

# What drives millex in Zimbabwe? A comparative study

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## Abstract

*Most of the papers on the determinants of millex in Africa have taken a quantitative or econometric approach. Few have attempted a qualitative approach that investigates underlying motives for huge millex especially in Southern Africa. This study tests a model located within the public choice approach to economics using data drawn from interviews with key informants and documentary sources to derive salient determinants of millex in Zimbabwe and South Africa. The empirical findings suggest that Zimbabwe's millex since 1980 has been influenced by internal political dynamics and to a lesser extent by economic factors. The most significant factors include regime security, elite corruption and liberation war hang-over and fear. In South Africa the millex level and composition are clearly formulated, transparent and are adhered to with respect to recurrent expenditures. However, recent military procurement history reveals increasing cabinet authoritarianism, a lack of transparency, significant opportunities for corruption and, arguably, inappropriate decisions.*

**Keywords:** Military expenditure, underlying determinants, qualitative methods, informal interactions, document analysis

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## 1. Introduction

Although by African standards Zimbabwe's millex burden of around 3.8 is modest but has since increased significantly compared to 1.7 percent in 2004. The tricky part is that the country cannot afford such military expenses compared to its neighbours South Africa and Botswana whose economies have been growing prior to the 2008-2009 world recession. The econometric results of previous researches on Zimbabwe do not explain fully the variation of millex allocations

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(Tambudzai, 2006a; Tambudzai, 2006b). They on average explain 66% of the causes of military allocations in Zimbabwe. We believe that there are other underlying causes of military allocations, which are difficult to quantify, imbedded in traditional beliefs and attitudes of the decision-makers. The underlying factors might have a significant effect on how the levels of military are determined in Zimbabwe. Very little is known about the military budgeting process in Zimbabwe and Africa as a whole.

Budgeting for defence in Africa, as in most other developing countries, tends to be an extremely obscure process. Some recent studies on the military budgets in Africa show that there are many off-budget sources of income (Hendrickson and Ball, 2002; Henk and Rupiya, 2001). Security-related outlays are often deliberately included in non-military budgets. The accuracy of the final defence allocations is doubtful. According to SIPRI (2009) military in SSA for the period 1999 to 2008 increased in real terms. In 2008 military in Africa increased by 10.2 per cent in real terms. The major contributor to the upsurge in military was South Africa, with 40 per cent of the region's military in 2006, followed by Angola with 19 per cent. Arms acquisition was a small part of military, as opposed to recurrent expenditures which was close to 90 per cent of total military (Omitoogun, 2003). Weapons purchases in most countries are usually funded via off budget and extra budgetary sources.

What motivated the research is the assertion that the presence or expectation of war provides the main reason for military, then why is military not decreasing in Zimbabwe and other African countries where there are no wars? The deteriorating economic performance in Zimbabwe over the past decade was triggered by escalating defence expenditures in the late 1990s. The funding of the veterans of the liberation war (considered a reserve army) in 1997 and the DRC expedition of 1998 led to unbudgeted for expenditures which cost Harare multilateral financial and development aid. The absence of balance of payments support from the IMF and the low export receipts led to continuous depreciation of the Zimbabwe dollar. Lack of development assistance crippled the manufacturing and agriculture sectors of the economy that previously had strong ties with the western economies. The chaotic land reform process only exacerbated the crisis. With these entire multiple crises, why is defence expenditure not being sacrificed?

The main goal of this paper is to explore the internal and external dynamics that underpin the military levels of the post-colonial Zimbabwe. The study attempts to reveal underlying influences on the military budgetary process generated by traditional or contemporary ideological and non-ideological beliefs of the various military or non-military related stakeholders in the country. We aim to improve our understanding of the drivers of military, in addition to the traditional determinants from econometric studies. Specific objectives include the desire to identify the various types of extra-budgetary and hidden channels of funding military activities. In addition we want to obtain some insight into the defence budgetary

process and explore the existing institutionalized means for controlling, monitoring and auditing defence expenditures. In the end we compare the Zimbabwean milex determinants with those of South Africa.

In the next section the essence of public choice economics and government spending is summarised. The third section will discuss some studies on the military budgetary process in Africa. This is followed by a section on the research methods, research process and the data collection. The fifth section will analyse the findings from the qualitative data in relation to South Africa. This will be followed by a conclusion.

