THE INTERPLAY OF POLITICAL GOVERNANCE: IMPLICATIONS FOR NATIONAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, THE CASE OF THE SECOND REPUBLIC OF ZIMBABWE

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Abstract

The Second Republic of Zimbabwe has made strides in economic development and governance, putting first investments in significant sectors like technology, infrastructure, and energy. The mantra "Zimbabwe is Open for Business" is geared to attract investment and boost economic growth. The study used the interpretivist philosophy and made use of the explanatory design. The study used people living Zimbabwe's rural and urban areas, employed and unemployed as well as economists and statisticians as its population. Purpose sampling was used to choose thirty-five respondents as the study sample. Zimbabwe has stumbling blocks such as economic sanctions, climate change and was also affected by COVID-19, nevertheless, the country progressing well in infrastructure development and governance reforms. Inflation has been curtailed, Growth Development Product (GDP) has boosted and the economic fundamentals have improved as a result of the government's efforts. To achieve its Vision 2030 goals, There is need for Zimbabwe to keep monitoring corruption, as means for effective governance and sustainable development. Investigating the effects of infrastructure development on economic growth of local communities was the proposed future study.

Keywords: governance, new dispensation, institutional reform, policy coherence, state accountability, public sector leadership

INTRODUCTION

The Second Republic of Zimbabwe embarked on a journey to revive the economy and restructure governance, vowing to "open up the country for business." The vision for the Zimbabwe's Second Republic was clearly

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specified in the National Development Strategy 1 (NDS1) and the Transitional Stabilisation Programme (TSP), where the goal was to achieve the middle-income status by 2030 through revamping investments in significant sectors like infrastructure, road network, technology and energy. Regardless of these efforts, Zimbabwe is still facing challenges, like illegal economic sanctions, climate change, and the impact caused by COVID-19. This article seeks to evaluate the interplay of political governance in Zimbabwe, investigating how economic strategies and governance reforms can be implemented to engage national development and attain sustainable growth.

BACKGROUND

Kabonga and Zvokuomba (2021) noted that Zimbabwe's Second Republic has embarked on crucial journey in prioritising governance and economic development reforms. Benchmarks and performance indicators of achieving middle-income status by 2030 were set.

THE GOVERNMENT OF ZIMBABWE'S 2018 MANIFESTO

Zimbabwe has through a process of restructuring and transitioned into a new dispensation, where the priority of the the Second Republic is opening the country for business by creating employment, modernising the public sector, boosting investment, leveraging the economy, declaring war on corruption and making adjustments towards investor-friendly trajectory that pave way for economic growth and creation of employment (Matsika, 2018).

TRANSITIONAL STABILISATION PROGRAMME

The Transitional Stabilisation Programme (TSP) was an a strategic measure by the government to stabilise the macroeconomy and restructuring public and private sector entities. Vision 2030 provided a strong foundation for an upper-middle-income economy through fiscal and currency reforms as well as enhanced competitiveness (Helliker and Murisa, 2020).

NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY 1

Justice (2025) gave an account that Zimbabwe's National Development Strategy 1 (NDS1), that was in use from 2021 to 2025, was the stepping stone towards achieving Vision 2030. The plan geared on transforming Zimbabwe into an upper-middle-income society through focusing on crtical points like macroeconomic revitalisation, infrastructure development, human capital improvement and private sector growth. Its objectives aimed at sustained Gross Domestic Product growth, creating formal jobs and improving social networking. NDS1 was built on the concrete foundation that was provided by the TSP while focusing on fiscal discipline, provision of sufficient food, technological advancement and devolution. NDS1 was followed by NDS2 (2026-2030) that is set to, push Zimbabwe towards its Vision 2030 goals. A point to note is that NDS1's 14 points tally very well with the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

The 14 priorities) of NDS1 are:

1. Economic Growth: Attain macroeconomic reforms, stabilise inflation and boost growth.
2. Food Security: making sure that there is food security and improve nutrition.
3. Value Addition: Making sure that there is value addition to raw materials thereby skewing towards higher-value sectors
4. Infrastructure: Dam construction, rehabilitation of roads, production of energy and sanitation.
5. Digital Economy: Modernise economy through technological advancement ICT and e-governance.
6. Housing: Provision of decent housing for all.
7. Human Capital: Taking education, skills and innovation into consideration.
8. Healthcare: Boosting quality healthcare.
9. International Relations: Rebranding the country's name and creating its good image on global context.
10. Devolution: Empowering local people through decentralisation of administration executive powers.
11. Youth Development: Aiding youth growth and cultural heritage
12. Social Protection: Giving maximum support to disadvantaged and vulnerable groups.
13. Environmental Protection: Boost sustainability and climate resilience
14. Governance: Strengthen laws, enforce compliance of corporate governance regulations.

