

“Gone to Egoli”



Photo: Zimbabweans in Bulawayo board the “Omalayitsha” to Johannesburg, June 2009.

Economic survival strategies in Matabeleland:

A preliminary study

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"P sent a two-speaker radio and picture of himself in SA in 2002. He drinks all his money after he is paid every month. I am told he is now sick with swollen legs and does not go to work any more. He never sent anything else."

"My two daughters left six children between them. Only one sends anything – she sends mainly clothes for the children twice a year. They have failed to get jobs in SA. I am suffering here with these children, and we often go hungry."

"Life is pure torture - where do we get the USD or Rand from? I am suffering even though the shops are full of goods."

"People come back dead"

"It is very difficult to feed and clothe my children and grandchildren. I often sit all day at the market and my vegetables go rotten before I can sell them. I cannot pay rent and electricity - I had to borrow money to bury my daughter who came dead from RSA."

Note: "Egoli" is the colloquial term for Johannesburg, meaning "city of gold"

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Abbreviations

CMC	Central Methodist Church
ESAP	Economic Structural Adjustment Programme
FMWPS	Forced Migration Working Paper Series
IMF	International Monetary Fund
MDC	Movement for Democratic Change
MSF	Medicins Sans Frontieres
SPT	Solidarity Peace Trust
UNHCR	United Nations High Commission for Human Rights
WFP	World Food Programme
WITS	University of the Witwatersrand
ZimVAC	Zimbabwe Vulnerability Assessment Committee



Photo 1: “people come back dead” – most common comment on the impact of the diaspora

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

There is not much likelihood that the formal economy in Zimbabwe will recover any time soon. It is likely to take over a decade before industry begins to recover in any meaningful way, and in the interim, Zimbabwe will continue to lose her youth to the diaspora, and those left behind will struggle to survive. Particularly in rural areas, grinding poverty is likely to be a factor for the indefinite future.

Diasporisation is escalating exponentially, with our sample families reporting a one hundred fold increase in the rate at which family members are leaving, between 1990 and 2009. However, there is not proving to be a corresponding return in remittances for rural families in Matabeleland.

While 59% of Zimbabweans in the diaspora are under the age of 30, only 4% of these send goods or money home on a regular basis – three times a year or more. Goods and money sent home do not lift families out of desperate poverty. 76% of families with members in the diaspora received NO money at all in 2008, and many of the remaining 34% received less than R100 a month. Goods sent home could amount to as little as 2 kg of sugar. When asked to describe the impact of having family members abroad, only 20% spoke of remittances. Most people referred to death, disease, criminal habits, broken marriages and diaspora orphans.

Families have been driven to bartering in the almost total absence of foreign exchange and goods for sale in rural areas. This has been ruthlessly exploited by the unscrupulous and at the end of last year, people in some parts of Matabeleland had to barter cows for 50kg maize meal each. Urban families have also resorted to barter as poverty overwhelms them.

The prospects are bleak for Zimbabwe's poorest citizens, and for the nation's youth. The next few years are unlikely to see the massive growth nationally that is needed to create the jobs that could change this reality. What is more likely, is that Zimbabweans will continue to stream across the borders – to be confronted in turn with the hardship of life on the streets in South Africa. Zimbabwe's poor are getting poorer, and the degree to which remittances from abroad can mitigate against this, has been overestimated when judged against the findings of this study.

A. WHERE HAVE ALL THE YOUNG FOLK GONE?

Zimbabwe is conservatively estimated to have around 15% of the population, or 1.5 to 2 million people, in the Diaspora.¹ It is also a truism to say that money from the Diaspora has been a major survival mechanism for Zimbabweans back home. The phenomenon of diasporisation on this scale is also a very recent one for Zimbabwe: prior to 2000, there was not much of a Diaspora community. However the implosion of the Zimbabwean state since then, including the shrinking of the GDP by around 50% owing to the collapse of local industry and agriculture, has pushed Zimbabwe from the second biggest economy in SADC to the smallest, behind Swaziland and Lesotho. The economic collapse, combined with the political crisis, has pushed Zimbabweans across the borders and all over the world, looking for a means of survival. However, because massive diasporisation is a relatively new event,² there have been very few studies that have attempted to look at the rate and impact of diasporisation and remittances, in particular in relation to *rural* Zimbabweans. The majority of the few published studies on remittances have focused on *urban* Zimbabwean families³, or have been centred on interviewing those who are in the diaspora, in Britain or South Africa⁴.

The distinction is important, as this means that much of the Zimbabwean diaspora literature is focused on the diaspora experience of the “urban upper and middle classes”,⁵ as it is only Zimbabwe’s elite who make it to the UK: there has been not much specific research into the remittance experiences of those from the peasant farming sector - who make up 70% of Zimbabwe’s population and a substantial proportion of the southern African diaspora population. While Bracking and Sachikonye⁶ have differentiated between “high” and “low” density suburbs in urban Harare and Bulawayo, they too have not explored rural remittances. JoAnn McGregor (2008)

¹ Rumours abound as to how many Zimbabweans are abroad, with some estimating as many as 3 million in South Africa alone. However, serious migrant researchers would dispute this figure: L Landau and V Gindrey in a recent paper reported a total international migration figure to Gauteng between 2001 and 2007 of **102,000 inclusive of migrants from all over Southern Africa**. See Table 3 page 12 of “Migration and population trends in Gauteng Province 1996 – 2055”: Forced Migration Working Paper Series (FMWPS) #42: University of the Witwatersrand (WITS); October 2008. They agree this figure could be understated, and Zimbabweans also reside in large numbers in Limpopo Province, and elsewhere in RSA, but according to Landau (via email, 10 June 2009) the figure of 3 million is almost certainly double the real figure as of the end of 2008.

² There have been previous waves of diasporisation, but never approaching this scale: many left during the war of liberation, others from Matabeleland during the massacres of the 1980s, and as we show here, the current massive movement out of the country had its roots in increasing border movement during the beginning of economic decline in the late 1990s.

³ There have been a few studies on rural impact of remittances, such as F Maphosa’s study four years ago: “The impact of remittances from Zimbabweans working in South Africa on rural livelihoods in the Southern districts of Zimbabwe”, FMWPS, #14, WITS, 2005. But most, such as the important work done by Bracking and Sachikonye, focus on urban remittances. See S. Bracking and L. Sachikonye: “Remittances, Poverty Reduction and Informalisation in Zimbabwe 2005-6: a political economy of dispossession?” Brooks World Poverty Institute Working Paper 28; Manchester University, 2008.

⁴ See for example - F. Maguna, A Bailey, L Cliffe: “Remittance strategies of Zimbabweans in Northern England”; School of Geography, University of Leeds, Jan 2009 and J McGregor: “Joining the BBC (British Bottom Cleaners): Zimbabwean migrants and the UK care industry”, Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies, vol 33, No 5: 2007. See also the Forced Migration Working Paper Series <http://migration.org.za> for articles with a South African focus on regional migration.

⁵ J McGregor; “Abject spaces, transnational calculations: Zimbabweans in Britain navigating work, class and the law;” in *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*; October 2008. She explores in depth the reality that it is Zimbabwe’s elite that make it to the UK – where they may then find themselves in menial jobs.

⁶ S Bracking and L Sachikonye; 2008, *ibid*; also; S. Bracking and L Sachikonye: “Remittances, poverty reduction and the informalisation of household wellbeing in Zimbabwe”; Global Poverty Research Group, working paper no. 45; 2006.

makes the point that class impacts in different ways not only on where one can migrate to, but on the experience and opportunities of migration. Middle class Zimbabweans in the UK may themselves have to resort to menial, “lower class” jobs to earn money, but they often remit sufficient amounts for their families in Zimbabwe to maintain a middle class lifestyle, even as Zimbabwe has generally collapsed.⁷ However, if you are a 19 year-old herdsman from rural Tsholotsho who migrates to Johannesburg, your chances of employment and your earning capacity may be poor, as may be your ability to remit at a level that will alleviate your family’s poverty. This certainly has been the finding of this preliminary study: the rural poor migrate and are often unable to improve or even maintain in any meaningful way, the lives of their families back home. This is particularly true in districts that do not have a long history of migration such as Lupane and Nkayi: in districts, such as Bulilima in western Zimbabwe, where families have been systematically migrating for generations, diasporans appear to manage well and remit reasonable amounts to their families. While more comprehensive and exhaustive studies need to be done, our work would suggest that income differences within Zimbabwe are being maintained and exacerbated by the experiences of Zimbabweans in the diaspora. It is clear from the British-based studies and from some of the findings of Bracking and Sachikonye in urban Zimbabwe, that middle class Zimbabweans often do benefit from having family in the diaspora.⁸ However, this study shows that this does not hold as true for families in rural areas.

Knowing more about both the rate and impact of diasporisation has become more urgent in the light of two key decisions, one made in Zimbabwe and one in South Africa. Firstly, in mid February 2009 the Zimbabwean Minister of Finance introduced the use of multiple foreign exchanges in place of the Zimbabwe dollar, meaning that only those with a steady access to foreign exchange (forex) can now survive in the local economy. Yet the number of formal sector, forex-earning jobs in Zimbabwe has not increased notably since then. Secondly, on 5 May 2009 the South Africans lifted visa requirements on Zimbabweans, and now issue 6-month entry stamps and the right to work to all Zimbabweans entering their country. Within days of the change in visa regulations, the number of Zimbabweans crossing the border at Beitbridge rose from 3,000 per day to 7,000 per day.⁹

Loss of markets in trading goods and people

Other trends in the informal sector may be likely to increase the rate of diasporisation in the immediate term. Zimbabwean shops have been flooded with goods since the move to forex, and this has undermined large sectors of the informal economy by which thousands have been surviving. It is no longer profitable to make a two-day trip to Botswana or Beitbridge to bring back a small pile of goods for resale, as competition within Zimbabwe among large retailers has already reduced the mark up on South African goods from double or treble to around 30-50%. In a matter of weeks, thousands of cross border traders have been left without a means of making a living, as have hundreds of parallel currency market dealers. This may push some traders to enter the diaspora more permanently, unless other money generating possibilities open up in Zimbabwe, which seems unlikely in the short term.

The *omalayitsha*, or cross border transporters, have also suffered a severe knock to their business. In recent years, hundreds of small businesses have sprung up around the double service of bringing

⁷ McGregor does not imply that all Zimbabweans in UK are able to do this: some commit suicide or fail to get employment, or fail to remit for any number of other reasons: *ibid*, 2008.

⁸ *Ibid*, notes 4 and 6.

⁹ Radio VOP; “7000 Zimbabweans Now Crossing Into S.A Daily”, 7 May 2009: SABC News; “Free visa results in influx of Zimbabweans to SA”, 14 May 2009.

goods from South Africa and delivering them to the door of even the remotest rural hut - and returning to South Africa with border jumpers. Both services were relatively lucrative – and both services are now in far less demand, as goods can be purchased more economically locally now, and the visa waiver means that many people can now cross the border legally who previously would have paid a high premium to be smuggled. Many employed in this trade will also now be forced to find alternative sources of income.¹⁰

Diasporisation: a double-edged sword

“I am told my son does not want to send money home as he thinks he now belongs to South Africa and has nothing to do with Zimbabwe.”