## **2. Public choice economics and milex**

McNutt (1996, p1) defines contemporary public choice as a “study of the political mechanisms and institutions which circumscribe government and individual behaviour”. The “choice of individuals in the public goods setting depends on the political institutions. Political systems differ in the manner in which economic agents interact and this influences the fiscal outcome” (Devaraj, 2006 p242). This article will be guided by public choice principles.

Public choice theory says that individuals act in their own self-interest, and it explores the actions and interactions of voters, politicians and government bureaucrats. The theory highlights the existence of government failures, in addition to market failure. Voters have no incentives to supervise government effectively, because the electorate is mostly uninformed about political issues. While legislators also have no direct benefit for them to fight influential interest groups in order to award benefits to society. Thus, the incentives for good public management in the majority’s interest become fragile. Interest groups reward politicians, campaign funds during election times and in return they get support for their projects.

Bureaucrats, voters and the politicians collectively determine the fiscal outcome. The national budget focuses on the desire to be re-elected but it takes into consideration the demands of interest groups. A bureaucrat is responsible for assisting in formulation and administration of policies, although she is self-interested and is motivated by maximising her budget. Black (1999, p77) argues that government failure emanates from three major sources: rational behaviour by politicians desiring to retain political power, thus ignoring the majority voters’ interests; the rational behaviour by bureaucrats that leads to bureaucratic failure; and government failure arising from the rational behaviour by the society and interest groups motivated by rent seeking objectives.

Rent-seeking explains the behaviour of most politicians, the role of interest groups, bureaucrats and the size and growth of government spending. The size

of government it seems is directly related to rent-seeking in the public market (Garfield 1996 p1). There are cases where agents and principals have joint interest, so that they form networks and other forms of collaboration. "Collusion, often involving a rather unstable relationship, can be formed between the state agencies responsible for the military budgets, such as Ministry of Defence (the principal...), and the domestic market industries (the agent)" (Eloranta 2009, p26).

The institutional, organisational and environmental context, in which the government department operates, influences bureaucratic performance (Schmidt, 2000 p16). McNutt (1996, p107) argues that "... the bureaucrat is a central figure" and it becomes impossible for her to be neutral in the budgetary process. This phenomenon could explain the escalation of defence budgets and the behaviour of military commanders who may not necessarily be bureaucrats but have vested interests in large budgets. Public choice economics has advanced the hypothesis that strong interest groups determine the size of the government. The decision maker in the case of military expenditure can be a bureaucrat, oligarchy, a median voter, interest group or a combination of the various entities. There is general concern that the traditional demand functions for military expenditure tend to ignore the principal agent problem.

### **3. Africa's military spending literature**

Researches on the determinants of military expenditure in Africa are few. West (1992) lists the main determinants of military expenditure in developing countries as follows: the past, geo-strategic considerations, influences on the budgetary decision-making process, pressure from arms suppliers, and financial and economic factors. The majority of studies have used strategic and economic factors in their econometric models. Harris (2002a, 2010) added to the traditional econometric approach of determinants a need to look at the effects of underlying motives. Harris' causal model looks at the underlying linkages in the military expenditure allocation process. It contains three main categories that consist of motivating, enabling and underlying factors.

Motivating factors comprise of geo-strategic considerations, budgetary politics and arms suppliers. While enabling factors comprise financial and economic resources. The underlying factors consist of the military pressure groups, the belief that military expenditure results in greater national security, and the belief that military expenditure results in greater national status and pride. Harris (2002a, p83) argued that the last two beliefs motivate the military allocation process. Beliefs influence the actions of the interest groups that are related to the military. The military interest groups include the army, connected politicians and bureaucrats, and domestic and international arms suppliers.

Military budgeting, tries to balance the need for confidentiality and transparency of the military sector. Ball (2002, p3) noted that a "highly non-transparent military

sector” is breeding ground for off-budget spending and corruption. Off-budget transactions besides violating basic budgeting principles undermine the operational efficiency of the security forces. A culture of secrecy on military issues and military is a common feature in the defence sector in Africa (Harris, 2005 p78). The worst thing is that the culture is enshrined in the laws of most of the countries. As Omitoogun (2006, p257) argues, the culture is based on the “general belief that, given the military’s primary responsibility of defending the country from external attacks, their activities, especially their capabilities and the resources made available for maintaining them should be kept from the public and by implication from enemies”. In addition the ruling elite in most states regard the military as a special institution (Harris 2005 p78).

