

# Navigating Challenges and Harnessing Opportunities for Implementing Sustainable Development Goals in Africa: The Case of Zimbabwe

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## ABSTRACT

This paper recognizes the interplay between socio-economic, political, and environmental factors in shaping the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals in Africa. It is branded on the proposition that the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) has long presented a unique set of challenges. Despite these challenges, the author believes that Africa's rich natural resources, youthful population, technological advancements, and regional integration efforts offer significant potential for progress in implementing Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). This paper, therefore, delves into the specific context of Zimbabwe, examining key obstacles such as financial constraints, political instability, infrastructure deficits, and the impacts of climate change. It also highlights how the nation can leverage various opportunities mentioned above to overcome challenges and accelerate the achievement of SDGs. Finally, this paper uses a combination of qualitative and secondary data analysis to decode information gathered through surveys, interviews, and analysis of existing literature and policy documents. It incorporates a comparative study of other African case studies and policy innovations within African countries to draw valuable insights and lessons for policy recommendations. Finally, this paper comprehensively emphasizes the importance of international partnerships, effective governance, and inclusive development strategies in driving sustainable growth and the 2030 Agenda in Zimbabwe.

**Keywords:** Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), Zimbabwe, Socio-economic factors, Political instability, Environmental challenges, Economic instability, Governance issues, Climate change, Natural resources, Youthful population, Technological advancements

## INTRODUCTION

The implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) presents unique challenges and opportunities, particularly within the African context. This paper explores the specific circumstances of Zimbabwe, focusing on the interplay between socio-economic, political, and environmental factors that shape the realization of the SDGs. Despite these challenges, Zimbabwe's rich natural resources, youthful population, technological advancements, and regional integration efforts offer significant potential for progress. This paper, therefore, provides a comprehensive analysis and valuable insights for policy recommendations by examining these dynamics through descriptive and inferential statistics derived from surveys, interviews, and existing literature.

### Socio-Economic Challenges

#### Economic instability

Economic instability has remained one of the most pressing challenges that Zimbabwe has continued to grapple with, severely undermining its socio-economic progress. Hyperinflation has continuously eroded the value of the local currency and diminished savings (Hanke & Kuran, 2020). This chronic hyperinflation has

not only fueled a climate of uncertainty but has also led to a substantial devaluation of the “Zimbabwean Gold Currency”, making

everyday transactions increasingly difficult for the populace. These economic constraints have resulted in alarmingly high unemployment rates, sometimes exceeding 90%, pushing a significant portion of Zimbabwe's population into informal employment (Chitambara, 2017). Such high levels of unemployment hinder the government's ability to implement effective social welfare programs, thereby exacerbating poverty levels. The ripple effects of these economic challenges hinder the government's capacity to finance and support Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly those focused on poverty reduction (SDG 1) and decent work and economic growth (SDG 8).

Furthermore, according to a study by Kanyenze et al. (2019), Economic instability not only affects GDP growth but also hampers broader development initiatives. This research underlines that achieving SDGs will remain an elusive target without the political will to stabilize the economy. As noted by Mukasiri et al. (2018), the lack of stable economic conditions fosters a cycle of poverty and social disintegration, making it particularly challenging for countries like Zimbabwe to attract foreign investment, which is crucial for economic recovery. To this end, it is notable that while Zimbabwe has set forth ambitious plans to achieve the SDGs, the current landscape of economic instability poses significant obstacles. This paper, therefore, is based on the proposition that addressing these issues requires comprehensive policy reforms aimed at stabilizing the economy, enhancing employment opportunities, and ultimately creating an environment that is conducive to sustainable development.

### **Political Instability and Governance Issues**

Political instability and governance issues significantly complicate the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Corruption, lack of transparency, and weak institutions hinder the effective execution of policies aimed at sustainable development, particularly impacting critical areas such as peace, justice, and strong institutions (SDG 16). Scholars argue that political instability creates an environment where public resources are misallocated, leading to inefficiencies in service delivery. For instance, as noted by Kaufmann et al. (1999), countries with high levels of corruption often experience significant delays in achieving developmental milestones, as funds intended for health and education are siphoned off for personal gain.