Challenges Faced by the Second Republic

Illegal Economic Sanctions

Economic sanctions, imposed to Zimbabwe in the early 2000s, have severely affected Zimbabwe's economy, preventing access to international credit, investment and trade thereby resulting in a staggering loss of billions of dollars. Efforts to rebrand the country with the "Zimbabwe is open for business" mantra is being jeopardised by sanctions that continue to hinder economic performance while keeping businesses in survival mode and limiting capital formation possibilities, hence creating some bottlenecks in the economy. (Helliker and Murisa, 2020).

Climate change

Climate change, for instance El Niño-induced drought, heat waves and Cyclone Idai, significantly affected Zimbabwe's economic development. Since agriculture is a critical sector, its jeopardy by climate led to food insecurity. The cyclone Idai killed people and destroyed infrastructure, homes and crops, pushing the economy further down. The climate-related disasters exacerbate unemployment, poverty, and vulnerability, specifically in rural areas. Since Zimbabwe's economy was already fragile, these shocks make recovery even tougher (Sithole *et al*, 2023).

COVID-19

COVID-19 further affected Zimbabwe's economy, by hitting sectors like tourism, agriculture and manufacturing. (Rodriguez-Morales *et al.*, 2020). Tourism, which is a pivotal contributor to GDP, was heavily impacted resulting in revenue losses and job cuts. Agriculture was not spared as it was given a strong blow thereby worsening food security. The informal sector which is the big employer, was crippled so much that businesses shut while some scaled down. Issues like sky rocketing inflation, foreign currency shortages and a crippled healthcare system made the situation worse. Regardless of these challenges, economists focused a bouncing back of Zimbabwe's economy by 5% in 2026, attributing to agriculture, mining and manufacturing.

Understanding Political Governance

Political Governance is a scenario about how those in authority make decisions, make use of the available resources and exercising of power in a given society. It includes leadership styles, accountability and how government and citizens interact focusing on efficiency, social and economic progress. In conclusion, it is all about how the state, or the government or a country is managed to get public goods and services.

KEY ASPECTS OF POLITICAL GOVERNANCE

1. Decision-Making Framework: Puts in place rules, laws and regulations governing the state.
2. Power Dynamics: Determines how leaders are chosen and how authority is used in managing resources and services.
3. Accountability: Ensures those charged with governance are answerable to the public while minimising corruption and conflicts.
4. Multi-Stakeholder Engagement: Includes balancing the interests of the state, private and social actors in governance networks (Tatendashe *et al.*, 2024)

GOVERNANCE REGULATIONS DONE BY THE SECOND REPUBLIC

PUBLIC ENTITIES CORPORATE GOVERNANCE ACT CHAPTER 10:31

Zimbabwe's Public Entities Corporate Governance Act (Chapter 10:31) is an act of Parliament that was enacted during the reign of the Second Republic that promotes good governance and accountability in State Owned Enterprises by aid board appointments, management and oversight. The Act use a "comply or else" approach, criminalising non-compliance of corporate governance regulations. This goes hand in hand with the government's "Zimbabwe is open for business" mantra and its efforts to curb corruption (Admire *et al.*, 2023).

MONEY LAUNDERING AND PROCEEDS OF CRIME ACT

The Zimbabwe's Money Laundering and Proceeds of Crime Act is also an act of Parliament that was put into use to fight financial crimes like money laundering and terrorist financing (Torerai *et al.*, 2024). The 2018 amendment came with provisions that make money laundering a crime, authorises asset seizure and requires financial institutions to report suspicious transactions. It also empower the the government to quiz officials and seize assets if individuals cannot explain their wealth source thereby showing efforts to curb corruption and illicit flows (Alshira'h, 2024).

Mutapa Investment Fund

The Mutapa Investment Fund is a wealth fund that was introduced by Zimbabwe to take care of its natural resources, especially in mining. It is geared to boost economic growth, transparency and development, dressing from the government's Vision 2030 goals. The fund caters for strategic sectors in a bid to generate revenue, support infrastructure and diversify the economy. This was done to enhance accountability, boost investment and manage resources meant for citizens' benefit while guided by good governance (Moyo *et al.*, 2025).

Performance-Based Contracts

According to *The Herald* (2021), the Second Republic introduced performance-based contracts in 2021 as a strategic measure to make sure the public receive the maximum possible service from public organisations. The government came up with this initiative to improve public service performance. Heads of ministries and departments, Chief Executive Officers of state-owned entities, University Vice Chancellors and other senior executives in the public sector and councils are expected to swear the oath of service by signing performance-based contracts annually. These contracts serve as the foundation for setting targets, yardsticks and standards for all departments.