Henk and Rupiya (2001) investigated the process and outcomes of military budgeting in a few African countries. The study is based on interviews with civil servants, military budget makers and professional military workers (Henk and Rupiya, 2001 p15). For most African countries, there is no prescribed military budgeting process. Where the formal process is in black and white it is not followed. Military budgets are determined by a small faction close to the executive in an informal way devoid of any relation to a military plan or goals (Henk and Rupiya 2001, pp15-16). Off-budget spending was evident in many military institutions [(Hendrickson and Ball (2002 p8), Ball (2002, p9) and Omitoogun (2003a pp272-273)].

Omitoogun and Hutchful (2006) focused on the budgetary process in the military sector of eight African countries (Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Mali, Mozambique, Nigeria, Sierra Leone and South Africa). The study discovered that all the countries studied had some form of procedures for budgeting for the military which are similar to the standard procedures for budgeting. The procedures were however not followed in practice. “[T]here are many gaps between good practice in military budgeting and what takes place in most of the sample countries. These gaps are caused by a number of factors of which the main one is the prevalent political culture - engendered especially by long periods of military and one-party rule - of the deference to the military and a belief in its need for special treatment” (Omitoogun and Hutchful, 2006 p263). There are gaps in adherence, and institutional arrangements, and there is little link between the defence budgets and the defence policies.

Omitoogun and Hutchful, (2006 p232) reveals importance of goodwill and commitment from the senior political leadership. Strategic defence policies in most African countries are not created from well-articulated risk evaluations and analysis of the macroeconomic and security environments. The general public and professionals in most African states do not debate or participate in the formulation of security policy.

The role of parliament is limited by the lack of experts and knowledge about the military sector (Omitoogun, 2003b p273, Henk and Rupiya, 2000 p19).

Parliament should have the interest and capability to carry out its mandate. The auditor-general's office also investigates how the various ministries have used their allocated funds. In most African countries, the audit reports rarely include corrupt practices in the defence ministries and the audit reports are never critical of off budget spending on military equipment (Omitoogun, 2006 p250). The auditor-general's annual reports to parliament take years to complete and it will be too late to take action.

The literature shows disparity in the level of observance by different countries to the good practice principles. The difference is explained by eight factors which include 'long years of military and one-party rule, confidentiality in the military sector, attitudes of the elite and bureaucratic inertia, strong informal processes, limited capacity and lack of political will, limited democratic experience and strong executives, weak oversight bodies, and inadequate regulatory frameworks' (Omitoogun, 2006 p256).

Hendrickson and Ball (2002, p4) argue that besides the normal budget allocations, there are four extra military revenue sources categories. These include income from military business activity, special funds from non-military parastatals and war levies, foreign military assistance, and criminal activities (Harris, 2005 pp83-84). Another source rarely available nowadays, is credit from friendly overseas governments for the purchase of military equipment. Resources are also availed from foreign exchange revenues from mining industries. Other countries are relying on intervention in conflicts as sources of finance (Henk and Rupiya 2001, p12). The military may also be involved in business activities to supplement their inadequate salaries and finance daily activities. Another important source of funding is the United Nations, peacekeeping operations, in which the participating countries and their soldiers are rewarded (Henk and Rupiya, 2001 p13). External support for human resource training is now common in Africa. Countries like the United Kingdom, China and France maintain cadres of military trainers in Africa, while other countries like Denmark have concentrated on training peacekeepers (Henk and Rupiya, 2001 p14).

#### **4. Research methods**

Research questions were formulated based on the various factors outlined by Harris(2002a) and the literature review. Most of the questions are used in the Zimbabwean study were adopted from Harris (2004a, 2004b and 2010). In the Zimbabwean study informants targeted in the investigation were from six groups. The government bureaus, security sector, parliamentarians, opposition parties, civil society (including media) and academics with interests in politics and defence issues were targeted. The informants were chosen based on their knowledge or connection to military-related and national budgetary issues in Zimbabwe. We tried to diversify the respondents but at the same time not losing value of the depth required in qualitative studies. The sampling method employed

was purposeful sampling.