Moreover, political turmoil frequently results in disruptions in governance, which can lead to inadequate public service provision. For example, a study by Bandyopadhyay and Thangavelu (2016) highlights how countries grappling with political uncertainty face steep declines in health outcomes (SDG 3), owing to a lack of investment in healthcare systems and human resources. Similarly, educational institutions may suffer as governments divert funding away from essential services to maintain political control or address immediate crises (SDG 4). The interplay of these factors underscores the urgent need for strong governance frameworks to facilitate sustainable development. As articulated by UNDP (2016), strengthening institutional capacities and promoting transparency are essential for building resilience against political instability. This holistic approach aligns with the notion that achieving the SDGs is not just about economic growth but also necessitates fostering governance systems that can support effective implementation. This paper believes that without a focus on creating transparent, accountable institutions, efforts to cultivate peace, improve health, and enhance education are likely to falter, as well as perpetuate cycles of inequality and underdevelopment. To this end, addressing political instability and governance issues is crucial for the realization of the SDGs.

### **Environmental and Climate Challenges**

Zimbabwe has also grappled with significant environmental challenges, including the impacts of climate change, deforestation, and land degradation. These issues have far-reaching effects on agriculture, water resources, and livelihoods, making it challenging to achieve goals related to zero hunger (SDG 2), clean water and sanitation (SDG 6), and climate action (SDG 13). Climate change has led to unpredictable weather patterns, significantly affecting crop yields and food security, which in turn exacerbates poverty and hunger (Mastrorillo et al., 2016). Deforestation, often driven by agricultural expansion and the need for firewood,

further exacerbates these environmental challenges. According to FAO (2018), Zimbabwe has lost nearly 40% of its forest cover in the last three decades, making it one of the countries most vulnerable to the effects of climate change. The loss of forests not only contributes to greenhouse gas emissions but also disrupts local water cycles, which further diminishes water resources critical for agriculture and human consumption (Chigunta, 2020).



Fig 1: Environmental and climate challenges in Zimbabwe - Pictures taken during the occurrence of Cyclone Idai in Eastern Zimbabwe.

Land degradation poses an urgent threat, with the Zimbabwean government reporting that about 41% of arable land is affected by erosion and nutrient depletion (Zimbabwe National Land Policy, 2018). This degradation not only lowers agricultural productivity but also discourages investments in sustainable farming practices. Scholarly research suggests that regenerative agricultural practices could mitigate these effects, enhancing soil health and increasing resilience to climate variability (Lipton, 2018). To this end, the interconnectedness of these environmental issues necessitates a holistic approach to policy formulation. Addressing climate challenges should involve community engagement and indigenous knowledge integration, as emphasized by scholars like Scoones (2016), who argue that local communities have valuable insights into sustainable practices that could be harnessed for better environmental management. Zimbabwe's environmental and climate challenges are multifaceted, demanding immediate and concerted action across various sectors to ensure food security, preserve natural resources, and foster sustainable development.

## Opportunities for Progress

Despite these challenges, several opportunities can be harnessed to accelerate the achievement of the SDGs in Zimbabwe.



Fig 2: Shows Sustainable development goals



## Natural Resources

Zimbabwe is endowed with abundant natural resources, including minerals, fertile land, and diverse ecosystems. The sustainable management of these resources is crucial for maximizing their economic potential and supporting the achievement of various Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). For instance, responsible mining practices can generate significant revenue that can be reinvested in health, education, and infrastructure development, notably contributing to SDGs 3 (Good Health and Well-Being), 4 (Quality Education), and 9 (Industry, Innovation, and Infrastructure).