This study therefore set out to gain some preliminary insight into rural diasporisation and remittances: we found that while the rate of diasporisation has escalated almost vertically in the last 18 months – and this was prior to the waiving of visas - there has **not** been a corresponding return for poor rural families.

We found that 51% of our sample families with at least one member in the Diaspora received NO goods whatsoever from them during 2008.

68% of people in the diaspora have never, or almost never, remitted anything back to Matabeleland. Families who have been reduced to abject poverty have now also lost their able-bodied labour, and associate diasporisation with death, disease and broken relationships. Only 26% of those interviewed mentioned the diaspora in positive terms.

Key informant interviews at the Central Methodist Church in Johannesburg, as well as other published research and media articles, have reinforced our perception that many Zimbabweans entering the South African diaspora struggle to survive and certainly do not raise enough money to remit regularly.¹¹ Our findings indicate that those aged below 30 and who migrated in the last two years, fare the worst in terms of sending remittances.

1. Methodology

The diaspora research was part of a bigger survey to establish access to resources in Matabeleland in the first few months of 2009. The rest of the findings have been published as a separate, companion report.¹²

Two questionnaires were devised by nine experienced interviewers, who also administered the interviews in the targeted areas. The first questionnaire was for *key informants* and the second for *community members*. Interviews were administered during February to April 2009. Interviewers

¹⁰ The Zimbabwe Standard: “Scrapping of Visa hits many ‘Vultures’”; 16 May 2009. Also interviews with “omalayitsha” in Bulawayo during May 2009.

¹¹ Mediciens Sans Frontieres, “No refuge, access denied: the medical and humanitarian needs of Zimbabweans in South Africa”, Johannesburg, June 2009: The Sowetan; “Dramatic rescue after kidnapped Zimbabweans raped and locked up in tiny room in three-day ordeal”, Johannesburg, 15 May 2009: Forced Migration Studies Programme and Musina Legal Advice Office; “Fact or fiction? Examining Zimbabwean cross-border migration into South Africa”; Johannesburg, Sept 2007.

¹² SPT, “Walking a thin line”; Johannesburg, 30 June 2009.

asked the questions in SiNdebele and recorded answers in English on the interview form. Each interview took between one hour and half a day to complete.

Selection of key informants

Six key informants were targeted per district.

In each district, key informants were drawn from the following categories:

- a headmaster or senior teacher;
- a nurse or health professional;
- a traditional leader, either a chief or headman;
- a political leader, if possible the elected councillor for that ward;
- a pastor or other religious leader;
- any other person known to be a key informant in the ward, such as a businessman or other influential person.

These key informants provided the detailed background to the local informal economies, food security and political context.

Selection of community members

Two wards in each of five rural districts were selected, and two villages in each ward. In Bulawayo, two wards were chosen encompassing Nkulumane and Magwegwe, which are both high-density suburbs. The districts were:

- **Matabeleland North:** Tsholotsho (wards 6 and 9); Lupane (wards 2 and 12), Nkayi (wards 19 and 16)
- **Matabeleland South:** Insiza (wards 11 and 15); Gwanda (wards 6 and 8)
- **Bulawayo urban:** wards 24 and 29

There are 20+ wards per rural district, and each pair of wards was chosen partly for its relative accessibility, as interviewing was done during the rainy season, when some areas can become unreachable, and partly on the basis that the interviewers already had some contacts on the ground in these wards, which would make introduction and acceptance of the research unproblematic.

Sample: 20% cover of 4 villages per district.

In Matabeleland, a rural village usually consists of around 25 families, who fall under the administration of one headman. Interviewers therefore targeted *every fifth homestead in each of two villages*, resulting in approximately 5 interviews per village, or a sample of 20% of homesteads per village. This means there were 10 interviews per ward (2 villages), and 20 per district, amounting to approximately a *20% cover of 4 villages per district*. Slightly fewer interviews were conducted in Nkayi for logistical reasons,¹³ so that the total number of interviews was 114 and not 120. In Bulawayo, 20 interviews were conducted on the basis of very fifth household up to a maximum of 20 interviews. In addition, there were six key informant interviews per district. *As the average size of a family was 8.5, this study provides background to the living conditions of 969 residents of Matabeleland.*

Questions relating to the diaspora were included in the core questionnaire. A further questionnaire, relating specifically to the diaspora and bartering, was added to the original questionnaire, and was administered on the same day as the more general questionnaire, to the same family heads.

¹³ Rain made one ward inaccessible for several weeks, preventing completion of interviews here.

Bulilima and Bulawayo– extra data on Diaspora

In addition to the original five rural district data sets, a set of 12 interviews specifically using the additional questionnaire on diasporisation and remittances was done in one rural village in the western district of Bulilima (Plumtree area): this village is very close to the Botswana border, and is in an area that is known to have a high rate as well as a long history of diasporisation.¹⁴ These 12 interviews comprised approximately a 50% sample of this village, which consists of around 25 families. As Bulawayo was the only urban sample, we also included an additional 16 interviews, on diaspora/bartering aspects only, in the Bulawayo wards. The diaspora data included in this study is therefore compiled from 142 interviews, which encompass the 114 community interviews plus additional information from these further 28 interviews. There was additional background from 36 key informant interviews, meaning that a total of 178 people were interviewed in all.

These interviews gave us data on the remittance behaviour of 278 Zimbabweans currently in the diaspora.

2. Demographics: family members in Diaspora¹⁵

Gender

Females in Diaspora: 106 (38%)
Males in Diaspora: 172 (62%)

Men were almost twice as likely to go into the diaspora as women in our sample families. There were no significant differences in the likelihood of men or women to remit.

Age

The average age of people in the diaspora was 29.5 years

The vast majority of those in the diaspora are aged between 19 and 29 years, with a substantial number aged from 30 to 39 years.

Those over the age of 40 years make up 14%

19 – 29 years	59%
30 – 39 years	27%
40 – 49 years	9%
50 – 59 years	4%
60+ years	1%

Apart from the adults, there were 18 *accompanied* minors, who had been sent into the diaspora to attend school, and were not working. Their average age was 11 years.¹⁶

¹⁴ Indeed, this village was found to have a very different current experience of the diaspora from that which was gathered from all other areas – see discussion ahead.

¹⁵ Full demographics of interviewees are in the companion report: SPT, “Walking a thin line”, 30 June 2009.

¹⁶ We also interviewed *unaccompanied* minors in Johannesburg, and these findings will be published shortly as a separate report.

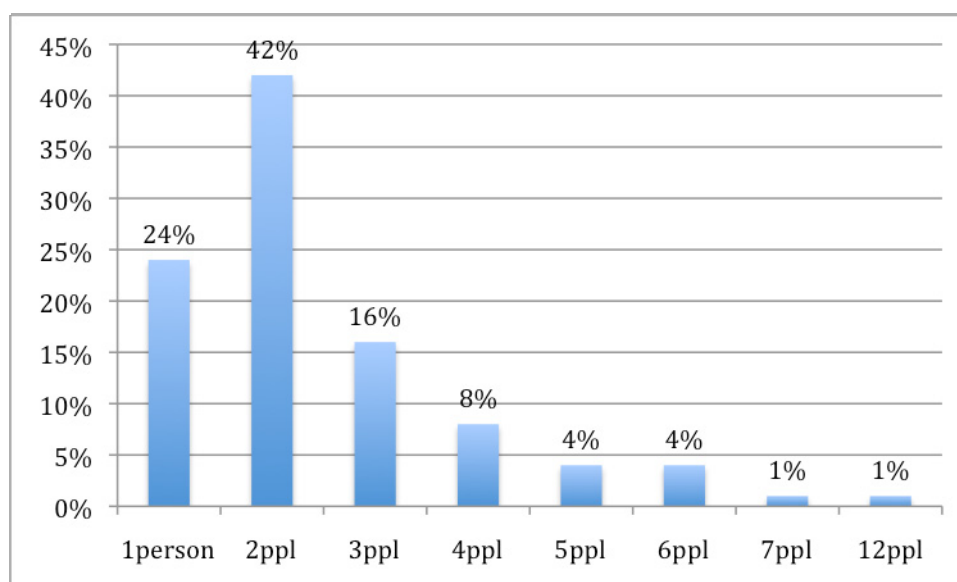
Prevalence of Diaspora families

75% of all families interviewed (106 out of 142) had at least one family member in the diaspora.

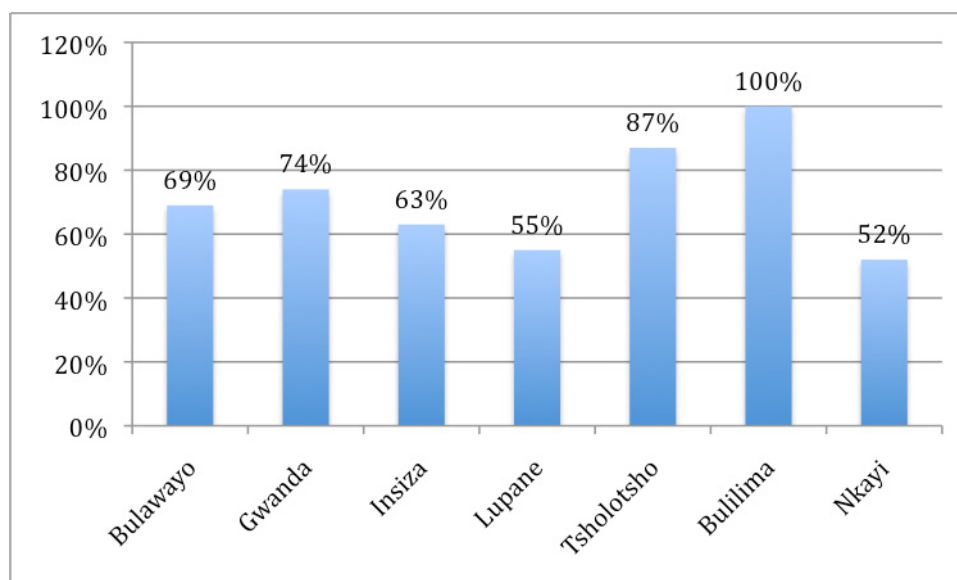
Of these, 24% had one family member in the diaspora, with the other 76% having between 2 and 12 family members out of the country.

The average number of family members in the diaspora was 2.5

Graph 1: Number of family members in the Diaspora per family (106 families)



Graph 2: Percentage of families in each district with at least one member in the Diaspora



District of origin

In all districts where we conducted interviews, more than 50% of families were affected by diasporisation. Bulilima and Tsholotsho had the highest prevalence, at 100% and 87% respectively, with Nkayi the lowest at 52%.

Country of destination

The vast majority of those in the Diaspora were said to be in South Africa.

Britain:	1
Botswana:	5
South Africa:	271

Families that live in rural Matabeleland do not have the money or connections to organize for family members to fly overseas. It is “urban middle and upper class” Zimbabwean families that have the capacity and the qualifications that make diasporisation out of Africa possible.¹⁷ Within our Bulawayo sample, only one family out of 36 had a family member in the UK, but we interviewed only in a high density, working class suburb, which excluded wealthier residents.

