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Challenges and Opportunities of the postcolonial state university education in Africa: An appraisal of *Hunhu/Ubuntu* in national-moral development in Zimbabwe

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Abstract

Postcolonial state universities have continued to serve African countries in producing highly educated professionals pertinent for the national economy and development. Unfortunately the moral philosophy of education in tertiary training institutions has been unclear for its products lacked moral relevance to local needs. This failure can be attributed to universities that traditionally hold on to foreign philosophies of education not rooted in local morality. It is for this cause that this paper seeks to appraise the role of state university education in developing ethical and moral development through fostering hunhu/ubuntu philosophy. The aim of this article is to highlight the challenges and opportunities advanced by the post-colonial state university education to national-moral development in Zimbabwe. The study is mainly a review of related literature on the moral philosophy of state university education since independence in Zimbabwe. Local universities are challenged by developments in the moral climate in the country, which demands for a major curricula review, to improve on professional moral-ethical contact in reshaping the world of the 21ˢᵗ century. In order to curb the social, political and economic ills experienced in Zimbabwe, this article proposes the moral and ethical approach using hunhu/ubuntu philosophy in remedying actions that are disruptive to the common good. The study also recommends that African universities inculcate personhood in its products using this hunhu/ubuntu philosophy.

Introduction

This article purposes at appraising the role of university education in cultivating moral development in Zimbabwe. Most institutions of higher learning in Zimbabwe do not seem to have a deliberate regard for moral issues in their study courses. Universities rather focus on courses that directly provide students with the expertise they need for their professions, thereby lacking on the moral base to practice in their fields of expertise (Muyambo & Machingura). The article appraises the moral significance of tertiary education in Africa in dealing with the influence of western philosophy of education premised on capitalism, materialism and imperialism. Since independence, most Zimbabwean universities have been influenced by the British culture and the British system of education. For this reason, university education in Zimbabwe is here criticised as lacking indigeneity, innovation, and relevance to local needs and challenges. Following an observational and descriptive survey design on media and literature study of ethical practice among high ranking professionals in Zimbabwe, the article argues for the use of *hunhu/ubuntu* to address moral issues in the context of tertiary training.

The study recommends the use of *hunhu/ubuntu* in transforming university education to make it relevant, innovative and responsive to local needs. Even the UN in its Human Development Report supports this saying "Success is likely to be the result of gradual integration with the world economy and accompanied by investment in people, institutions and infrastructure" (UNDP, 2013, p. 4). Additionally, the study calls for fostering continuous dialogue among university administrators on reviewing university activities and using local ideas and philosophies to professionalise the work of the university as well as impact university students coming out of the system in line with the expectations and needs of their societies.

Research questions

Before going further, the following questions help us think through the discussions that will follow:

> *i) How should the university curriculum in postcolonial Zimbabwe positively impact national and moral*

development?

ii) *How should university education positively affect the Zimbabwean society?*

iii) *Is there a universal logic to education and national development today?*

Hunhu/Ubuntu philosophy and university education

Every society has a philosophy that acts as the soul in its development. *Hunhu* (popularised by Desmond Tutu as *ubuntu* in South Africa) is a philosophy that is also associated with the Kenyan theologian, J. S. Mbiti (1969) that can assist our educationists in addressing and cultivating interest on teaching contextual and contemporary moral issues in our tertiary institutions. *Hunhu/Ubuntu* 'the foundation and edifice of African philosophy' (Ramose, 1999: 49), is linked to the religious, political, social, economic and civic life of the people at both higher levels of cognitive activity and moral self-consciousness (Tschaepe, 2013). To justify the need for *hunhu/ubuntu* philosophy in local university education, this article probes into the postmillennial situation in Zimbabwe, where in 2014 alone, more than five high profiles cases of corruption in government supported parastatals were reported (The Herald, 25/01/2014, 12/02/2014, 27/01/2014; The Daily News, 29/01/2014, 27/01/2014, 08/02/2014; The NehandaRadio, 27/01/2014, 12/02/2014, 10/03/2014). This calls for an urgent revisit in our philosophy of education, and the consequent need for professional training on morality and responsibility in the public arena.