It was very difficult to predetermine the sample size given the volatile political environment in which the research was conducted. However, efforts were made to interact with individuals from all the six-target groups. Reliance on an individual informant from each group for the whole period of study was virtually impossible. Most of the information was obtained through informal interactions and telephone interviews with informants. Some interview questions were sent to informants via email for their consideration in their spare time. The study also relied on information from documents. The sources included various public and private archives in Zimbabwe and online government and private archival sources. The document sources included parliamentary documents relating to the activities of the Parliamentary committee on Defence and Home Affairs, Portfolio Committee on the Budget, and material from the Ministry of Defence. We also relied on internet searches for relevant and more recent developments from online sources such as online newspapers both private and government owned, speeches [by Ministers, Senior Army officers, Members of Parliament and senior civil servants], and non-governmental organizations websites [e.g. Zimbabwe Democracy Trust, Global Integrity, and International Crisis Group (ICG)]. We also relied on journal articles and books articles written on the Zimbabwean defence forces by various military specialists and academics.

The data analysis involved the generation of themes from the codes and categories identified in the textual data. The next step was to give a general description of the responses from informants in line with the themes generated. The third part involved an outline and description of data obtained from various documents such as speeches, reports, newspaper articles, journals and books. The secondary sources acted as “confirmatory data collection - deepening insights into and confirming patterns that seem to have appeared” (Patton, 2002 p436). The coding process used followed the guideline presented by Thomas (2003, p6). The study followed the analytical framework of qualitative data organisation. This framework has four main components; processes, issues, questions and sensitising concepts (Patton, 2002 p439). The issues approach, entails that the data be presented in such a way that the key issues are highlighted. In this study some of the key issues were the military budgetary process, beliefs and attitudes of decision makers, and military interest groups.

The South African case is presented in a recent study by Harris (2010). Three major themes arose from interviews and documentary sources as well. The research methods used in these studies are similar.

## **Drivers of millex in Zimbabwe and South Africa**

Major themes that emerged from the Zimbabwean and South African studies include the justification of milex, external threats, beliefs and attitudes, the special case, the budgetary process and oversight and the pressure groups theme. Markedly different responses were received from different informants on each theme. In general informants saw local, regional and international political, security and economic imperatives as drivers of the level and trend of Zimbabwe's milex. With respect to data obtained from various documents, there was convergence with views obtained from interviews.

Under the justification of milex theme, government officials gave four major factors that influence the change in milex allocations. The informants revealed that the underlying factors include state security, regime change threats, fulfilling peacekeeping duties, and wars or political instability.

The government and the ruling party (ZANU-PF) have great influence in the determination of milex. The study has shown that milex is used as payment (rent)-financial and non-financial packs- to the military and in particular security chiefs in order to retain political power. The civilian leaders in government, in their self-interest manipulate the defence budget decision making process to ensure that parliament ratifies defence allocations that do not take into consideration trade-offs with other government departments. In most cases Parliament approve a smaller figure for defence, but the bulk is hid in the unallocated reserves, kept by the MoF. More recently, Parliament has been called upon to just condone unauthorized spending by the military. This has mostly been facilitated by the RBZ through its quasi-fiscal policies.

The pressure groups theme focused on how the milex levels are influenced by military and non-military related pressure groups. The non-military related pressure groups are said to have little effect on milex allocations. Their failure to target the defence sector limits their ability to influence military decision-making. Multilateral donor organisations since 1999 have had no direct influence on milex levels in Zimbabwe. However, the suppliers of military-related and daily essentials have considerable influence on changes in milex levels, because they have connections in the military leadership and the ruling party politicians. The military and intelligence have greater influence on the size of the security budget through the JOC, the ruling party and the presidency. The ruling party as a pressure group has greater influence on milex levels compared to opposition parties. ZANU PF advocates for greater milex.