It was surprising not to find more people seeking employment in Botswana, but on inquiry with key informants, we were told that Botswana is perceived to have tight immigration control, and a policy of caning and deporting people. People wanting to seek refugee status there have to go and live in Dukwe Camp in order to apply, and this is extremely unpleasant. As Botswana has a population of only 1.5 million, foreigners are also more obvious, whereas in South Africa, people from Matabeleland can blend in with ease.¹⁸ If we had conducted more interviews in villages very close to the border with Botswana, no doubt we would have found a higher number of people migrated to Botswana, as the border is very porous in places, with families artificially divided by colonial borders a hundred years ago. While Botswana has been a popular destination for cross border shoppers, who go there only for a few days at a time, it is clear that South Africa is the destination of choice for the vast majority of people in rural Matabeleland.

3. Change in rate of Diasporisation over time

There are strong historical and cultural links between the Ndebele, Sotho and Venda people who reside in Matabeleland and with certain regions in South Africa, and there is a long-established pattern of informal migration across these borders as a result. From 2002 onwards, this history of migration was used as a counter argument to claims of mass migration from Zimbabwe to South Africa, as Zimbabweans began fleeing both political persecution and the economic meltdown. Both the Zimbabwean and the South African governments referred to this historical pattern and denied that there was an increase in volume and motive in the movement of people over the border. The argument that there was “No War in Zimbabwe” and that movement across these borders was

¹⁷ J McGregor, *ibid*, 2008.

¹⁸ On a recent trip to Gaborone to interview Zimbabwean activists there, a human rights organisation confirmed that they knew of only four political activists currently in Gaborone: yet in Johannesburg there are more than a thousand at the Central Methodist Church alone, so this lends strength to the conception that Botswana is not a permanent destination of choice, for activists at any rate. In South Africa there are at least 30 organisations set up specifically to deal with Zimbabweans and their issues, compared to none in Botswana.

“normal” was used to withhold asylum from Zimbabweans and delayed policy shifts in the South African Department of Home Affairs.¹⁹

This official position was maintained until 2005, after which it became increasingly impossible to deny that the nature of migration from Zimbabwe to South Africa had fundamentally shifted, not least in numbers, but also in who was crossing the border: thousands of Zimbabweans from Mashonaland, Masvingo, Midlands and Manicaland, who have no historical links with South Africa and who do not share a common language, have joined those from Matabeleland who have had traditional family patterns of migration. The trickle from Matabeleland has also become a deluge.

However, the rate at which informal migration has changed remains largely conjecture. We therefore included questions on the family history of diasporisation in our study to begin a more informed discussion of this issue.

One hundred-fold increase in diasporisation

Families were asked to indicate when in the past, and up to the present, a family member had left the country more or less permanently, for any reason. The findings were astounding. The rate of diasporisation in the 142 Matabeleland families in our target group has increased one hundred-fold since the early 1990s.²⁰

This means that for every one person across all 142 families that left permanently each year in the early 1990s, there are now over 100, meaning that more than half of these families are now migrating at the rate of one family member per year. Most of this exponential increase has taken place since the end of 2007, and the rate is still increasing almost vertically.²¹ While family memories of migration may be faulty with reference to the 1970s and 1980s, we can assume a fairly high level of accuracy in who has left in the last ten or fifteen years, and particularly in the last five years.

The rate of diasporisation quadrupled between 2004 and 2007 (from 7 to 29), and the 2007 rate had more than tripled (from 29 to 104) by the end of March 2009. The rate of diasporisation for April to June was based partially on the projection of families, who were asked if anyone in their family had plans to leave in the next two or three months, and according to these predictions, the 2007 rate was set to more than quadruple by June 2009. According to key informants and to our interviewers who have good local knowledge, such predictions are likely to *understate* the number leaving, as young people in particular tend to leave on the spur of the moment and often do not tell their parents that they are about to do so.

Furthermore, the information in this study was collected up to the end of April – and on 5 May, the visa requirement for Zimbabweans was waived, and the South Africans have acknowledged an overnight doubling of the movement of Zimbabweans across the border since then, from 3,000 per

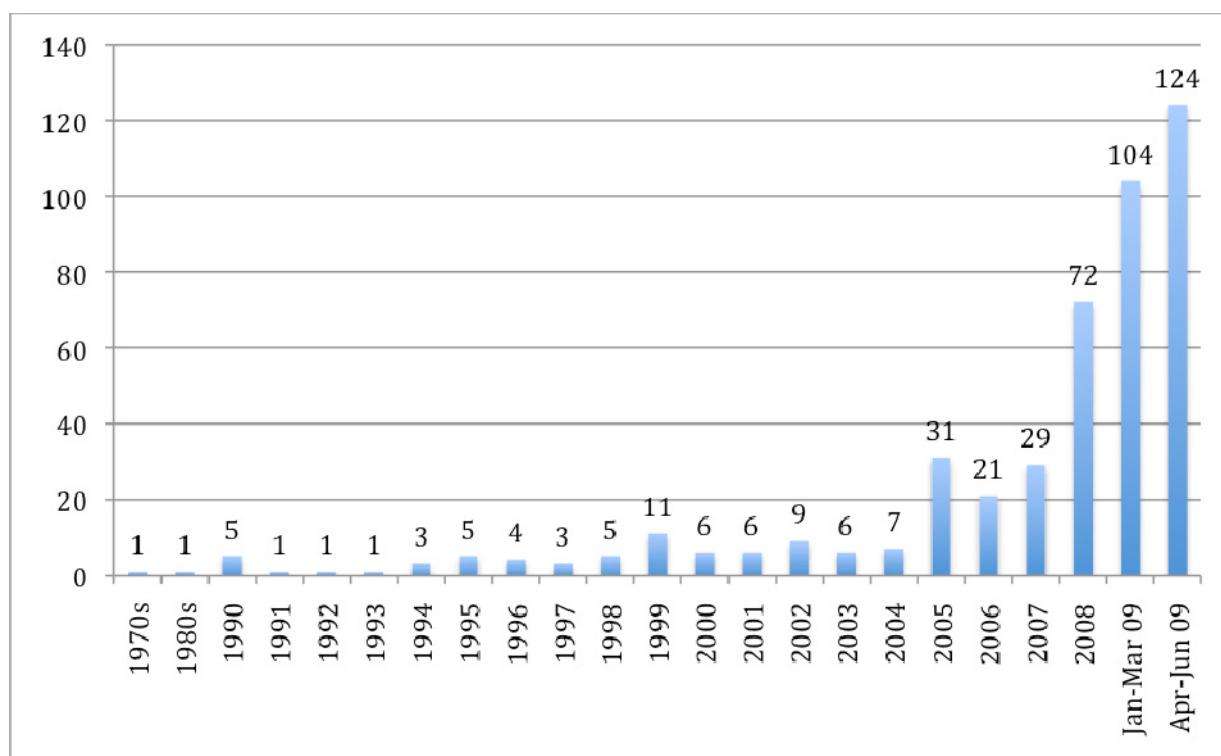
¹⁹ Solidarity Peace Trust, “No War in Zimbabwe”, Johannesburg, 2004. There remains an entrenched reluctance to issue Zimbabweans with refugee status; access to offices and protection of rights of asylum seekers remain problematic.

²⁰ We distinguish here between the tradition of young men going to “Egoli” for a short time as an act of manhood, which has been common practice in the past, and those who have set up more permanent arrangements in the Diaspora, living and working predominantly outside of the country.

²¹ One could assume that this rate will have to plateau out or fall, once all able-bodied members in these families have left! However, as school children continue to leave school and head for the diaspora, the exodus will continue at some level, unless Zimbabwe recovers economically and in terms of service delivery.

day to 7,000. What is not clear is how many of those who crossed illegally, now cross legally since the waiver, and to what extent this apparent doubling is an actual increase in border movements, as opposed to a move from illegal to legal crossings. It is also not possible to distinguish cross border shoppers from those entering more permanently simply on this border entry figure. However, the fact that it is now legal to work for six months in South Africa without seeking a work permit will undoubtedly lead to a new wave of diasporisation.

Graph3: the 'per annum' rate at which family members in total case study group of 142 families, entered the Diaspora from 1975 to 2009.²²



Some interesting minor trends are visible from the changing diaspora rates in these 142 families.

- Firstly, it is possible to see the impact on them of the Economic Structural Adjustment Programme (ESAP) on Zimbabweans: as the industrial base began to shrink from the mid 1990s onwards, as a result of IMF imposed policies, there is a jump in migration, which had been fairly steady at around 1, up to 5, peaking at around 11 in 1999.
- With the advent of the MDC and the excitement locally about the possibility of a shift in government, migration falls slightly in the early post 2000 era, from 11 down to 6.²³
- However, it climbs again in 2002, possibly coinciding with the violence of the Presidential election of that year.
- Diasporisation quadruples from 7 in 2004, to 31 in 2005 – which is the year of Operation Murambatsvina, when demolitions destroyed homes and livelihoods around the country.²⁴

²² Total number of family members from our target 142 families, who were reported as entering the diaspora in a given year: Jan–Mar and Apr–Jun figures were multiplied by 4 to give *per annum* rate.

²³ As Matabeleland voted overwhelmingly for the MDC in 2000, this seems a fair assumption: 21 out of 23 seats in the region went to the opposition in 2000.

- After this, we enter the current period of almost vertical escalation in diasporisation, climbing to a *per annum* rate of 100 by March and possibly over 120 by June 2009.

4. Motive for entering the Diaspora

The vast majority of people entering the diaspora are referred to by their families as having done so for economic reasons. While generally some Zimbabweans have fled after torture, assaults, property losses linked to political oppression, only 5 people out of 278 (2%) were referred to by their families as having left as a political refugee.²⁵ Characterizing those who left as having done so primarily for economic reasons may say more about the hopes of families that they will receive remittances, than about the motives of those who have left. However, considering that the GDP of Zimbabwe has shrunk by around 50% in the last decade, and the formal employment base has lost 250,000 jobs during this time, the high number of economic refugees is hardly surprising. Certainly, the recent massive movement over the border since the beginning of 2008 has coincided with the total economic meltdown, collapse of local services, and the arrival of hyperinflation.²⁶ All of our families are from Matabeleland, and there was relatively little political violence in this region last year in contrast to most of the rest of the country, so the sharp increase in diasporisation is almost certainly linked mostly to the need to find work and foreign exchange to survive. It may also have been linked to disappointment at the unresolved election outcome, and a sense that the stalemate would not translate into jobs on the ground any time soon, being in this sense a political decision. People have also migrated in search of medical care – cholera treatment, safe hospitals in which to give birth, ARVs and other medication – and in order to further their education.²⁷

It has been observed that refugees often move with broader flows of migrants, and that people who migrate can be “simultaneously affected by human rights violations, armed conflict, ethnic discrimination, unemployment and deteriorating public services”.²⁸ This is certainly the case for Zimbabwe at this time, which also conforms to the supposition that large migrant flows are “associated with undemocratic and/or corrupt regimes and underdevelopment.”²⁹ Bloch (2008) observed that Zimbabwean migrants themselves usually report more than one motive for leaving, and among those applying for political asylum are many who give economic reasons for leaving, and among those not interested in applying for asylum are torture and violence victims, who are

²⁴ This lends credibility to the authors’ contention in a previous report, “Meltdown”, 2006, that Murambatsvina resulted in diasporisation as opposed to town dwellers going “home” to rural areas, as intended by government.

²⁵ This finding is very similar to that of Maphosa (ibid) in 2004, when 3% of his respondents cited political reasons for migration.

