

Mugabe's Self-Belief Not Matched by Results

Author: [Joseph Sithole](#)

Everyone agrees that what Zimbabwe needs is competent administration, but few would concur with Robert Mugabe that only he has those skills.

When Zimbabwe began its steep slide into economic and political crisis, President Robert Mugabe declared that nobody could have managed the economy better than he had done.

He might as well have said nobody had ruled Zimbabwe better than he had – if only because he has been its sole leader for the 27 years since the end of settler rule in 1980. Thus, responsibility for the disastrous state of the economy has to rest squarely with him.

President Mugabe appears to believe his leadership is essential to the country's economic and political well-being. At the national assembly of the Women's League of the ruling ZANU-PF on March 24, he asserted that it was Britain that set up the opposition Movement for Democratic Change, MDC, in order "to protect their interests that were threatened by the land reclamation exercise". For that reason, he said, the MDC would never rule Zimbabwe as long as he was alive.

"We fought for this country and its resources will remain ours forever... I have 83 years of struggle, experience and resilience and I cannot be pushed over, and I have seen it all. It is my country that I fought and struggled for, and here I shall die," he declared to wild applause.

A political analyst who teaches at a Zimbabwean university commented, "If we didn't know Mugabe well enough, we would accept the views of those who say these are the empty words of an old man. Unfortunately, Mugabe believes every word he says. He believes he is qualified to rule until death. He sees it as an entitlement."

He seems to believe that in the armed struggle of the Seventies, it was he who single-handedly liberated his country from colonial bondage. Without his presence at the helm, he believes Zimbabwe would slide back into colonial hands.

And just as he sees himself as indispensable, he is dismissive of those around him, including his own ZANU-PF. Just last year he said he would not leave the presidency as long as the party was "a shambles".

The other point is that anyone in ZANU-PF who has designs on the leadership must wait until the day the party regains stability and Mugabe can finally relinquish power. This is a ploy the president used as early as 2002, when he said he would leave office as soon as land reform was complete.

But this position of strength looks as if might be coming to an end, as resistance begins to stiffen inside the ruling party as well as outside it. His disastrous management of the economy has helped to build that opposition.

The late Tanzanian leader Julius Nyerere described Zimbabwe as a "jewel of Africa". At independence, Mugabe inherited a country with a strong currency, yet today it takes more than 20,000 Zimbabwean dollars to buy one US dollar. Annual inflation is 1,700 per cent and rising, unemployment is around 80 per cent, and average life expectancy had plummeted from around 60 years at independence to about 35.

Seven years ago, Zimbabwe was able to feed itself and still export surplus maize to the region. Today there are clinics with no medicine, and pupils are dropping out of school either because parents can't afford the fees or because the children are starving.

Yet it was Mugabe who as prime minister expanded primary education and made it free for everyone, and opened health clinics in every district. But it is evident now that these good intentions were not backed up by a concern for managerial competence in his administration.

After independence, ZANU-PF soon forgot about its socialist "Leadership Code", according to which senior party officials were expected to declare their assets and income sources. Mugabe allowed corruption to flourish by failing to ensure officials were prosecuted even when they were named in official investigations.

The same happened with ill-planned and violently executed land revolution launched in 2000, which highlighted the fact that astute management was not a feature of Mugabe's political projects. Experienced commercial farmers were chased out of their flourishing enterprises, to be replaced by party cronies who saw the farm seizures as an opportunity to become fabulously wealthy without breaking a sweat.

Despite ordering seven land audits so far to see who owns what property, Mugabe has not acted on their findings, which reveal that ministers, local officials and members of the security forces acquired more than one farm each, in breach of the policy's stated goal of fair land re-distribution.

Similarly, Mugabe has proved unwilling or incapable of acting against senior officials who have been accused of illegally dealing in precious minerals. There are police reports showing that the president knows who is involved, but beyond empty threats, he has done nothing.

"The evidence is there that Mugabe is a poor manager," said another analyst based in the country. "If he had left office in 1990, when the economy and education were still functioning, his legacy would be unrivalled.

"Unfortunately, he allowed power to go to his head and believes nobody can do better. The result is a disaster that will take decades to repair."

The analyst said it was difficult for anybody within the system to openly challenge Mugabe for the presidency, because all potential leaders are his creations and are therefore compromised.

"Most senior ZANU-PF officials are beneficiaries of Mugabe's patronage. He made them who they are," he said.

The analyst said there were nevertheless officials who would be able to work in collaboration with current opposition members so secure the transition.

"There are many people who can do better, but we have to get Mugabe out of the way first. After all, at independence nobody had any experience in governance. What is needed for new leaders to emerge is an

orderly transition and transfer of power,” he said.

“What is the point of the opposition starting all over again when there is a lot of talent to tap into? “We need the best [people] for the leader to succeed.

“Mugabe believes he is the best. And the results are there for all to see.”

Joseph Sithole is a pseudonym used by a reporter in Zimbabwe.

Location: Zimbabwe

Focus: Zimbabwe Crisis Reports

Source URL: <https://iwpr.net/global-voices/mugabes-self-belief-not-matched-results>