The two major interest groups (the army and ZANU-PF government) are pursuing the same goal which makes it collusive behaviour. The military chiefs' stay in power is sort of guaranteed by the ruling party and the party's continuous hold on power is guaranteed by perpetuation of violence by the military forces. This relationship is confirmed by Rupiya (2007) who identifies the fact that, there is cross-representation of the ruling party and the military both in each of the structures. The military-ruling party alliance has seen the armed forces being co-



opted in civilian duties that were not traditionally the preserve of a professional army. The violent nature of the military does not just influence the behaviour of voters, but even decision makers in government departments. The decision-makers find it difficult to resist the demands from the military. Resource allocation thus is not objective because it is not transparent and there is no accountability

With respect to the military industry influence, Nkiwane (1999 p5) argues that Zimbabwe does not have an “arms industry”, per se but rather produces small ammunition, as well as mortar supplies. ZDI a government-owned company formed in 1984 manufactures small arms. ZDI produces and export some of the ammunition to mainly African countries. Data collected has revealed that in Zimbabwe the military is a special case when it comes to resource allocation. As a partner in the power retention game the military automatically occupies a unique position. The special case theme revealed that one element that drives military in Zimbabwe is the special position accorded to the military by the governing party. The military is treated different to other sectors of government. The findings show that when it comes to the Ministry of Defence, budget rules are not respected at all the times. A notable situation is requests for additional funding and expenditure. Contrary to normal budget principles the executive does not normally consult parliament.

Contrary to McNutt (1996 p140)’s assertion that governments are there to be manipulated, in Zimbabwe it seems the regime had a fair share of manipulating interest groups to its advantage. The median voter model as a decision-making tool does not really apply in Zimbabwe. In principle, the values of democracy have been scuttled or are not applied normally. The informal interaction responses revealed a budgetary process theme. The theme focuses on how the military budget is crafted and whether the process is different from other sectors of government. Some informants professed ignorance of the actual budgetary process in the military even though they are familiar with the national budgetary process. Some informants noted that there is no serious oversight over defence spending. The normal budgetary rules and procedures are not being followed to the letter. In other words the military is preferred above other departments in resource allocations and monitoring.. There is no sense of trade-offs in resource allocation by the executive.

Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2003a, pp28-29) concurred with this assessment when he wrote: *“[t]hese recent developments testify to the trend towards militarism in politics”*. Rupiya (2008, p1) also noted that: *“[i]n the newfound relationship, the distance between party and government was collapsed and by extension, the professional standing of the military in its national symbolism disappeared. Instead, the security organs have assumed partisan roles and functions in support of the ruling party...”*. Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2003a pp30-31) argued that ZANU PF has used the army in a *“political power game”*. He wrote that the army,

*“It seems they see themselves as hired to protect the regime in power rather than the population of Zimbabwe”.*

The beliefs and attitudes theme focused on how the beliefs of various interest groups influenced military allocation decisions in Zimbabwe. Opposition parties believe that *[the current dictatorship is using intimidation tactics to prolong its stay in power. In the aftermath of the DRC war most of the resources allocated to the army (in the national budgets) were influenced by opposition politics]*. The civic society organisations believed that more funds should be allocated to sectors that promote human security. On the contrary, there is a strong belief within government and ZANU PF that high military is imperative. Only a strong military can achieve national security under prevailing circumstances. The importance of the colonial history in generating fear and insecurity was also emphasised.

Integrating the findings from the informal interviews and document analysis the main factor arising from the research is that determination of military in Zimbabwe is partisan rather than national. Although the defence budget is presented in the national budget, the final figure rests with the ruling party, especially the presidency and the security arms of government. Defence expenditure is required to fit the aspirations of the ruling party. The implication is that national security is secondary. The primary driver of defence spending becomes regime security. The military leaders are ZANU PF cadres and they have close association (alliance) with the party. The formation of the JOC shows how influential the army has become in resource allocation decisions.

In the SA case, the major themes were justification of military, the budget decision-making process and the influence of pressure groups. Under the justification theme the study revealed that South Africa, as the regional power should continue to participate in peacekeeping operations in Africa. Respondents saw the drive to earn a permanent seat on the UN Security Council as an important driver of defence spending in SA.

Others believed that military in South Africa was guided by the *Defence White Paper* of 1996 and the *Defence Review* of 1998. Most respondents however noted that, *“[t]he trade-offs between traditional security and human security needs, they argued, needed constant monitoring”* (Harris 2010 p6). They believed that military was too high if the threats to social security like HIV and AIDS are taken into consideration.

An key factor driving defence spending in SA is a belief in military security and therefore a need to retrain and re-equip the armed forces constantly. This idea is important in Zimbabwe too. An informant revealed, *‘the myth of the effectiveness of military defence and the glory of war which run deep in South African culture’ and ‘the association of militarism with notions of patriotism’* (Harris 2010 p6).