²⁶ The highly contentious issue of whether economic migrants ought to be seen as genuine asylum seekers on the grounds that the economy has been willfully and deliberately destroyed by ZANU PF for a political motive, will not be gone into in this report. The decision of the South African government to allow all Zimbabweans to seek work, regardless of their motive for entering the country, has pre-empted the practical significance of this debate, although not the moral significance.

²⁷ See companion report to this by SPT, which examines rural access to health care, food and education.

²⁸ UNHCR; “Refugee protection and durable solutions in the context of international migration, High Commissioners dialogue on protection challenges”, 2007; cited in A Bloch: “Gaps in Protection: undocumented Zimbabwean migrants in South Africa”; FMWPS 38; WITS, July 2008.

²⁹ S. Castles, H Crawley, S Loughna; “States of conflict: causes and patterns of forced migration and EU policy responses”, London, IPPR, 2004: cited in Bloch, ibid, 2008.

more interested in finding work and keeping open their option to return intermittently to Zimbabwe than in gaining asylum.³⁰

5. Remittance patterns

“My two children left for SA in 2001 after the death of their father and have never returned to Zimbabwe. My son stole and sold my sewing machine to pay to leave – he has never returned or paid back the value of the machine. My daughter is said to be working as a maid and earns very little so cannot send home.”

For the purposes of this study, “remittances” include both goods and money; in 2008, goods were more likely to be sent to families than money, owing to the food shortages on the shelves in Zimbabwe.³¹ Families were asked for a full history of remittances, including *when most recently* they had received either goods or money from *each member* of their family in the diaspora. Families were asked *how often during 2008* they received either goods or money, and the value of the money and the nature of the goods received on each occasion. *How were goods/money transferred* was noted. Respondents were further asked what they had used the money for.

How reliable are responses?

Other researchers working with information on remittances have raised the issue that families may not always be honest about the true value of remittances.³² This was attributed partly to the fact that donor NGOs would use the fact that a family had a member in the diaspora, as grounds for not including them as beneficiaries. The World Food Programme (WFP) has in fact used this criterion in the past, when simply having somebody in the diaspora was enough to rule you out for donor food, regardless of whether they were remitting or not; we found nonetheless that 74% of families were prepared to admit that they were “diaspora families”. Further, in the observation of our interviewers, families had detailed memories of what had been sent, and exactly when 20kg of maize meal had or had not been received in the last year – and it is unlikely that interviewees would at short notice have come up with a sustained, invented pattern of remittances. Families were able to say – “this son has never remitted, but this one was home at Christmas and brought groceries”.

People related detailed histories of their experiences and attitudes to having family in the Diaspora, and often cried when relating tales of unfaithful husbands, or daughters who returned dying of AIDS, or sons who had become criminals, creating the strong impression that their experiences are real and not invented. It was also the observation of our interviewers that the majority of families in the rural target groups are clearly close to destitute, or destitute, and it is simply implausible that they were denying huge sources of income from abroad. Some families who were visibly better off openly admitted to having regular sources of income, which sometimes included the diaspora.

³⁰ Bloch, *ibid*, 2008.

³¹ Maphosa, *ibid*, points out that many studies of remittances around the world consider only cash movements in the definition of remittances.

³² Maphosa, *ibid*, page 18.

18% of families claimed that the diaspora was their major source of income. Most claimed to rely on subsistence farming. Vending, and in the case of Bulawayo respondents, a “job in town” contributed to 29% of households.

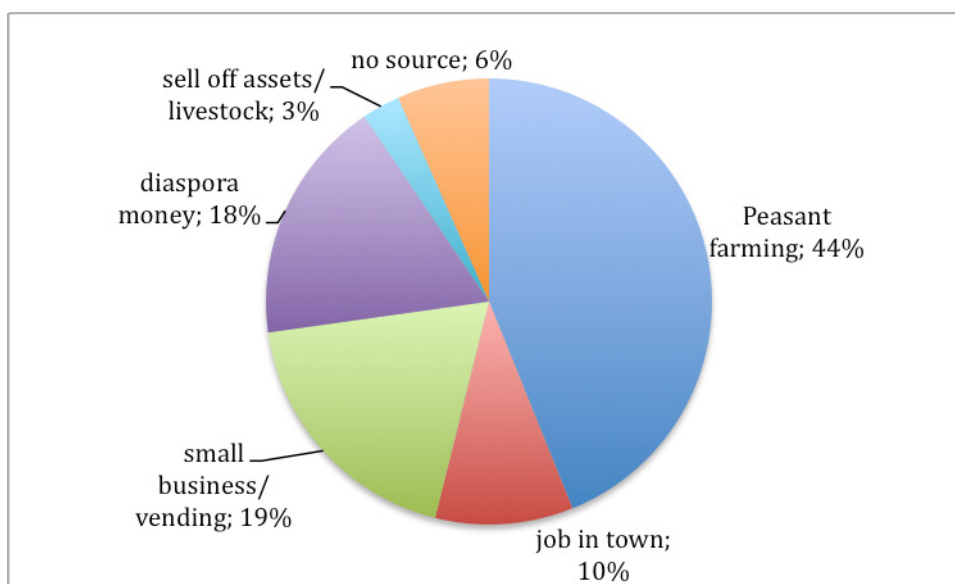


Photos 2 and 3: The Central Methodist Church in Johannesburg has become a haven for thousands of Zimbabweans in recent years. Below, diaspora children attend school in the church, while a woman hangs washing behind them.



During late 2008, the WFP stopped excluding families from food lists on the basis of “family in the diaspora”, thus eliminating the risk to people in admitting to this. This was in recognition of the lack of availability of food in rural areas, even in the event that people had money to buy it, and the corresponding decision by WFP to blanket feed in most areas. At the moment there is only “orphan and vulnerable people” donor-feeding taking place anywhere, on the grounds that it is harvest time. In our opinion, there was little vested interest in people lying to us about their remittance experiences.

Chart 1: showing main sources of income during 2008/9



6. Frequency of remittances

“My oldest son – I am told he is working but drinks all his money after he is paid. He came to Zimbabwe to mourn his dead brother and brought nothing with him. I had to source money for him to return to SA, believing he was going to change his ways and support me but that has not happened.”

[Two sons in SA since 2002 and 2004 – no remittances]

“P sent a two-speaker radio and picture of himself in SA in 2002. He drinks all his money after he is paid every month. I am told he is now sick with swollen legs and does not go to work any more. He never sent anything else.”

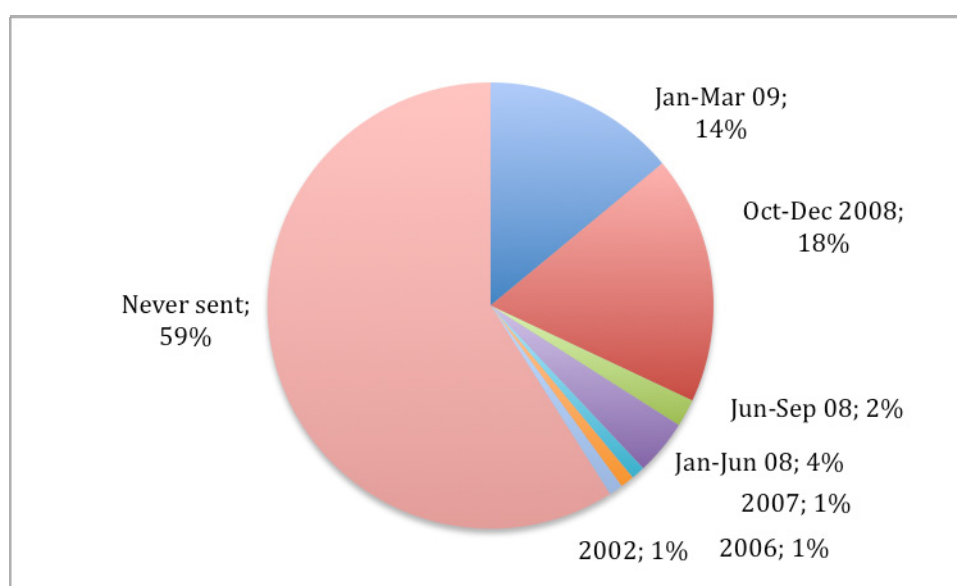
Families reported that:

- 59% of those in the diaspora have never sent a single item or cent of money home to their families.
- 14% of diaspora members have sent goods during 2009.
- 18% of diaspora members brought goods home at Christmas when they returned for the holiday break.
- 6% had sent items 9 -12 months ago.
- 3% had sent items more than a year ago.

From this, it can be seen that 68% of those in the diaspora are not remitting at all, or have not done so recently. Of course, many of these departed only during 2008, but even out of those who have been in the diaspora for more than 12 months, the figure remained constant, with 59% having not remitted ever.

Most “diaspora families” (74%) have more than one person in the diaspora, and it is clear that some family members are better at remitting than others. Findings were therefore evaluated to see the overall pattern of how often families were receiving something from one family member or another: while two sons may never have remitted, there may be a third who remits regularly.

Chart 2: Date that goods/money were most recently sent by each person in the Diaspora

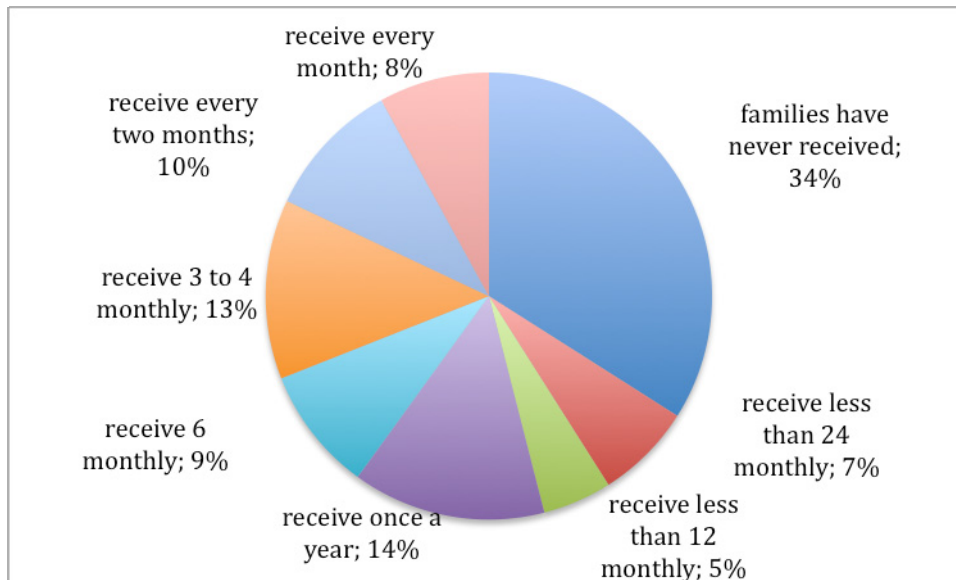


- 34% reported having never received anything from any family member in the diaspora
- **51% of families have received NO goods/money since before January 2008.**
- 12% reported receiving goods/money *less often* than once every year or two.
- 23% received once or twice a year
- 23% received at least once every 2 to 4 months
- 8% claimed monthly remittances