Many Zimbabwean authors penned ideas on the definition, understanding and application of *hunhu* philosophy in the development of a person in the society (Makuvaza & Gora, 2014; Makuvaza & Gatsi, 2014; Hapanyengwi, 2013; Makuvaza & Hapanyengwi, 2013; Rukuni, 2012; Mangena, 2012a, 2012b, 2011; Makuvaza, 2010, 2008; Samkange & Samkange, 1980; Pierce, 1990). In this article, an appeal to *hunhu/ubuntu* philosophy is deliberately made towards self-generated initiatives by the local universities to advance national and moral development that will serve the broader Zimbabwean community. Makuvaza (1996) took note of the increase of white collar

crimes, and called for a critical reflection on the Zimbabwean philosophy of education from its erstwhile British theoretical base that was failing to produce professionals who have personhood (*hunhu/ubuntu*). Failure of ethics among professionals results from lack of rootedness and historicity in an ongoing human community. *Hunhu/Ubuntu* thus, is a philosophy of life that roots individuals into their African world, prompting us to suggest the need to revisit *hunhu/ubuntu* philosophy in our tertiary education and training systems. Skills and knowledge infused with *hunhu/ubuntu* philosophy result in a wholesome professional practice rooted in principles accepted by the community. In *hunhu/ubuntu* philosophy, no individual takes precedence over the group (Tschaepe, 2013; Shutte, 2008; Prozesky, 2003; Ramose, 1999). *Hunhu/Ubuntu* philosophy thus acquaints an African and international audience with suitable local views and ideas on perspectives of education that can guide tertiary institutions to produce professionals that are genuinely ethical and intentional on Africa's development.

While the purpose of this paper is not to discuss the understanding of *hunhu/ubuntu* philosophy (Hapanyengwi, 2013), its reference to trueness and fullness of human moral qualities in a person "sets a premium on human relations" to help regulate social and political activities in society (Samkange & Samkange, 1980, p. 34). This study is inspired by earlier contributions of Africa to education, agriculture, civilisation and human development. It emphasises human interconnectedness and otherness, that is, a 'wellspring flowing with African ontology and epistemology' or 'African philosophy' (Ramose, 1999, p. 49), which contradicts Cartesian theories of personhood (Chege, 2008). Here *hunhu/ubuntu* philosophy calls for personal responsibility (Nafukho, 2006), for it is guided by the feeling of kindness to one's fellows (Letseka, 2000; Nafukho, Amutabi & Otunga, 2005), and transcends teachings of particular age groups done today. Bangura (2005) a social learning theorist, suggests that learning is done at child level (pedagogy), working level (ergonagy) and as self-determined learning (heutagogy). *Hunhu/Ubuntu* philosophy served as a social foundation for most African peoples because of its principle of communitarianism (Magesa, 1997) engraved on people's hearts (Feris & Moitui, 2011), which emphasises fairness, otherness, openness,

charity, mutuality and reciprocity among others. Situating individuality within the social context of community history, culture, aspirations and values had the wisdom of eradicating selfishness and self-serving interests (Hapanyengwi, 2013, p. 32) 'labelled as wizardry among the Karanga of Zimbabwe'. The philosophy of education based on this concept among Africans thus articulates compassion and respect for others, and can be used for social-transformative education for it can provide a social ethic, rule of conduct or moral order in society.

Further, the philosophy's emphasis on otherness and interconnectedness creates and regulates human conduct that values human relations. Thus social-transformative education is possible because *hunhu/ubuntu* philosophy is a social foundation based on three major tenets (Nafukho, 2006):
- *spirituality* which is a decidedly religious or taboo system meant for character formation, education and learning (Fafunwa, 1974);
- infinite capacity to seek *consensus* and reconciliation; and finally
- the inherent power in community where people *dialogue* to provide meaning to life.

These tenets however, seem to have lost flavour among professionals in Zimbabwe, and we here propose a revisit of the current education philosophy that considers indigenous knowledge systems previously shunned by Western education theorists. According to Museka and Madondo (2012), the marginalisation of indigenous knowledge systems is a by-product of Western expansionist theories through colonialism, religion, and racial and cultural prejudice premised on technological and scientific developments, to mention just but a few. Razak (2012) adds that, 'the West won the world not by superiority of ideas or values or religion (to which few members of the other civilizations were converted) but rather by its superiority in applying organized violence'. Thus Ajayi (1961, p. 197) argues that Christian missionaries were actively involved in violently introducing to Africa 'the ideas of nation-building of contemporary Europe' by training 'a group of [Africans] who accepted those ideas and hoped to see them carried out, and later began to use these ideas as a standard by which to

judge the actions of the [European] administration'. In this way, Ajayi sees Christian missions sowing 'the seeds of [African] nationalism'.