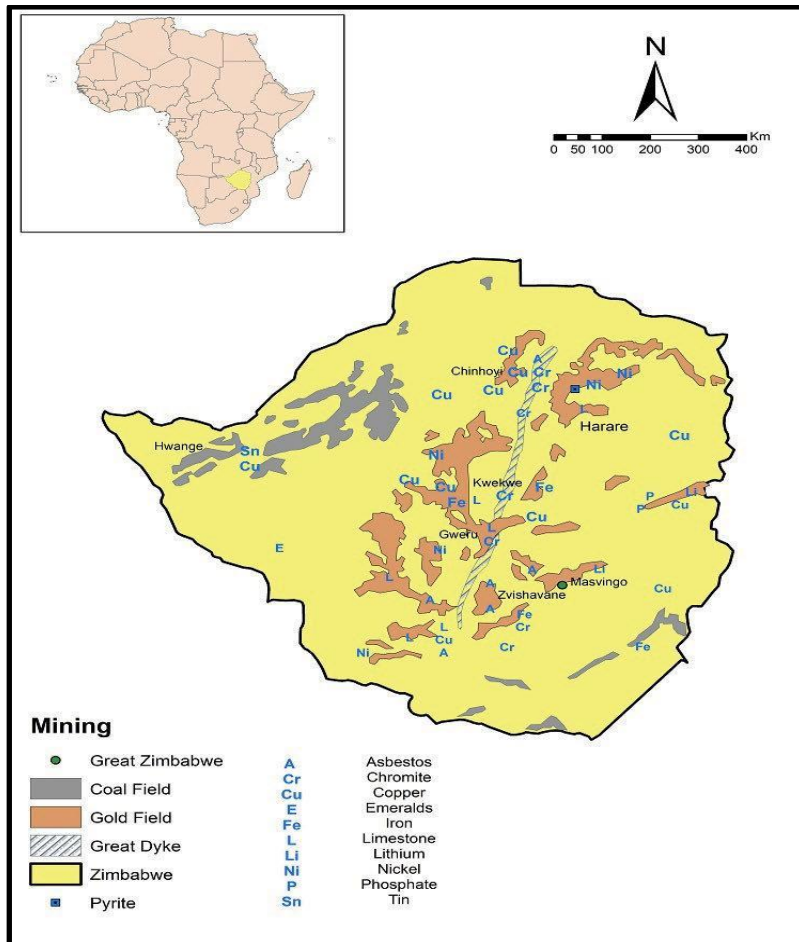


Fig 3: Map of Zimbabwean Minerals

This paper, therefore, emphasizes the importance of integrating sustainable practices in resource management to mitigate environmental degradation and enhance community resilience. According to Pegg (2017), adopting responsible mining practices not only aids in economic growth but also ensures environmental protection and social equity. Sustainable resource management can lead to job creation and improved livelihoods, particularly in rural areas, which aligns with SDG 1 (No Poverty) and SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth) (UN, 2015).

Moreover, the work of Cultur and Patz (2020) stresses that biodiversity conservation is critical in sustaining natural resources and ecosystems. Zimbabwe can enhance its agricultural productivity and natural resilience, further supporting SDG 2 (Zero Hunger) by promoting policies that protect biodiversity. Zimbabwe has the potential to leverage its natural resources for sustainable economic development while ensuring ecological and social integrity with various stakeholders, including government, private sector, and local communities, working together. This, therefore, provides a comprehensive and balanced approach to managing Zimbabwe's natural resources can lead to substantial economic benefits and progress toward achieving the SDGs. Effective governance, community engagement, and adherence to international guidelines can facilitate this transformation and foster sustainable development for future generations