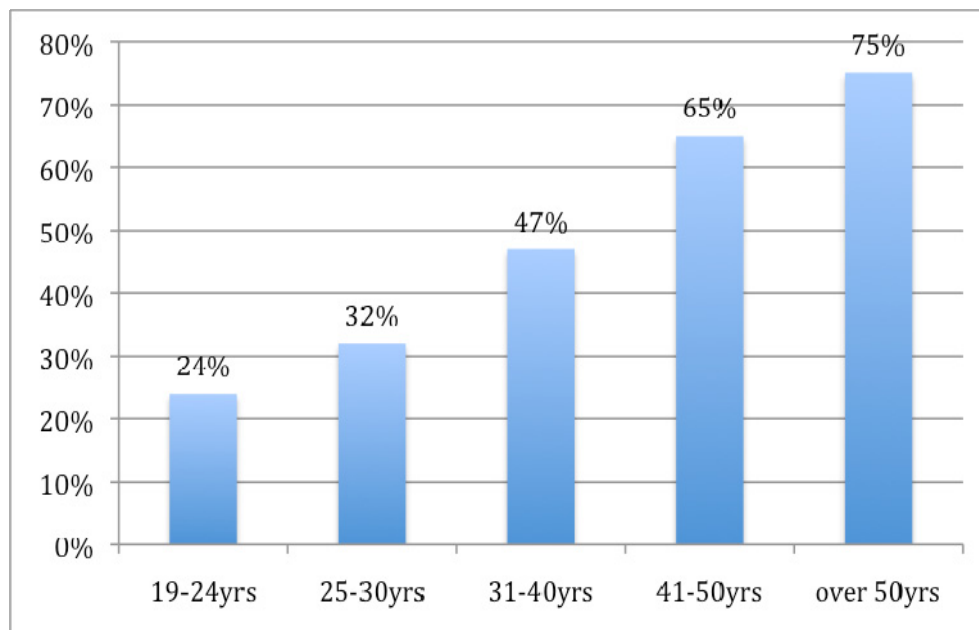
From this, it can be seen that only **around a third of families** with somebody in the diaspora claimed to receive any kind of **regular** remittance, if we include those who received three times a year or more, as regular recipients.³³

³³ Our findings show a lower level of remittance than Maphosa’s 2004 study, when he found that 22% of families did not receive (presumably at least yearly) remittances, compared to our 51% for 2008. This could be owing partly to the region in which Maphosa did his research (see Bulilima discussion ahead) and could be owing to the tougher conditions in the Diaspora since 2004. Bloch, *ibid*, conducting interviews on the South African side of the border, found higher levels of reported remittances than this study, with 68% of Zimbabweans claiming to remit regularly. Bracking and Sachikonye found that 73% of their urban sample families had received money either in the last week, month or year: *ibid*, 2008. This is a non-annual remittance rate of 28%, which is similar to Maphosa.

Chart 3: showing how often families reported receiving remittances



Graph 4: showing % in each age category that have sent goods/money home at least once



“My daughter left for SA and returned with a child that I now have to look after. When she returned to SA, her ID and passport that she got in SA were confiscated by police and so she could not return to work. She used to send money every few months, but doesn’t now.”

“My two daughters left six children between them. Only one sends anything – she sends mainly clothes for the children twice a year. They have failed to get jobs in SA. I am suffering here with these children, and we often go hungry.”

“We are suffering worse than ever before. My daughter’s body arrived from SA and we had no money to bury her. I borrowed money and now have got nothing to my name. I have

three other children in SA, and one sends me R100 once in a while. I got R600 last year. I wonder all the time when this suffering will come to an end."

Age as a predictor of likelihood to remit

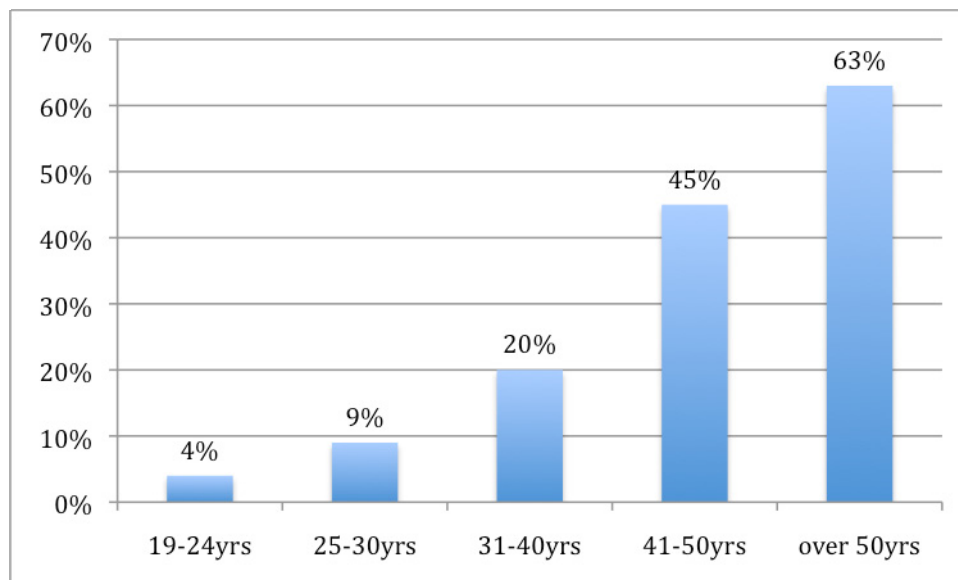
The older a person in the diaspora is, the more likely s/he is to send remittances. While the vast majority of people in the diaspora are aged 19-30 years (59%), this group is the least likely to remit, while those aged over 50 years are three times more likely to do so.

75% of people aged under 25 years, are reported never to have remitted anything at all.

This trend becomes even more marked if one looks at who it is that sends remittances on what might be termed a **regular basis – at least three times a year**.

Those aged over 40 years are **more than ten times more likely** to be remitting regularly than those aged under 25 years, who tend to only bring goods once a year at Christmas time, if at all.

Graph 5: showing % in each age category that remit at least three times a year



96% of those aged under 25 years DO NOT remit regularly.

63% of those aged over 50 years DO remit regularly.

This finding is not surprising, but is of key interest, considering that according to our findings, it is Zimbabweans aged between 19 and 30 who are streaming into South Africa at this time. It is clear from the experiences of Zimbabweans arriving in South Africa that it is increasingly difficult to find jobs of any description, and thousands end up living on the pavements or in the Central Methodist Church (CMC) in Johannesburg:³⁴ Zimbabweans live ten to a room in Hillbrow, and struggle to sell sunglasses on the street corners.

³⁴ MSF, *ibid*.

Key informants both in South Africa and Zimbabwe have also referred to the insatiable demands of families back home, in the event of someone getting a job in the diaspora.³⁵ In some instances people under this pressure decide to go to ground and to avoid demands from family back home entirely, instead focusing on building a separate life abroad. Again, it is younger men and women who do not have spouses and children back home who can most easily make this decision, where older spouses with more established family bases could be predicted to be more likely to keep in touch and send money home.

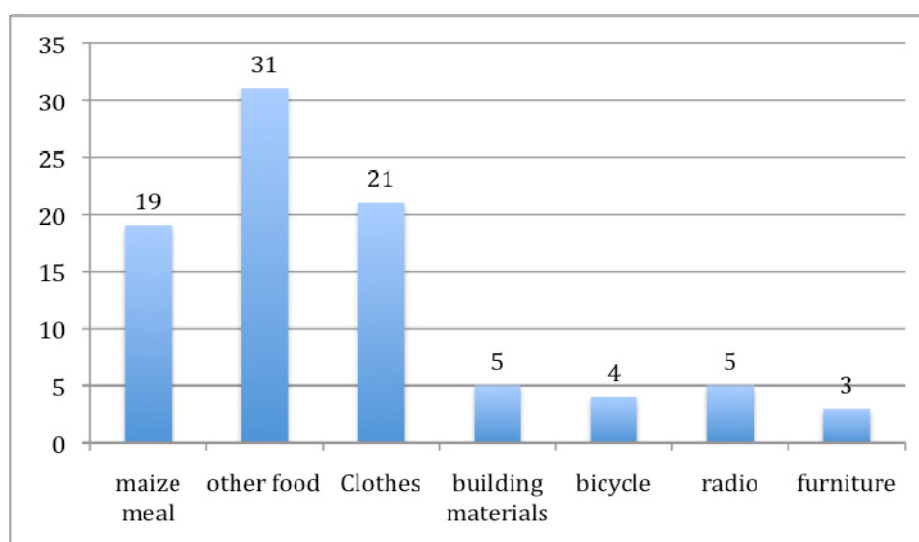
Clearly, rural families who send their children into the diaspora at this stage should not expect to reap much return. Yet, there is little else for school leavers in Zimbabwe to do, but to try their luck outside of the country.

7. Remittances: what do families actually receive?

Bearing in mind the preponderance of young people in the diaspora (59%) and the finding that over 90% of these do not remit regularly, it was not surprising that people reported very modest remittances from the diaspora.

In terms of goods, 51% of families with diaspora members DID NOT receive any goods at all. Of the remaining 52 families (49%), goods received were reported as illustrated in the graph following. All but two families reported receiving either maize or other food. The fact that the *omalayitsha* charge by the kg for cross border deliveries, combined with the fact that donors were blanket-feeding maize in many areas by the end of 2008, may explain why maize was not sent as often as other foodstuffs. However, the quantity of goods being remitted was insufficient to provide more than a brief respite in poverty. This finding is consistent with the Zimbabwe Vulnerability Assessment Committee (ZimVAC) report of January 2009, which assesses that remittances currently contribute a miserly **2%** to the income of urban families in Zimbabwe.³⁶

**Graph 6: number of families receiving various types of goods during 2008
(52 out of 106 “Diaspora families”)**



³⁵ Interviews at the CMC in April 2009, also interviewers' personal family experiences with siblings.

³⁶ ZimVAC, "Urban food security assessment", January 2009, page 18.

“Other food” can include anything from substantial groceries, to 2 kg sugar.

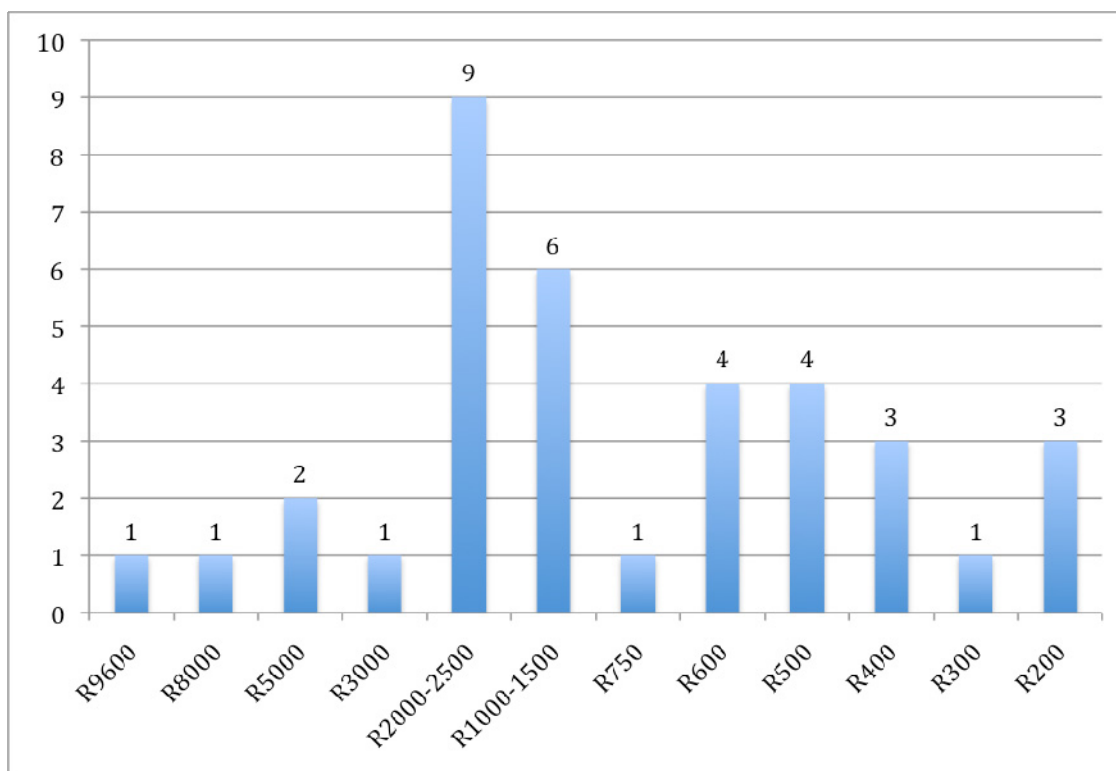
“Clothes” are frequently second hand, often from the employers of Zimbabwean domestic workers in South Africa, and are sometimes destined for bartering.