Further, 'missionaries were the precursors of formal education in colonial times in Africa because schools were their main avenues for conversion' (Bassey, 2009, p. 30). With this, colonial, religious, cultural and scientific ideas advanced European interests that thrived on capitalistic-imperialistic thinking that emphasises on materialism and individualism, and diminished *hunhu/ubuntu* as the buttressing theoretical base of African moral education. Missionary evangelism and education thus assisted in spreading the 'Euro-centric traditions' 'that saw the gradual transformation of the world, in this case, African communities, toward a materialistic culture backed by scientific and technological innovations of the West'; and these 'traditions' were 'diametrically opposed to the indigenous value system enshrined in *hunhu/ubuntu*', leading to 'cultural bankruptcy' (Museka & Madondo 2012, p. 258-265). Yet Christianity and its moral values or teachings (Mk 7:20-23; 1 Cor.6:9-11; Rom 13;1-10; Mk 12:30-31; Isa 64:6; Jn 14:26; Rom 1:26-2:1; Mt 6:24; Gal 3:28; Acts 5:29; 1 Pet 1:16; Mt 5:27-28; Lev 18:19-23; Gal 5:19-21; Lev 20:10-16; Lk 12:42-46) will not help much if African Indigenous Knowledge Systems and *hunhu/ubuntu* are not considered in discourses to do with national development. The *hunhu/ubuntu* philosophy, however, can be appraised and highlighted also as a 'primary vehicle' of normative African perspectives of behaviour that can create a value system for modern African education systems rooted in African peoples' worldviews. For instance, the Zimbabwe Agenda for Sustainable Socio-Economic Transformation (*ZimAsset*), emphasizes on four local initiatives of 'indigenise', 'empower', 'develop' and 'employ'. Such local initiatives can only be successful if rooted in an indigenous *hunhu/ubuntu* philosophy that prevents Western influences of capitalism and individualism to lead to all kinds of corruption dealings (GOZ, 2013).

The *hunhu/ubuntu* philosophy negotiates for the place of African values in global moral debates on education and training, done in view of Zimbabwe's national and moral development through tertiary and professional training (Nziramasanga, 1999). It, however, needs to be

observed that the assumption of *hunhu/ubuntu* philosophy as a wholesome African concept is misleading since Africa is not a homogenous continent, for its diversity encompasses language differences from our erstwhile colonisers, the French, the British and the Portuguese (Mufwene, 2013a; Mufwene, 2013b; Bahuchet, 2012; Keita, 1999). Thus a discussion on *hunhu/ubuntu* philosophy from a Zimbabwean perspective recognises the strong threads of connections that may be universal and enshrined in these diversities, controversies and struggles. Nonetheless, the international society can take a leaf from underrepresented local ideas from *hunhu/ubuntu* philosophy, as our countries are making recognisable contributions to world markets by describing and suggesting specific transformation drivers for future development policy priorities (UNDP, 2013). It is on this background that the inclusion of *hunhu/ubuntu* philosophy in education and training (Makuvaza & Hapanyengwi, 2013; Makuvaza & Gatsi, 2014; Makuvaza, 2010, 1996) effect positive outcomes on national education investment as it produces professionals who have high moral attitudes (Nziramasanga, 1999). This, it is hoped, *hunhu/ubuntu* philosophy can take a step further from just an academic concept discussed in academic articles to a way of life cultivated at an institution of higher learning. This can help local universities to develop respectable systems that celebrate university independence in Southern Africa thereby impacting positively the Zimbabwean society and the international community. From here we review the experiences of postcolonial state university education.

