.¹¹⁰

For the purpose of this paper, it is unnecessary to go into a detailed assessment of JUICE. Yet, it should be pointed out that the way that JUICE was presented to the public was ill-conceived. Zimbabwe is a low-income country with a gross national income (GNI) per capita of \$820 around the time of the election, and a poverty headcount ration of over 70 per cent.¹¹¹ Unemployment rates hovered between 80 and 95 per cent between 2005 and 2014.¹¹² The first idea embedded in JUICE – jobs – is therefore something that the average Zimbabwean can definitely relate to. Conversely, it is unclear what “Upliftment” means. As for the other three ideas related to JUICE – Investment, Capital and Ecology/Environment – it mindboggling why the MDC-T selected those as central pillars of their campaign.¹¹³ These are ideas that may even struggle to resonate with voters in middle-income countries. To be clear, these are important issues that are required for long-term development, but they did not belong in campaign slogans and they did not make for digestible soundbites.

In contrast, ZANU-PF consistently ran a campaign based on short snappy slogans such as “land reform”,¹¹⁴ “indigenise”, “illegal sanctions”,¹¹⁵ and “empowerment”¹¹⁶ while the MDC-T and Tsvangirai were consistently characterised as “puppets of the West”. In short, ZANU-PF presented concise messages to the public, while MDC-T’s messages were often more complicated, thereby distorting their communication.

1.18 Practice what you preach

This issue is a rather simple and basic: the MDC-T should have done more to practice what they preached. The MDC was originally born during turbulent times, characterised by violence and a massive political and economic crisis. The party consequently emerged as a movement that stood for an end to corruption and the building of democracy based on human rights, constitutionalism, and other freedoms.¹¹⁷ If these values and beliefs are not respected within the party, then why should supporters believe that the MDC-T will be able to translate these issues into reality if they come into power?

It is worth noting that within months of forming the GNU, “All but one of Zimbabwe’s minister from [both MDC formations] accepted an official Mercedes Benz.”¹¹⁸ During that same period, the United Nations Children’s Fund reported that 78 percent of Zimbabweans lived in “absolute poverty”.¹¹⁹ That is why some would argue that MDC-T was effectively seduced by Mugabe during the GNU period.¹²⁰

With regards to democracy, the MDC-T demanded democracy at a national level but some MDC-T leaders were unwilling to practice the same values inside the party. Undemocratic decisions were being made related to a host of issues, ranging from the imposition of candidates at the primaries¹²¹ to decisions that were made by Tsvangirai’s kitchen cabinet, thereby bypassing party structures and procedures.¹²²

Violence within MDC-T is also a serious issue where the party has failed to demonstrate how it is different from ZANU-PF. It should be added though that MDC-T violence has never reached the same scale as that of ZANU-PF, but violence is nonetheless unacceptable. Sometimes, violence has allegedly been directed from the top by individuals close to Tsvangirai. A Commission of Inquiry conducted by Trust Maanda for example identified several MDC-T heavyweights who were behind the violence and intimidation that rocked the MDC-T’s party Congress in 2011. There were also numerous other incidents during the GNU years, some even taking place at Harvest House, the party headquarters. In 2013, the MDC-T’s coordinator for policy research, Fortune Gwaze, was for example assaulted by party youths. The assault was allegedly related to factionalism.¹²³ At the time, none of the high-level

officials uttered a word about Gwaze's assault, but it was a taste of what was about to occur: a split within MDC-T, which happened shortly after the 2013 election.