“Furniture”: refers to a chair in one case, and to electrical items such as a fridge or stove.

The percentage of families that received money during 2008 was even smaller than that receiving goods. **Only 36 out of 106 families with members in the diaspora reported receiving any cash at all. This is 34% of all diaspora families, and 25% of all families.** ³⁷

The amounts received were in most cases a mere gesture to families, in terms of the cash actually making a material difference to recipients, being more in the nature of very occasional and not very large windfalls. The most common amount received (by 9 families) was R2,000 – R2,500 in the course of an entire year, which amounts to around R200 (USD 20) per month.

**Graph 7: showing number of families and total amount of cash received during 2008
(36 out of 106 “Diaspora families”)**



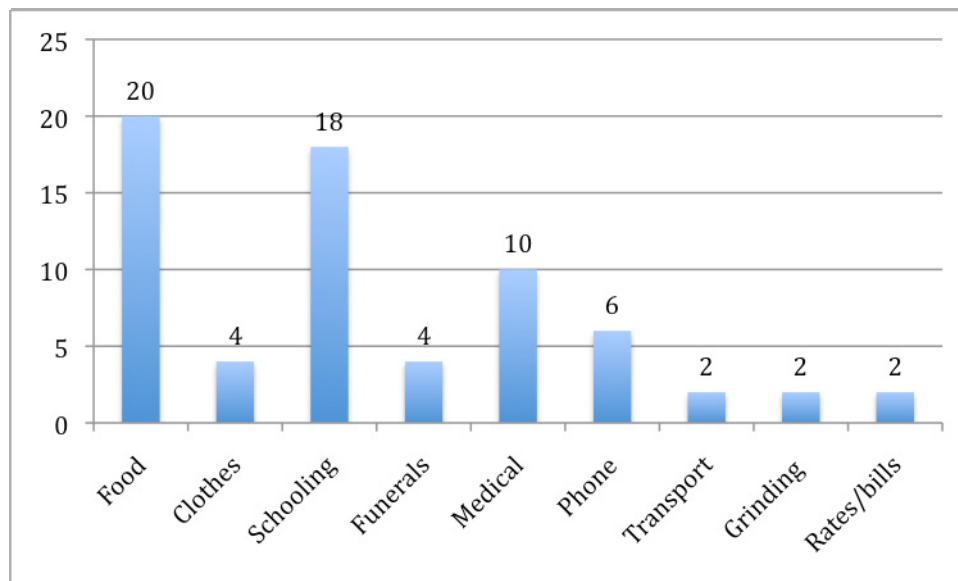
Only 18% of our 142 families with somebody in the diaspora received the equivalent of at least R100 per month during 2008. ³⁸ This figure tallies well with the findings of the ZimVAC report for 2009, which found 19% of urban households reporting a relative in the diaspora who supported them

³⁷ This contrasts sharply to Bracking and Sachikonye’s finding that 73% of families reported monetary remittances in the previous 12 months: *ibid*, 2008.

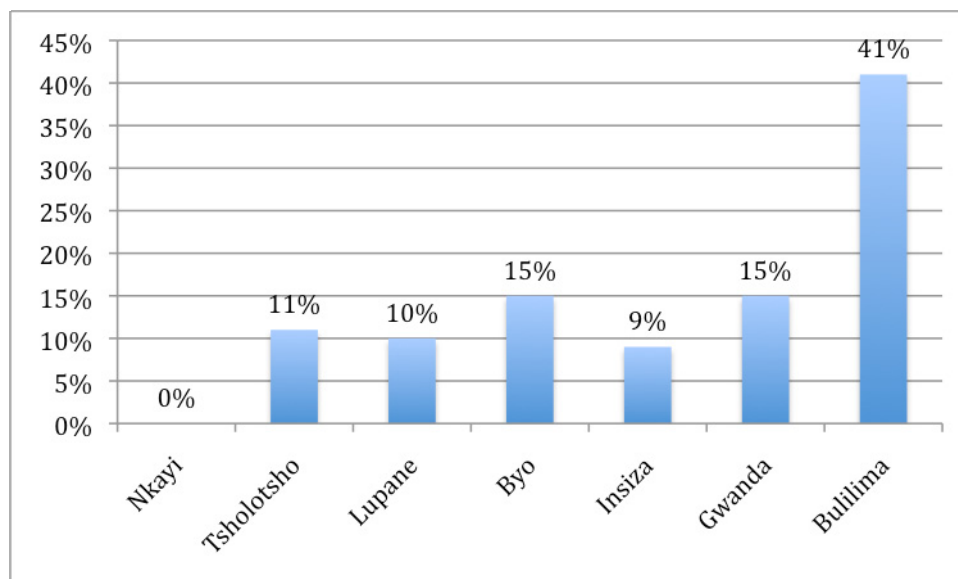
³⁸ This figure of 18% also tallies with those who claimed that diaspora money was their major source of income.

from time to time – and they reported a decrease from their 2006 finding of 28%.³⁹ However, only 4% of the ZimVAC households reported that remittances were an important source of income.

Graph 8: How 36 families who received Diaspora money, spent it in 2008



Graph 9: Percentage of individuals in the Diaspora who remitted cash in 2008, by District



The low remittances during 2008 might be in part owing to the disruption to life caused by the xenophobic attacks in South Africa in the first half of the year, which displaced thousands of Zimbabweans from their places of informal residence and hence from work. Alternatively, it could reflect a saturation of the job market consistent with the enormous surge of migration that we have documented, with correspondingly hard times for those in the South African diaspora.

³⁹ ZimVAC, *ibid*. The drop off in our remittance findings from those of Bracking and Sachikonye's 2007 study may reflect in part a genuine falling off in remittances, in keeping with this ZimVAC finding: as the South African diaspora becomes over subscribed, remittances have fallen.



Photos 4 and 5: ten million dollar notes lie in the garbage heap – Zimbabwean currency is not even fit for toilet paper as this sign at South African Emigration, Beitbridge, states. (March 2009)



Sixteen out of the 36 cash-receiving families received less than R800 over the entire year - less than R100 per month, and 7 of these received as little as R200 – R400, as once off donations at Christmas. While every Rand makes a difference at some level to families as poor as those in most of rural Zimbabwe, remittances at this level are not making a substantial difference to anyone's life style, although it did allow some families to meet essential expenses, even if only once in the year.

Five out of seven districts had between 9% and 15% of individuals in that district remitting money back home. Nkayi families reported no money remitted, but this may be due to the smaller sample in this district, although Nkayi families did seem to fare worst generally in terms of returns from the diaspora.⁴⁰ Bulilima showed 41% of individuals abroad remitting cash, and the most substantial cash remittances of 2008 were also in this sample group: Bulilima may be a special case, which is discussed separately ahead.

Considering the fact that in April 2009, the Consumer Council of Zimbabwe placed the minimum amount of money needed per month for a family of four to survive at USD 437 - which is approximately R 3,500 per month - and considering that the cost of living has come *down* during 2009, it can be observed that a remittance of R100 per month is scarcely going to have any impact on household expenses.

Now that Zimbabwean shops are better supplied with foodstuffs, it is already apparent that in 2009 fewer people in the diaspora are remitting goods and are more likely to remit money, which is the reverse of 2008, as the cost of sending goods from South Africa is now more expensive than the cost of purchasing them in Zimbabwe. However for families in remote rural areas, their best hope is for families to still remit goods rather than money, as goods are still not readily available in most rural business centres, and are expensive when they are.

8. How do remittances reach their recipients?

The two most common ways of transporting goods and money from South Africa to Matabeleland are via the cross border operators - the *omalayitsha* - or by the family member in person. Personal delivery works only for those who remit seldom, or cross the border often. Most commonly, in our sample it involves people bringing groceries home once a year at Christmas. The *omalayitsha* provide a very convenient service of usually same day or overnight delivery, often right to the homestead. However, they are expensive to use, charging between 20% and 40% on top of the value of goods/money delivered. This system operates entirely on trust, and is surprisingly reliable; however, goods sometimes do not get delivered, or are delivered to the wrong person. Those using the road from Johannesburg to Beitbridge are very familiar with the sight of vehicles dragging enormous trailers packed precariously high, with everything including wheel barrows, window frames, lounge suites and groceries, destined for rural Zimbabwe. However, it is also visibly apparent that this traffic has slowed dramatically in the last few months, as shops in Zimbabwe restock.

Ironically, the *omalayitsha* are now turning to repatriating corpses to Zimbabwe, as the demand for groceries has receded, but Zimbabweans in South Africa continue to die every week: instead of the

⁴⁰ It is not possible to draw strong conclusions from our small sample, but Nkayi is furthest away from South Africa out of the districts we included, and discussions with key informants suggest that people here have often been here for generations and are reluctant to move, even within Zimbabwe. Most diasporisation has therefore been recent and as we have shown, recent migrants have fared worst in remitting.