University education and the postcolonial state of Zimbabwe

Zimbabwe changed from a socialist state to a Western liberal state in the first decade of its independence and accepted Breton Woods recommended Economic Structural Adjustment Programme (ESAP) that failed to resuscitate the economic recession. This programme led to rapid urbanization with a concomitant rise in mass poverty across the social divide (Machingura, 2012). The high level of poverty led to civil activism and vigilance in the late 1990s as well as frequent confrontations by students and academics against the state (Omari & Mihyo, 1991). The party in power in Zimbabwe, the Zimbabwe African National Union Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF), played party and state and came up with the national youth service and the fast track land

reform. Many scholars were critical of these innovations and condemned them as ZANU/PF electioneering projects to survive a possible defeat against opposition (Tendi, 2008; Muzondidya, 2009; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2006). These violent actions were aided by land invasions by self-styled war veterans, which critics argue also interfered with business, industry, education and agriculture. While the country's educated younger generation has been transformed along the demands of global changes, with a booming increase on access to Information and Computer Technology (ICT), radio, cell phone and television reception, especially Digital Satellite Television (DSTV), the government has been condemned by the youths for failing to match up to these developments due to its undiversified approach to state governance systems. This is evidenced in the Deputy Minister of Information, Computer Technology, Post and Courier Services, Mr Mlambo who said in a parliamentary question and answer,

> We just completed a consultative process on ICT policy and we did that last week. What remains now is to finalize on the policy formulation; then, we will announce to the entire nation what the new policy is including the number portability and what it is going to be like (POZ, 2014, p. 26).

Most youths who should have received relevant local education have been seen attracted to Western lifestyles making them unsuitable for dealing with African problems (Davies & Rattsø, 2000). This may be a tip of the iceberg on our social, religious, educational and political institutions; and this paper appraises the tertiary institutions to take a lead in using local ideas and philosophies like *hunhu/ubuntu* to prepare students, academics and practitioners to successfully come up with innovative ideas during crises and take the leading role in development. Strong systems in society can be buttressed by the education system, especially what government and other institutions will say concerning corruption and greedy can be emphasized at university level to help change people's frames of minds on moral thinking, and help them embrace *hunhu/ubuntu* philosophy to teach people about the importance of sharing.

In the period following the 1990/1 ESAP, as incomes decreased, and affected funding opportunities of universities and living conditions of

all people, some academics became openly critical of their government with some academics openly supporting the government. In response, critical academics faced difficulties for their statements and actions. The state was condemned for exercising according to Ki-Zerbo, quoted by Sall (2003, p. 23), the process of "Silence, Development in Progress". So academics had to either participate in the state agenda or they had to keep quiet. Sall (2003, p. 23) commenting on the attitude of the state on universities after independence says that:

Scholars and scholarly institutions were invited to join the nation building and development effort or to keep their mouths shut. Academic freedom was shunned as an idle, petty bourgeois affair, and its advocates were suspected of indulging in "anti-government activity." Scholarship was seen as needing to have practical applications to be relevant to national development agendas.

This attitude towards academic freedom was evident in instances where academics criticized irregularities in a variety of activities in the country for instance corruption, nepotism, and violence among other things. Critics argue that, in Zimbabwe state universities, university council, leadership and management are handpicked from among the best of its academics with political cleavage to ensure that the university dances according to the tune of the state and that the institution boosted the face of the state in its political events and concerns. However, if it is true, this is not itself wrong on gate keeping although in some cases it seriously affects curricula development and critically undermines university freedom. University education that propelled Kwame Nkrumah to power was to be used to serve the whole nation and not political elite groupings only (Bassey, 2011, p. 30). The university is there to empower students with skills that will help to move the nation forward than focusing much on gate-keeping as possibly wanted by the political elites. However, African universities have been regarded as churning out unpatriotic Zimbabweans who lack *hunhu/ubuntu*. Sall (2003, p. 24) quotes Hagan and Mukandawire on the attitude of the nationalists to state universities and the influence of former colonizers in Ghana, which states that,

> We do not intend to sit idly by and see these institutions [the universities] which are supported by millions of pounds

produced out of the sweat and toil of common people continue to be centers of anti-government activities. We want the university college to cease being an alien institution and to take on the character of a Ghanaian University, loyally serving the interest of the nation and well-being of our people (Hagan, 1994; and Mkandawire, 1999b)