Harris(2010) noted that the budgetary process in SA is guided by

“comprehensive rules and procedures regarding budget allocations regarding budget allocations and that these are generally closely followed. One informant commented that ‘*On average, the SA defence debate is probably one of the most transparent and participative in the world and certainly shames countries such as the US*’ (Harris 2010 p7). This differs from Zimbabwe where rules are flouted in most cases.

The purchase of weapons in SA is better than that of Zimbabwe, although the executive in recent years has been moving towards more secrecy and little parliamentary consultation. The budgetary and policy rules have been flouted, especially in the arms procurement business. The SA cabinet is accused of making one-sided decisions. Most informants cited the “*recent weapons procurement decisions made by Cabinet with little or no consultation or transparency*” (Harris 2010 p7). Reference was made to the ‘arms deal’ process in 1998 and the eight Airbus A400M military transport aircraft and infantry combat vehicles deal in 2005 and 2006.

Some high ranking government and ANC executives have been brought before courts for corruption related to the arms deal. Feinstein (2007) reveals how the cabinet is incessantly trying to avoid or influence parliament with respect to public spending decisions as well as how SA Cabinet has attempted to undermine investigations into the arms deal (Feinstein 2007, pp. 154-207). He reveals evidence of bribery (and rent-seeking) of government officials and the ANC by foreign arms firms.

Similar to Zimbabwe, interest groups are critical in military budgeting in SA. Harris (2010) study identified three pressure groups. The military itself, arms producing companies and anti- military NGOs. Like the Zimbabwean experience, the military is seen as a major interest group in SA.e. The only difference is that it is well-organised and efficient. While arms producing companies, like Denel have an indirect impact “...through the belief that the technological expertise they embody must be retained in the country” (Harris 2010, p7). The interests of the military-industry are easily fulfilled in comparison to other economic sectors, since they have access to senior politicians. Like Zimbabwe, anti-military NGOs influence has not significantly affected milex levels (Harris 2010).

Unlike in Zimbabwe, there was no mention of any external threats as a driver of milex in SA. Informants believed that SA should continue to play an important role in the arena of peacekeeping and peace building (Harris 2010, p8). Similar to the Zimbabwean scenario the need for a strong army to maintain security is alive in SA. The difference between the two countries is the democratic institutions that are still effective in the South African system. The separation of powers between the military and civilian institutions provides checks and balances in SA.

Other studies also find South Africa to have a better military budgeting process than other African states. Omitoogun and Hutchful, (2006 p232) find South Africa to be the only country where there is good will towards the application of good practice principles to military budgeting. Henk and Rupiya (2001, p19) highlight the oversight role that a robust civilian management has played in the ministries of defence in South Africa.

## Conclusion

The paper is meant to compliment earlier econometric studies on determinants of millex in Southern Africa. Millex has been influenced more by historical and political dynamics rather than external threats and economic factors. The main factor emanating from the analysis of the qualitative data in Zimbabwe is the domestic- political dynamics dominated by regime security. The major reasons for relatively higher defence expenditures are regime security and rent-seeking/elite corruption. Other factors include national security and sovereignty, lack of serious oversight and accountability, liberation ideology, international peacekeeping obligations, regime change paranoia and the Western arms embargo. The main conclusion is that military budgeting in Zimbabwe is in essence ad hoc, determined by the military elite, ruling elite and bureaucrats in government. It has two sides, the official part which is presented to Parliament and the unofficial part fulfilled through unbudgeted expenditures and revenues.

On the other hand, in South Africa the decisions concerning the size and composition of current millex are transparent and consistent with well-formulated government expenditure procedures. However, in recent years weapons purchase is being made by the executive with little regard for these rules and less accountability to parliament. Like in Zimbabwe there is evidence of extensive bribery and corruption. While there is emphasis on peacekeeping responsibilities in Africa, the South African security thinking is still very much military-dominated.

There is need for security sector reform in Zimbabwe, in order to make the ZDF more professional and remove military influence from decision making. The military budgeting process should be democratised, as much as the entire political system. Zimbabwe can learn a lot from their neighbours SA in this regard. We think that the best way to achieve national and regional security is by promoting human security.

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