Yet, violence began to stick its ugly head out within the party shortly after the MDC's formation. In 2001, Priscilla Mishairabi-Mushonga, Janah Ncube, Gabriel Chaibva and several other party officials were "beaten in the presence of some members of the [MDC] leadership."¹²⁴ When Peter Guhu, the former Director of Security, identified some of the sources of violence, he "was almost thrown over the balcony" at Harvest House by MDC youths.¹²⁵ It is interesting to note that Guhu's account of names reveals that many of the leaders of the violent group that operated from within Harvest House are some of the same people that remained part of Tsvangirai's inner circle during the GNU years.¹²⁶ The Stevenson Report specifically stated that it "believes that there is a need for the Party leadership to address issues of violence holistically ... the culture of impunity must be stemmed, and the example must be set from the top."¹²⁷ That advice, has not been heeded and the result has been that the MDC-T has lost one of the founding values – non-violence – that made the party attractive to millions of Zimbabweans who were tired of violence.¹²⁸ One human rights activist argues that "the MDC-T has to go back to their roots", which means reigniting these values (democracy, liberty, respect for human rights and anti-corruption) within the party.¹²⁹

1.19 Reconciliation starts in-house

Issues related to the politics of identity at the national level are also found within most parties in Zimbabwe, including the MDC-T. By the time the MDC-T joined the GNU, it was to a certain degree already a party divided along ethnic, tribal and racial lines. In 2005, "MDC youths camped out at Harvest House ... and then attacked people after they were fed ethnic propaganda about Welshman Ncube planning to take over the MDC."¹³⁰ The violent group that operated from within Harvest House were led by a "tribal clique from Mashvingo".¹³¹

These internal cleavages made the MDC-T weak because the party has not yet confronted the ghosts from within. As is the case at the national level, diversity has been exploited rather than embraced. Consequently, the MDC-T has lost a great deal of diverse appeal because the party's original support base included people from all walks of life. Some Zimbabweans have claimed that failure of Tsvangirai and Ncube in the run up to the 2013 election was partly also related to the fact that the former individual was surrounded by confidants who were anti-Ndebele.¹³² But it also became even more specific when it came to ethnicity, as Tsvangirai allegedly used the advancement of Karangas who he pitted against Manyikas and Zuzurus.¹³³

Needless to say, the MDC-T during the GNU years lost many of the diverse leaders and supporters who once fought a hard battle on behalf of the party, ranging from Ndebele leaders to White farmers. On top of that, the MDC-T also operates in a very patriarchal manner. Strong women figures, who played a vital role in mobilising support for the MDC during the party's formative years have largely disappeared exactly because they have been marginalised by the party.¹³⁴ Either opposition parties in Zimbabwe should continue to establish their own social cliques based on selfish identity politics and accept ZANU-PF dominance; or they can choose to move forward as a strong, unified collective that respects and embraces diversity.



1.20 Do not take people for granted

It is safe to argue that the MDC-T's relationships with their voters, civil society organisations (CSOs), the media, and the diplomatic community worsened during the GNU years.

For example, during the GNU years, certain representatives of CSOs complained that the MDC-T's top leaders were taking them and their work for granted, despite areas of convergence on some of the reforms that they were pursuing. One has the impression that the MDC-T expected CSOs to behave in a certain way and to tread carefully, as was the case with the media. Some representatives of CSOs have claimed that the MDC-T leadership called in some of them whenever these organisations were critical of the MDC-T.¹³⁵ That is unacceptable. CSOs have the right to judge the MDC-T with the same democratic or liberal lenses that they wear when they engage or criticise ZANU-PF.

Although the MDC-T was historically born from within civil society, that does not mean that CSOs owe anything to the party. Rather, CSOs have a specific role to play just like the MDC-T chooses its own course.

1.21 Sometimes there can be no middle ground

During the GNU years, some MDC-T members seemed liked they were good friends with ZANU-PF members. This is natural given that the parties spent a lot of time together in several negotiation settings, thereby so to speak helping former 'enemies' to see one another as being 'opposition'. Yet, there came a time, particularly in the run up to the election, when the MDC-T should have drawn a clear line between their views and that of ZANU-PF.