In fact, independence in Africa was generated by pan-African ideas from universities in Ibadan, Dar es Salaam and Dakar, where scholars like Archie Mafeje, Abdoulie Ly, Samir Amin, Cheikh Anta Diop, Yash Tandon, Memel Fote and Walter Rodney debated on the works of Frantz Fanon, Kwame Nkrumah, Amilcar Cabral, Sekou Toure, Julius Nyerere and others (Mkandawire, 1995). The concept of African identity and African pride derived from *hunhu/ubuntu* was used to fight colonialism (Mkandawire, 1995). Unfortunately interference by the state at times irresponsibly rendered the human moral obligation of scholars and students obsolete, killing scholarly contributions and human-power development for regional or rather national consumption as well as indigenous knowledge systems generation. African universities thus "lost their original *raison d'etre* in the eyes of the state and sometimes the public (Mkandawire 1995, p. 79). They failed to contribute to the new context and market economy characterized by new diversities.

In Zimbabwe, prolonged political impasse between ZANU/PF and MDC affected university incomes leading to reduction in institutional and national infrastructure development, increased corrupt tendencies, capital depletion, and staff brain drain (Maile, 2008). As corruption deepens, resources become difficult to come by, leading Zimbabwe's third generation of scholars born after independence and educated in Zimbabwe to pursue their diverse interests elsewhere, leaving universities with those who overlapped in their generations who have other income generating projects, enjoy collegial presence, get free tuition for their children and hope for an immediate change are content to remain at the university (Mkandawire, 1995). This demands that the new Zimbabwe government restructure and incorporate *hunhu/ubuntu* into tertiary training to serve diversified interests that intersect with business, commerce, industry and technology. The ZANU/PF government appointed a Minister of State for Liaising on Psychomotor

Activities in Education whose mandate is to reincorporate practical subjects and equip pupils with life skills. There is probably need to rethink together on the role of university on issues of morality for we think our failure is in our values and ethics rather than technical life skills. The university that emphasizes on morality may attract and develop students who can sell university services to industry, generate wealth for the nation, and bring income to their families and the university. In Zimbabwe, the 2013 "ZimAsset" uses four development clusters-food security; poverty eradication; infrastructure development and processing (GOZ, 2013, p. 9-10). To benefit from "ZimAsset", there is need for moral and ethical competence acquired from a transformed university system where academics are involved in the formulation and implementation of university policies.

The university's own transformation needs to go along socio-economic and political needs of the nation. Further, human-power development and marketing in the region, as a national strategy for regional and national development, can make Zimbabwe a human resource powerhouse in Southern Africa, wherein Zimbabwe has other national competences not found in other countries, which still need to be explored by local universities. The 1990s gave the UZ opportunities to rethink its 'human power development' for the region as South Africa was going to get its independence in 1994 (Raftopoulos, 2001; UNDP, 2013). Indeed there were individual country achievements in education, health and service delivery, yet that still fails to qualify as human development for there is lack of social conditions to free individuals to do what they can to better the life of the people in their communities premised on *hunhu/ubuntu* philosophy (UNDP, 2013). The biggest challenge is to contextualize the standards and excellences of university education to the needs of the people; that is, grounding the process and product of university education in the material conditions of the people. This resulted in "creating an intelligentsia with little stamina for the very process of development whose vanguard we claimed to be" (Mamdani in Mkandawire, 1995, p. 77). Varma (2012, p. 26) generally lamented at the bulky of African universities that, "our universities are noteworthy for their absence of independent thinking, the absence of the spirit of critical enquiry, the emphasis on rote, the clearing of examinations, the passive acceptance of outdated curricula, the paucity of pedagogic talent and most importantly, the deference to

western academics." However, deep reforms in university education, though delayed, can still lead Zimbabwe to reorient programmes on *hunhu/ubuntu* in order to guard against selfishness and unpatriotic behaviours.

University education, academic freedom and *hunhu/ubuntu* philosophy

Despite state support and donor funding, the university can still operate in ways where it is free and autonomous in planning and in developing its own curricula. The crisis in the economy however affects this, showing that unless if the state and civil society remains kinder to university freedom and autonomy where it refuses to call the tune after paying the piper, as practiced in other liberal economies, this freedom remains a mirage. This, therefore, requires a balanced approach that sees a symbiotic partnership between the academia, the state, civil society and the market to display their civic and social (corporate) responsibilities that improve the university's material conditions conducive for quality education today (Masunungure, 1998; Godana & Hlatshwayo, 1999). This is premised on the understanding that the role of a university is to transform individuals and society in line with African needs, thus we propose African values in solving African problems, hereto suggested that to be human is to have *hunhu/ubuntu*. Curriculum designers need to take into cognisance of the fact that, since time immemorial, Africans had culture-specific education that was premised on *hunhu/ubuntu* promoted democracy and was ingrained in their spirituality long before colonialism. Due to its inclination towards indigenous African beliefs and practices, *hunhu/ubuntu*, can be a better potential resource on the understanding of freedom and democracy which resonates so well with indigenous knowledge perspectives.