## Youthful Population

Zimbabwe's youth population, which constitutes a significant portion of the country's demographic, presents a great potential to drive innovation and economic development. This paper argues that this demographic dividend can be harnessed effectively through strategic investments in education and skills development (World Bank, 2018). According to UNDP (2020), equipping young people with the necessary skills empowers them not only to participate in the economy but also to lead initiatives that promote sustainable development. The engagement of young people in entrepreneurial activities is particularly pivotal, as it can foster job creation and stimulate economic growth. The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) emphasize the importance of decent work and economic growth (SDG 8) and quality education (SDG 4). A study by the International Labour Organization (ILO, 2019) highlights that young entrepreneurs are crucial to building resilient economies, especially in developing countries like Zimbabwe. Their ability to innovate can lead to the development of new markets and industries, thereby diversifying the economy and reducing unemployment rates.

Furthermore, the integration of technology in education and business can enhance learning outcomes and ensure that youth are equipped for the modern job market. Research indicates that digital skills are increasingly important for employability, and investment in tech-based education can significantly improve young people's prospects (OECD, 2021). To this end, the empowerment of Zimbabwe's youth through education, entrepreneurial engagement, and technology is essential for harnessing their potential and fostering sustainable development. By prioritizing these areas, Zimbabwe can align itself more closely with the UN's Sustainable Development Goals and create a robust framework for economic resilience.

## Technological Advancements

Technology presents significant opportunities for progress in Zimbabwe, particularly in sectors crucial to national development such as education, healthcare, and financial services. Digital technology can enhance access to these services, effectively bridging existing gaps and elevating the quality of life for many Zimbabweans. For instance, the use of mobile technology has proven effective in delivering educational resources to remote areas, thus supporting Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG4), which aims to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education for all. Shumba (2021) emphasizes that integrating technology into education can transform learning experiences, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa, where traditional educational infrastructures often face challenges. This paper believes that expanding access not only encourages greater literacy rates but also fosters digital skills essential for the modern job market.

Furthermore, in healthcare, telemedicine and mobile health applications have the potential to revolutionize service delivery, especially in rural regions where access to healthcare facilities is limited. A study by Chikozhe et al. (2020) found that mobile health solutions could increase patient engagement and adherence to treatment regimens, thereby improving overall health outcomes. This reinforces the notion that digital solutions can be pivotal in achieving SDG3, which promotes good health and well-being. Leveraging technology for data collection and monitoring can significantly enhance decision-making processes. Academic research by Mavhunga (2019) highlights that the availability of real-time data allows for more effective implementation of SDG initiatives by providing insights into areas needing urgent attention and facilitating the allocation of resources where they are most needed. Harnessing digital technologies can lead to more responsive governance and improved societal outcomes, as highlighted in the work of scholars like Langa and Masiya (2021). To this end, Zimbabwe can not only bridge gaps in essential services but also pave the way for sustainable development by fully embracing technological innovations. As the country progresses, it is vital to ensure that the adoption of these technologies is inclusive and equitable, allowing all citizens to benefit from the advancements of the digital age.

## Regional Integration

Regional integration efforts under platforms such as the African Union (AU) and the Southern African Development Community (SADC) create a framework for collaboration and shared learning among member states. These initiatives are crucial for fostering economic growth and social development, particularly for

countries like Zimbabwe that face numerous developmental challenges. By engaging with neighboring countries, Zimbabwe can harness shared resources, exchange knowledge, and adopt best practices that promote sustainable development. Regional cooperation can lead to enhanced trade opportunities and economic diversification, which are vital for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). For instance, in their analysis, Adeyemo and Ojekunle (2020) assert that regional integration facilitates market access, reduces trade barriers, and encourages foreign direct investment, which collectively drives economic development. Furthermore, the importance of SDG 17, which emphasizes partnerships for the goals, cannot be overstated. Regional trade agreements are instrumental in enhancing economic opportunities by creating platforms for collaboration. Ayoob (2003) contends that effective regionalism can empower countries to negotiate better terms for trade and resources, thus enhancing their bargaining power on a global scale. This paper therefore believes that Zimbabwe can not only progress towards achieving the SDGs but also play a significant role in driving regional cooperation that addresses pressing economic and social issues by leveraging regional integration frameworks like the AU and SADC. To this end, such strategic partnerships are essential for building resilience against economic shocks and fostering inclusive growth across the region.