Photos 6-9: Omalayitsha on the move from Johannesburg to Bulawayo with precarious loads – bringing groceries for Nhlanhla of Hope Fountain, Matabeleland, and for many others. (May 2009)

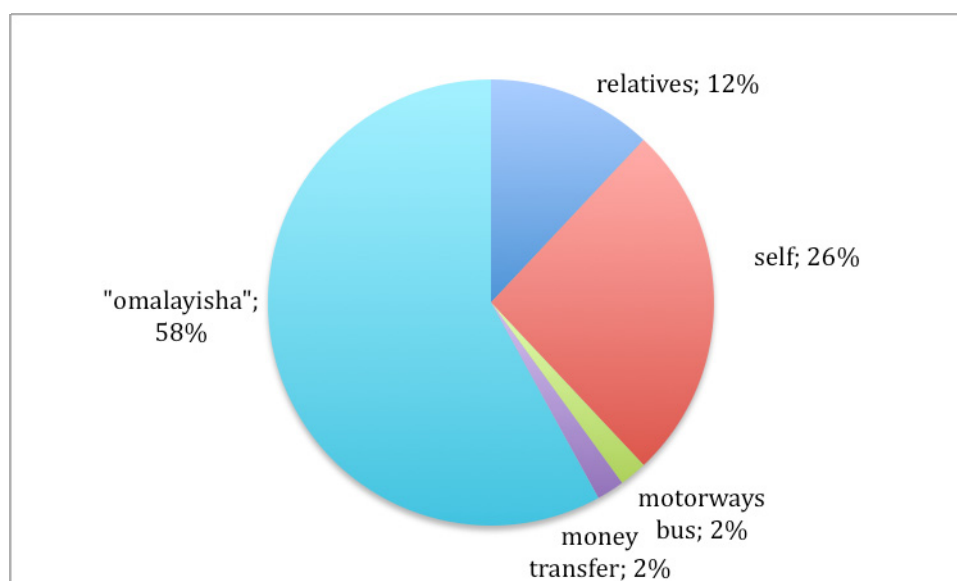


hoped-for groceries, the *omalayitsha* is now likely to deliver the corpse of somebody's child or husband.⁴¹

Very few people make use of formal money transfers. Only one Bulawayo-based family reported this as a means of receiving money, with all other Bulawayo families also receiving money either by hand or from *omalayitsha*. As Maphosa (2004) has pointed out, this is because most people are in the South African diaspora illegally and so cannot easily produce the documentation required in South Africa to engage in a formal transaction, and more importantly, most rural families have no local access whatsoever to banks, so that this would not be a useful way of transferring funds. Families who have been remitting for decades, such as those in Bulilima (see following), commented that it is much easier these days to get remittances than it was in the 1980s or 1990s, when the current *omalayitsha* system was not in place.

⁴¹ The Chronicle, "Going gets tough: *Omalayitsha* turn to ferrying corpses", 20 June 2009.

Chart 4: Most common methods of delivery of remittances



9. Bulilima, village X – a different experience of the Diaspora

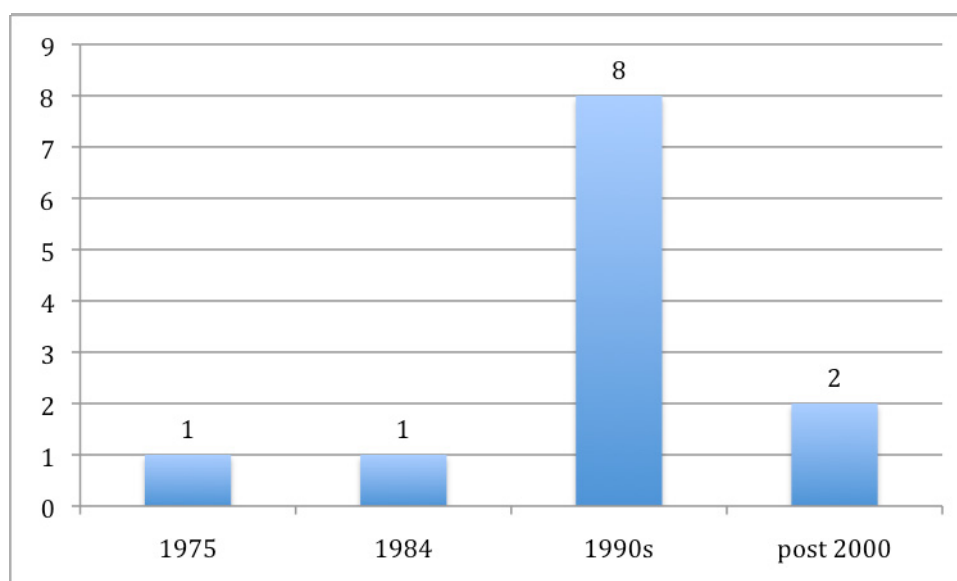
The authors were surprised at how few people in the diaspora who originate in rural Matabeleland appear to remit regularly, and are aware that certain areas of Matabeleland have a more established pattern of diasporisation and remittances. We therefore chose one village that is very close to the Botswana border and 10 km north of Plumtree town, and interviewed every second family in this village. This was a total of 12 households, or a 50% sample of this one village. The findings here were markedly different from all other villages in the other five districts.

- 12 out of 12 families interviewed here had family members in the diaspora
- The average number of members in the diaspora was 1.8 per family – a total of 22 family members from 12 families.
- **10 out of 12 families (83%) receive remittances from the diaspora**
- Remittances are often substantial, and are enough to sustain a family.
- 7 out of 12 families, or 60%, received cash during 2008, ranging from R9,600 down to R1,200, with none receiving less than this. (9 out of 22, or 41% of individuals remitted money, but their spread was such that 60% of families received cash).
- The average age of family members in the diaspora from Bulilima was 35.2 years – higher than the overall average age of 29.5 years.
- **10 out of 12 families (83%) had had at least one member of their family permanently in the diaspora since the 1990s, or earlier.**

Length of time that a family has been in the diaspora clearly has an important bearing on the ability of people in that family to remit. Again, this is not a particularly surprising finding, but is an important one. Family members that found employment in South Africa during the 1990s or before, are clearly better established there. It was explained to us that if you are a waiter in a restaurant, or

a labourer in a building company and have been there for a decade, you are well positioned to ensure that your brother/son/uncle/daughter can take any vacancy that arises.⁴²

Graph 10: Village X, Bulilima: time range in which first family member went into Diaspora



There is a direct link between those families that diasporised prior to 2000 (83%) and those that get remittances (83%) in Bulilima. There is also an obvious link, generally across all districts, between length of time in the diaspora and age, which also explains why older people are more likely to remit – they are more likely to have been in the diaspora for longer and to be more established.

Even in this village, with its apparently exemplary diaspora experience, out of 22 people in the Diaspora there were three who had never remitted. One young wife cried bitterly and reported that she had heard that her husband has a girlfriend in Johannesburg and has abandoned her.

Our findings in Bulilima are not dissimilar to those of Maphosa in his 2004 Mangwe study. Mangwe is, like Bulilima, on the western border and has a long history of diasporisation. While we found higher numbers of diasporised families – 100% compared to 68% - this could be owing to our small sample, the wave of diasporisation that we have observed since Maphosa's 2004 study, plus the extremely close proximity of our village to Plumtree town: his area is 100km away. He found 78% of families received remittances, compared to our 83%. He also recorded substantial remittances to this region, sufficient to alter life styles, as we did - in sharp contrast to other regions involved in our study.

It is no surprise, bearing these findings in mind, that the ZimVAC report of January 2009 found urban centres in Matabeleland South, including Plumtree and Beitbridge - two border towns - to be the most food secure in Zimbabwe, with only 20% food insecure families. It should be added that Matabeleland South **rural** is one of the **least** food secure regions in Zimbabwe and the ZimVAC research reflects only the food security of **urban** provincial areas.⁴³

⁴² Key informant interviews. This is readily apparent in Johannesburg: there are restaurants in Rosebank where virtually every waiter is from the same extended family or rural village in Matabeleland – personal interactions with waiters, April 2009.

⁴³ ZimVAC, "Urban food security assessment", January 2009.

10. How has the Diaspora affected your life?

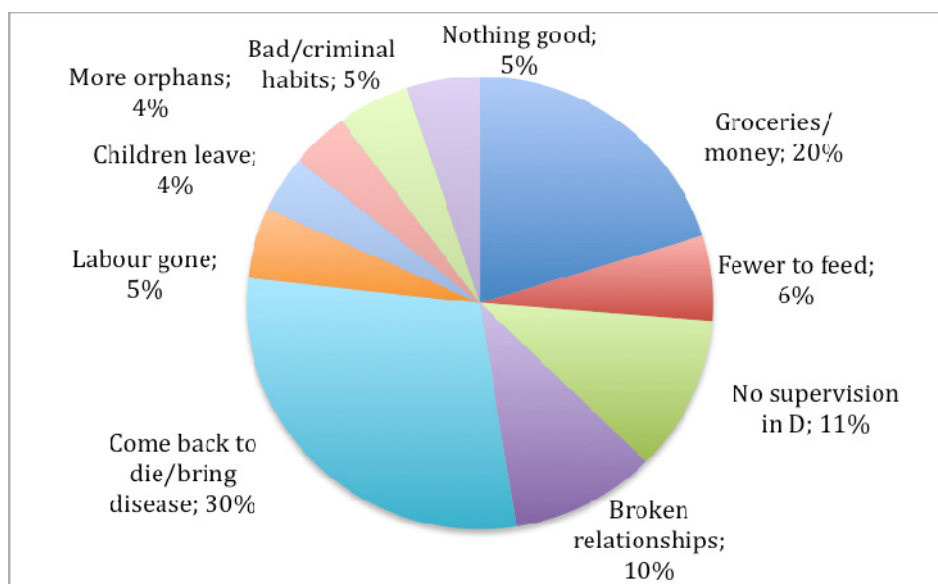
"I had to give the 'omalayitsha' an ox to take my son to Joburg and he has never sent anything back to me. Nothing good has come to me".

"People come back dead".

"A man got me pregnant and ran away to SA and I am ill and cannot look after my two children. My aunt has to help and it is not enough for food for us."

"I have heard he has joined the criminals of South Africa and survives by robbing people."

**Chart 5: The range and frequency of responses to:
how has the Diaspora impacted on your life?**



Interviewees were asked to describe how the diaspora had affected them, and all responses were noted. Many interviewees were insistently negative, and a few were positive, while others gave mixed responses, such as: "We get groceries at Christmas, but there is nobody to help in the fields now."

All responses were put in general categories. The most frequent group of comments reflected the idea that people go into the diaspora and "come back dead", or come back ill and infect others. Only 20% of the responses indicated that the diaspora was a source of groceries and money. Most of these responses were from families in Bulilima, unsurprisingly. A further 6% indicated that there were at least fewer mouths to feed now at home, which was the only other "positive" response to the question.

The other 74% of responses were all negative:

- 30% implied that the diaspora brought death and disease to families.
- 10% implied that marriages were destroyed by the long separations.

- 11% were parents lamenting that their young adult children were away from family support systems and had nobody to guide them morally.
- A further 5% acknowledged that their children were learning morally bad or even criminal habits in South Africa. This included two mothers who broke down and cried, saying that they knew their sons were now involved in criminal gangs and were robbing people. One said she heard her son had shot somebody.
- 5% noted that there was now less labour for the fields and livestock.
- 4% noted that there were more orphans now, either because people died in the diaspora, or because they came back and dumped illegitimate children on relatives in Zimbabwe, creating “diaspora orphans”.
- 4% noted that it was now hard to persuade children to finish school, as they all wanted to run away to Joburg as soon as they could.

The lived experience of the diaspora is clearly far from the myth – Egoli has proved to be no “city of gold” for most rural families in Matabeleland. The predominant feedback on diasporisation is that it has undermined family and community cohesion, depleted villages of competent leadership and labour – and too seldom has resulted in poverty relief for families. It has even exacerbated poverty, through death and disease.

Those areas that have a long history of diasporisation may be notable exceptions to this general pattern. While further research and follow up is needed on rural remittances, these findings from our admittedly small sample, certainly challenge the popular wisdom that it is diaspora remittances that sustain most people, particularly in rural Zimbabwe.



Photo 10: a Zimbabwean hangs washing in the Central Methodist Church, Johannesburg



Photos 11 and 12: rural and urban poverty – a woman in Tsholotsho gathers wild fruit to stave off starvation, while urban kids dice with cholera and death.