As Zimbabwe moved closer towards the 2013 elections, Tsvangirai (and the MDC-T at large) continued to treat Mugabe and ZANU-PF "too kindly ... Tsvangirai was sipping tea with Mugabe on a weekly basis, praising him at every turn. Meanwhile, ZANU-PF went on an all-out propaganda war against the MDC-T, painting Tsvangirai and the party as puppets of the West".¹³⁶ This was strategic. ZANU-PF knew they had to legitimise their cause while creating hobgoblins out of Tsvangirai and the MDC-T.

When Thomas Jefferson drafted the U.S. Declaration of Independence, he did not go soft on the British. He did not attempt to explore arguments for and against being part of the British Empire. Instead, the Declaration was a full-on condemnation of British government, which is why it was widely supported. As Alinsky notes, "Our cause had to be all shining justice, allied with the angels; theirs had to be all evil, tied to the Devil; in no war has the enemy or the cause ever been grey."¹³⁷ ZANU-PF understood this, but the MDC-T did not.

2. Conclusion

Although the MDC-T under Tsvangirai has achieved a lot during the GNU years - most notably negotiating a new Constitution despite great resistance from ZANU-PF, and brining about some form of economic stability – the fact remains that the party was weak going into the 2013 election. Many Zimbabweans continue to long for liberty, democracy, respect for human rights, and economic prosperity. These are all core values and desires that gave birth to the MDC. The fight for the opposition is thus not yet over.

The MDC-T has largely been shaped by Zimbabwe’s political environment. What is happening within MDC-T, as well as the opposition at large, is a microcosm of the national issues that Zimbabwe experiences. Some of the criticisms of the opposition are pale in comparison with the looting, human rights abuses and undemocratic practices related to ZANU-PF. Nonetheless, Zimbabwean voters do not desire ZANU-PF light, they demand a clear alternative. As argued by Matinenga, “People must realise that we are different from Zanu-PF...”¹³⁸

This paper identified twenty-one lessons that will have to be addressed by opposition parties if they are serious about becoming a force to be reckoned with. These lessons can largely be grouped into three clusters: internal organisational issues, strategic issues, and outreach. Many of the lessons are intimately interlinked with one another. For example, failure to address internal communication (lesson 1.6), to develop consistency on key issues (lesson 1.16), to simplify the message (lesson 1.17), and to take a systematic approach (lesson 1.7) to communication in this case, will ultimately entail failure to effectively engage the media and thereby also the public at large (related to lesson 1.16). Consequently, it is crucial to tackle the issues in a holistic manner rather than attempt to address them piecemeal.

ZANU-PF under Mnangagwa is much stronger and more organised than what it was under Mugabe. The party also runs on a bit of euphoria related to the removal of Mugabe. The MDC-T and its splinter parties look much weaker. There are too many individuals who wants to be the king or queen of his or her castle. While such an approach to politics might be lucrative for a few individuals, it will not induce change at the national level for the benefit of all Zimbabweans. If opposition parties really want to make a difference on the political and economic landscape of Zimbabwe, then they will have to confront the issues teased out in this analysis, and they will have to do so together. As argued by a former Western ambassador who served in Zimbabwe, “Politics is to want and will something for all of us, not only for me and for you.”¹³⁹

Summary of Lessons Learned

| Internal organisational issues | Strategic | Outreach |
|--|--|---|
| Demonstrate leadership | Take a systematic approach rather than check the box | Under promise and over deliver |
| Institutions are more important than individuals | Never assume a damn thing | Consistency on key Issues is imperative |
| Delegate and do not overstretch | Plan, prepare, and take opportunities | It’s the media, stupid! |
| Listen and re-establish a culture of debate | Engage the security sector | Simplify your message |
| Use resources efficiently | Focus on your goals | Practice what you preach |
| Effective internal communication is critical | My enemy’s enemy is my friend | Reconciliation starts In-house |
| | Improvise, adapt and survive | Do not take people for granted |
| | | Sometimes there can be no middle ground |

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