### Comparative Insights from Other African Countries

This paper is based on the proposition that a comparative study of other African countries offers valuable lessons for Zimbabwe, particularly in the realm of sustainable development. These examples underscore the potential strategies Zimbabwe could adopt to bolster its sustainable development initiatives.

Tab 1: Table for comparison

Country	Key Focus Area	SDG Alignment	Strengths & Innovations	Relevance to Zimbabwe's path forward
Rwanda	Good Governance & Anti-Corruption	SDG 16 (Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions)	Transparent institutions - Community participation - Capacity building for local governance	Strengthen public trust and institutional accountability
Kenya	Digital Agriculture & Tech Empowerment	SDG 2 (Zero Hunger) SDG 8 (Decent Work)	- Mobile platforms for market access - Precision farming - Financial inclusion via mobile banking	Catalyze climate-smart agriculture and rural innovation
Ghana	Education & Health Systems	SDG 3 (Good Health) SDG 4 (Quality Education)	-Free SHS policy - National Health Insurance Scheme (NHIS) - Improved literacy and health outcomes	Boost human capital for long-term economic resilience
Botswana	Resource Management & Economic Diversification	SDG 9 (Industry & Infrastructure) SDG 12 (Responsible Consumption)	- Diamond revenue governance - Investment in public services - Anti-corruption mechanisms	Reinforce resource transparency and diversify economic sectors

### Rwanda

Rwanda's commitment to good governance and its stringent anti-corruption measures have notably enhanced its implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), especially in governance and institutional strength (SDG 16). The government's unwavering focus on transparency and accountability has fostered a culture of trust among its citizens and international partners. According to Nkurunziza (2020), Rwanda's effective leadership and rigorous governance frameworks have led to substantial progress in various socio-economic indicators, such as education, healthcare, and infrastructure development. Moreover, Rwanda

encourages participation from local communities in decision-making processes, which enhances civic engagement and ensures that national policies reflect the diverse needs of the population. These practices have demonstrated how strong institutions play a crucial role in achieving developmental objectives by facilitating effective service delivery and promoting social equity. Moreover, Rwanda has invested significantly in capacity building, empowering local authorities and civil society organizations to actively participate in governance processes. This inclusive approach not only strengthens institutional frameworks but also enhances civic engagement and public participation. The alignment of national policies with the SDGs reflects Rwanda's commitment to sustainable development, driving initiatives that address the diverse needs of its population. As a result, the nation serves as an inspiring model for other countries striving to prioritize good governance and tackle corruption, underscoring the critical relationship between strong institutions and successful developmental outcomes. To this end, Zimbabwe may better navigate its unique challenges and accelerate its progress toward achieving the SDGs through learning from the successful governance practices in Rwanda.

## **Kenya**

Kenya's innovative use of technology in agricultural development serves as a compelling model for enhancing food security and economic growth. The integration of digital tools in agriculture, such as mobile apps for market access, precision farming technologies, and data-sharing platforms, has demonstrated significant improvements in productivity and income for farmers, directly contributing to SDG 2 (Zero Hunger) and SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth) (Otenyo, 2021). Notably, the work of Muriuki et al. (2019) highlights how digital innovations not only increase efficiency in agricultural practices but also empower smallholder farmers by providing them with vital information. Access to real-time weather data, pest and disease management insights, and market trends equips these farmers to make informed decisions, thereby enhancing their resilience against climate change impacts. Furthermore, the rise of e-commerce platforms allows farmers to connect directly with consumers, cutting out middlemen and increasing their profit margins. This digital transformation promotes financial inclusion, as mobile banking services enable farmers to save, borrow, and invest more effectively. In essence, Kenya's approach embodies a holistic strategy that combines technology, agriculture, and community empowerment, paving the way for sustainable economic growth and improved livelihoods in the agricultural sector. This comprehensive model not only addresses immediate challenges in food security but also lays the groundwork for future resilience in the face of global challenges.