B. BARTERING EXPERIENCES: “WE WERE CHEATED”

*“We were swindled by people from town as we do not know the real value of forex.”
[man in Lupane who traded 5 cows for 150 kg maize each]*

The vast majority of Zimbabweans have been driven outside of the formal economy, firstly by the rampant inflation and deindustrialization of the last few years, and now by the US dollarization of the economy. While many have tried to survive by heading into the diaspora – with mixed success as shown in the previous section – other families have had to resort to barter in order to survive. While barter at the village level has always existed, it is the frequency and exploitative nature of it that has changed. This is no longer the neighbourly process of exchanging a cup of flour for a cup of sugar, but is a case of rapid depletion of major assets, often bartered to people from outside the district, that has plummeted families into deeper poverty and is threatening food security. ZimVAC noted that more than 30% of their urban respondents had traded a household asset in the last year, and that 7% of them had traded livestock, in exchange for food.⁴⁴ They interpret this as an indication of extreme poverty, and express concern at the vicious poverty trap into which loss of assets is driving those who are already desperately poor.

1. Foreign exchange – who has it?⁴⁵

“Life is pure torture - where do we get the USD or Rand from? I am suffering even though the shops are full of goods.”

“The move to forex has crushed me. I have no money for food or goods.”

“If we had had the money for hospital my mother might not have died, she was strong and busy. We have suffered so much hunger because we don’t have money to buy food even though it is now available.”

At the end of May 2009, we continue to observe that many families in rural Matabeleland – and no doubt throughout Zimbabwe – do not have access to foreign exchange. While the current harvest has provided temporary relief in terms of food security, in the absence of hard currency families are still having to resort to bartering chickens, goats, cows, radios – and their hard won harvests – in order to pay for school levies, for grinding mill services, for bus fares and health services.⁴⁶ While rural teachers and nurses are now getting paid in forex, this does not help the average subsistence farmer, who has no easy way of accessing hard currency. Instead, bartering maize for other essential needs is rapidly undermining the length of time that harvests will last this year. Bartering is reducing food security and general wealth, which is already precarious for many families.

⁴⁴ ZimVAC, *ibid*, page 18.

⁴⁵ Lack of access to forex is a widespread problem in Zimbabwe now. There is little generation of real revenue through exports or taxes, yet the entire economy is forex-based. Banks frequently cannot find the cash to give to civil servants, who are being paid USD 100 per month, and businessmen complain that they cannot retrieve their deposits in hard cash, meaning that they are reluctant to place cash in the banks. See Zimonline, “Huge demand for hard cash hits Zim”, 27 May 2009, and The Zimbabwe Independent, “Deposits remain scarce”, 21 May 2009. But this situation is even tougher in rural Zimbabwe, where there is virtually no formal employment and no obvious way, apart from remittances, for forex to enter the economy there. As we have shown, cash remittances are few and far between for most families.

⁴⁶ The Herald; “Rural service providers resort to barter trade”; 29 April 2009

In our sample of 142 families, 56% reported that they had bartered during 2008. This included 7 Bulawayo urban families. Most people regret the transactions they were forced into making, being aware that they can never replace the asset they gave away for short term but essential gain.

2. How much maize is a cow worth?

“There was no fair deal – it was exploitation”.

The problem with bartering is that there is no fixed rate, and the price you negotiate depends on your own desperation and the generosity of the other party. In Matabeleland the rate also seems to vary depending on the district: the further you live from a big centre, the fewer buyers that come your way, the less information you have about fair rates, and the worse your negotiating power. At the end of 2008, there was a national crisis in terms of food availability. Five million Zimbabweans were receiving donor hand-outs, and WFP rations were cut to cope with the demand, meaning that even families on donor food lists were barely surviving.

The ZimVAC report of January 2009 found that Matabeleland North, with 45% of food insecure families, was the second most food insecure province in Zimbabwe, after Manicaland at 47%. It is no coincidence that where people are most desperate, they are most likely to lose the little they have. Food insecurity led to widespread bartering of livestock in rural northern Matabeleland, as families battled to feed themselves. It was often people from outside the villages, or businessmen, who came in and dictated the rates for major transactions, as most rural villagers were equally hungry and desperate by the end of 2008.

Binga is the most remote part of northern Matabeleland, and is particularly prone to drought and hunger. While this district was not part of the current study, on a specific outreach trip two of our interviewers noted that people in Binga had been particularly vulnerable to unfair bartering practices at the end of 2008. Butchers in the Midlands (via Gokwe) and Bulawayo sent trucks out to extort cattle from desperate villagers at the height of the hunger last year. There is at least one economy butchery in Bulawayo that is alleged to stock its shelves in this manner, by extorting the starving and desperate on a regular basis.

The going rate in Binga was 50 kg maize meal per beast, and starving families in this remote region had no option but to sell at this rate. One interviewee in adjacent Lupane district also reported selling a beast for 50 kg maize. This exchange is little less than robbery. A cow has an average value of around R3,000 and 50kg maize in 2008, if assessed generously, had a value of R500.⁴⁷ Five families in Lupane (Matabeleland North) swapped cows for 100 kg maize and another man traded five cows for 150 kg each – all patently unfair deals.

Policemen who could access grain from the parastatal Grain Marketing Board by virtue of their positions as senior civil servants, were also accused of using this then-scarce commodity to pick up beasts for next to nothing in various parts of northern Matabeleland.⁴⁸

⁴⁷ At the moment, 50 kg would be worth R200, which has deepened people's regret for having been forced to give up their beasts last year.

⁴⁸ Several key informants mentioned this in Matabeleland North.

However, in Gwanda – in Matabeleland South which was listed by ZimVAC as the most food secure province in Zimbabwe, with only 20% of food insecure **urban** families - one man reported getting 500 kg maize for his beast – ten times the Binga rate. Two other families, one in Gwanda and one in Insiza, also Matabeleland South, each reported swapping a cow for 300kg maize. But families further from Gwanda's urban centre, in outlying, drought prone Gwanda district, swapped cows for 100kg.

3. What value does anything have?

A brief but not exhaustive list of items that were bartered last year will give some insight into the arbitrariness in terms of relative value of these exchanges, most of which took place at the village level, involving neighbours or local services.

One chicken is worth: a pair of track shoes; one bar of soap; two bars of soap; 5kg maize; 6 kg maize; 10 kg maize; 2 kg seed maize; 5 kg seed maize; one mobile phone call; visit to the clinic in Insiza; school levy; four chickens for a one way 60km bus trip within Lupane....

- In Gwanda, a family gave up their prized solar panel and radio for maize.
- In Insiza, a woman gave up a whole fish for a box of matches, and still bitterly complains about how unfair a deal this was.
- In Lupane, one man swapped a cow, a donkey, two goats – and finally the corrugated roofing off one of his outbuildings – in a desperate effort to maintain a supply of maize for his family.
- In Tsholotsho a man swapped Colgate toothpaste for a cabbage, and another gained 24 buckets of millet for his donkey.

People in all districts offered up their labour in return for goods, and again, these exchanges ranged from the possibly fair to the exploitative.

One woman in Tsholotsho worked for a week for a bucket of maize; a man in Insiza worked for two days for a goat; a Tsholotsho woman swapped washing powder and a candle in return for having her door fitted; her neighbour thatched a hut for a jar of Vaseline and a child's dress.

4. Maize for barter

At the moment, most people have at least some harvest on hand, and prefer to swop grain for services and commodities, rather than livestock. Maize is currently being traded for school levies, medical fees, other foodstuffs.⁴⁹ Teachers in some areas are reported to be insisting that every pupil brings 10 kg of maize or groundnuts on a monthly basis, to supplement their poor salaries.⁵⁰ If you have several children in such a school, this will impact dramatically on your own food security.

⁴⁹ The Sunday News; "Schools demand maize, chickens as fees"; Bulawayo, 7-13 June 2009. This article cites a school in Matabeleland North that is demanding 10 to 16 buckets of maize per pupil in lieu of fees.

⁵⁰ Radio VOP; "Teachers demand cereals to supplement allowances"; 1 June 2009. This quotes a parent: "I am having serious problems raising 40kgs needed for my children every month because if I continue pumping out such huge amounts of maize every month, I will be begging for food four months down the line. We did not get a bumper harvest here and there is no way we can continue paying teachers from our granaries".

People who desperately need hard currency for something have been seen in rural business centres, trying to sell buckets of maize for R30 – and finding no takers.⁵¹ Maize is readily available and therefore not worth much either for sale or as a bartering tool at the moment. But people's urgent need for resources is forcing them to give up maize for very little, and this will undermine the food security of families, many of which have effectively grown only a few months' maize supply in the first place.



Photo 13: eating from rubbish dumps.

5. Bartering in Bulawayo: urban poverty

"It is very difficult to feed and clothe my children and grandchildren. I often sit all day at the market and my vegetables go rotten before I can sell them. I cannot pay rent and electricity - I had to borrow money to bury my daughter who came dead from RSA."

"We have no income and no breadwinner and my husband is blind."

Some of the most desperately poor and food insecure families that we interviewed live in Bulawayo. While rural families have mostly harvested something and have at least temporary food security, this is not true of urban families, who have little to fall back on in the current devastatingly tough economic environment. Shops in town may be full of goods, but most families do not have the necessary foreign exchange to buy anything.⁵² It is therefore hardly surprising that some families in Bulawayo have been reduced to barter. Five families here reported swapping second hand clothes for: maize; groundnuts; melons; beans; chickens; dried vegetables. One woman swapped her decent set of dinner plates for maize for her children; a man swapped his radio for maize.

⁵¹ Observations of SPT interviewers in Lupane and Nkayi, May 2009.

⁵² AFP; "Zimbabwe stores full again, with food for the rich", 12 June 2009.

Almost regardless of the transaction, references to bartering were always combined with the sense of having been exploited, cheated, robbed. People are used to the formal economy and paying in cash for an item: it feels unnatural and unfair to have to pay with goods for other goods, and in many cases, this is more than a perception: people were effectively robbed and continue to be, because they are too poor and desperate to strike a good deal. Zimbabwe's poor are getting poorer.

C. CONCLUSION

There is not much likelihood that the formal economy in Zimbabwe will recover any time soon. It is likely to take over a decade before industry begins to recover in any meaningful way, and in the interim, Zimbabwe will continue to lose her youth to the diaspora, and those left behind will struggle to survive, and most, particularly in rural areas, may receive little in the form of remittances. Hopefully, as the tax base grows slowly and civil servants and those in industry receive better wages, family security and access to foreign exchange will increase accordingly. But particularly in rural areas, grinding poverty is likely to be a factor for the indefinite future.

It is important, therefore, for donor agencies and others to be aware of the extent of rural poverty, and the following two major findings in this report:

- Many rural families who have members in the diaspora do not receive a sufficient return from this to reduce family poverty in any meaningful way.

Therefore having a family member in the Diaspora should not be used as a criterion, in and of itself, to exclude Zimbabwean families from donor food lists. There is a need for a much more sophisticated evaluation of which families do benefit from the diaspora and which do not, before this is used to deny people food.

- In the absence of access to foreign exchange, families are currently being forced to barter their harvests, and this is reducing food security of some rural families. This should be examined more carefully, to arrive at a realistic estimate of how long this year's harvests are actually going to keep rural families fed.



Photo 14: “Omalayitsha”, loaded high with goods for delivery, on the road from Johannesburg to Bulawayo. (June 2009)