To fulfill this, it may be suggested that staff development programmes that engage academics in publishing books, articles and monographs that focus much on indigenous knowledge systems and *hunhu/ubuntu* need to be encouraged. Publications are invaluable for future generations. In fact younger scholars can learn to be solution-centred in their writings as well as appreciating modern pluralistic societal ideals but basing on their own philosophy of *hunhu/ubuntu*. The university education must engage academics, challenge students and inspire

practitioners to tap on indigenous knowledge systems and *hunhu/ubuntu* that benefit the individuals, community and the nation at large. Institutions of higher learning are characterised by idealised influence to all people in the society as it is endowed with higher human ideals that unifies human purpose for existence and celebrate beliefs and attitudes held dear by society; and has programmes tailored to fulfil individuals' needs. In fact formal education was used as bait for a young generation in Africa to accept Christianity, similarly it can be used to advance the philosophy of *hunhu/ubuntu*. African universities must be premised on the African philosophy of *hunhu/ubuntu* if media reports on social ills are going to be nipped in the bud. In other words the university should provide and build people's visions premised on *hunhu/ubuntu* philosophy so as to encourage innovation and creativity, and to generate national wealth by developing individual, spiritual and mental capacities of people who live successfully in society (Boehme, 1989). The university recognises and inspires human potential by having the curriculum that motivates and influence its clients to seek the best for their lives from the abundance of opportunities made bare through knowledge generation of African values and dissemination. Zimbabwean universities are privileged to have the bulk of the youths who enrol for different programmes and courses. They must set the pace and conscietise students on selfless service to their nation according to *hunhu/ubuntu* philosophy. This can cascade down in schools and colleges. Thus our country can invest in the capacity of its people to identify and use the knowledge in foreign capital and ideas using *hunhu/ubuntu* philosophy (UNDP, 2013, p. 49). The university thus develops its clients ethically besides skills training and intellectual stimulation. The culture of the people must manifest in the education offered at primary up to university level in order for its products to become responsible citizens who are prepared to transform and better their societies. Pupils need to learn and develop at a tender age to uphold policies and actions that positively impact on people and society. African universities are technologically behind when compared to western universities, but their values, *hunhu/ubuntu* and knowledge systems may be adequate at addressing the needs of their societies.

The state thus should not needlessly interfere with university activities as long as it realises that the university authorities are carrying out their

mandate within the minimum stipulations of their national obligations, and are supporting the services of the university with no strings attached (Masunungure, 1998; Godana & Hlatshwayo, 1999). Similarly the state should reciprocate as long as the university reasonably stays loyal to its mandates of critical analysis and evaluation of human experiences in society and suggesting ways of improving them thereby contributing to the development of the nation. The state and university academics thus need be prepared for social transformation, especially on policy formulation and construction, monitoring and evaluation. Therefore *hunhu/ubuntu* philosophy is here presented as the anchoring philosophy for the development of virtues that demand responsibility, transparency, fairness and honesty in dealing with moral challenges and development opportunities in Zimbabwe.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this paper has tried to highlight the challenges and opportunities that universities pose and face in a nation as a result of not premising its programmes on indigenous knowledge systems and needs of society where its products fail to serve their communities. The university thus should keep a suitable balance of its interests to the interests of its stakeholders or clients, partners, the state and competitors. External relations, however, should be complemented by internal values, beliefs and systems. This allows universities to claim idealised influence by inspiring and motivating, addressing individuals' needs as well as intellectually stimulate creativity and innovation to challenge long held ideas and feelings. The spirit of the African *hunhu/ubuntu* should be the guiding philosophy if Zimbabwe is going to productively use its resources for the benefit of Zimbabweans.

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