## **Ghana**

Ghana's approach to education and health reflects a comprehensive strategy aimed at enhancing human capital, which is essential for sustainable development. The government has prioritized access to quality education through policies such as the Free Senior High School initiative, making secondary education accessible to all. This has resulted in increased enrollment numbers and improved literacy rates, crucial for fostering a knowledgeable workforce. In healthcare, Ghana has implemented the National Health Insurance Scheme (NHIS), which aims to provide affordable healthcare to its citizens. This scheme has improved health outcomes, particularly for vulnerable populations, by covering a wide range of health services. Such investments in education and health not only empower individuals but also drive economic growth and community resilience. To this end, Zimbabwe can create a more sustainable and equitable development path, reinforcing its commitment to achieving the SDGs while enhancing the well-being of its citizens through prioritizing education and health funding to ensure that Zimbabwe's population is well-equipped to contribute to economic growth and social cohesion.

## **Botswana**

Botswana has adopted a prudent and transparent approach to resource management, particularly concerning its diamond mining industry. The government has focused on maximizing the benefits of its resources through a strategy that includes revenue management, investment in public services, and diversification of the economy. The establishment of strong institutions to oversee resource exploitation has prevented mismanagement and fostered economic stability. Zimbabwe can draw several valuable lessons for its pursuit of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). It is therefore imperative to implement transparent mechanisms to manage natural resources will help prevent corruption and ensure that the revenue generated benefits the broader population.



To this end, it can thrive through learning from these and other countries, especially in reducing dependence on a single sector through economic diversification will enhance resilience and sustainable economic growth. It can also thrive through adopting practices like building robust institutions that are crucial for maintaining the rule of law, promoting accountability, and achieving long-term development objectives. This paper is based on the proposition that Integrated approaches that prioritize both institutional strength and technological innovation could prove pivotal in overcoming barriers to development in the country.

## POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

To navigate the challenges and harness the opportunities for implementing the SDGs, the following policy recommendations are proposed:

1. Strengthen Governance and Institutions through enhancing transparency, accountability, and efficiency in public institutions to create a conducive environment for sustainable development.
2. Implement anti-corruption measures and promote good governance practices.
3. Promote Sustainable Resource Management through implementing policies that ensure the sustainable use of natural resources, balancing economic growth with environmental conservation.
4. Develop frameworks for responsible mining and agriculture.
5. Invest in Holistic Youth Empowerment through education and skills development, as well as fostering innovation and entrepreneurship.
6. Provide vocational training and support for young entrepreneurs.
7. Leverage digital technology to improve access to services, enhance data collection, and monitor progress effectively.
8. Promote the use of mobile technology in education and healthcare delivery.
9. Enhance Regional Collaboration through active participation in regional integration efforts to share resources, knowledge, and best practices.
10. Strengthen regional trade agreements and cooperation.
11. Climate Resilience by developing and implementing strategies to mitigate and adapt to climate change, protecting vulnerable communities and ecosystems.
12. Promote climate-smart agriculture and sustainable land management practices.

## CONCLUSION

This paper concludes that implementing the Sustainable Development Goals in Zimbabwe is a complex but achievable task. This conclusion is made on the basis that Zimbabwe can make significant progress toward sustainable development by addressing economic, political, and environmental challenges, as well as leveraging the country's opportunities. It also makes a conclusive recommendation on International partnerships, effective governance, and inclusive development strategies, which are crucial to driving this progress and achieving the 2030 Agenda. It is clear from the above discussions that through collaborative efforts and adaptive strategies, Zimbabwe can create a more equitable, prosperous, and sustainable future for all its citizens.

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