Performance-based contracts are a means for delivering government initiatives and achieving an upper-middle-income economy by 2030. Each leader's performance measured in accordance with the nation's blueprint, the National Development Strategy 1 provides the basis for measuring performance and the findings will be revealed, indicating who surpassed targets and who did not. Successful officials whose performance is outstanding will be recognised and awarded in a special ceremony attended by the President, Cabinet ministers and government officials. Such occasions are lively broadcast on national televisions showcasing their outstanding contributions. Conversely, underperforming public entities will also be named. (*The Herald*, 2021).

METHODOLOGY

Research Philosophy

Making use of the interpretivist philosophy, the study qualitatively explores Zimbabweans' perceptions of economic developments in their country

(Taherdoost, 2022). Grounded in a descriptive design, the research went through the lived experiences of Zimbabweans taking note of their subjective encounters with economic changes, drawbacks and opportunities. Deep analysis was done through interviews and focused group discussions. (Elgeddawy and Abouraia, 2024). Thematic analysis was used to identify, synthesize and make some interpretations of patterns and themes in the data, providing a deep understanding of Zimbabweans' experiences and perceptions. Through triangulation of these approaches, the study goal is to provide a comprehensive and contextualised understanding of the of economic developments in Zimbabwe. (Abu and Toyon, 2021).

POPULATION

The target population includes respondants who fit the research's criteria and have characteristics the reseacher finds interesting. It should not include demographic categories that do not match these charecteristics to avoid misrepresentation. Normally, the target population is a subset of the population under review. (Lavic, 2023). The study population comprises Zimbabweans who have vast experiences on the economic changes and governance reforms, encompassing people from all walks of life either in rural or urban areas, vulnerable groups, employed or unemployed and including all stakeholders.

SAMPLING TECHNIQUE - PURPOSIVE SAMPLING

While making use of purposive sampling, 35 respondants were selected based on their relevant expertise or knowledge about political governance, making them suitable for the research. This strategy includes people from population who fit a desired profile relevant to corporate governance (Ortega, 2021). The study employs purposive sampling, to select respondants with diverse backgrounds, ages and occupations from Zimbabwe's 10 geographical provinces. This criteria ensures representation from all regions, sectors and demographics, thus capturing a broad range of experiences and perspectives on economic development and governance reforms. The selection criteria consists:

- People living in urban or rural areas
- Employment status be it (formal or informal or unemployed)
- Age group
- Sector (government, private, civil society, entrepreneurship)
- Experts and economists with vast knowledge of Zimbabwe's economy and development projects

This approach enables in-depth exploration of people living in Zimbabwe's perceptions while providing rich insights into economic developments, complemented by expert perspectives on macroeconomic trends and policy implications.

DATA COLLECTION INSTRUMENTS

Data collection instruments consisted of in-depth interviews with Zimbabweans from diverse backgrounds, statisticians and seasoned economists. These semi-structured were employed to solicit subjective judgments on economic developments and governance reforms implemented by the Second Republic. Making use of in-depth interviews enabled the collection of rich, data, providing a deep understanding of people's experiences and perceptions (Botany and Road, 2022). The interview guide was crafted to explore topics such as:

- Awareness and comprehension of economic policies and reforms
- Perceived influence of economic changes on livelihoods and communities.
- Their subjective views on government performance and accountability.
- Their aspirations and expectations for Zimbabwe's economic future

DATA ANALYSIS TECHNIQUES

Atlas.TI software was employed as a qualitative data analysis (QDA) tool to help the researcher in organising, coding and analysing large amounts data. It is a suitable tool to be used in qualitative research across a variety of domains, as it can handle complex capabilities such as coding, memoing and network analysis. Studies may identify patterns and themes in sophisticated data, analyse and interpret data chronologically and derive useful conclusions using Atlas.TI (Tatendashe, 2023)

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

A thematic approach to data analysis was consistent with the qualitative foundations of this study, which used in-depth interviews and focus group discussions, yielding four key themes summarised in Table 1.

Table 4: Main Themes

Theme	Description
1	Expansion of development projects as symbols of state capacity
2	Infrastructure LED development and economic revitalisation
3	Good governance as a determinant of project sustainability and credibility
4	Persistent implementation and integrity challenges

EXPANSION OF DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS AS SYMBOLS OF STATE CAPACITY

The study participants held the view that the presence of a large-scale development project was evidence of the nation's developmental state. Theyconsistently support major infrastructure development initiatives in road construction, airport expansions, hospital refurbishment and dam projects, indicating the state's capacity to fulfil its development objectives as planned in the NDS1. Some of the key insights shared by the participants suggested that:

> "We have noticed massive projects being undertaken by this government, such as airport expansions and road network interchanges, which demonstrates that there is action being taken to improve the level of development in Zimbabwe" *(Participant 1).*
>
> "The development of roads and dams demonstrates the state's willpower and capacity to implement developmental projects" *(Participant 3).*
>
> "Developmental projects have given people hope that the country is on the right path, even if the pace is slow" *(Participant 4).*
>
> "It is easy for one to notice that the government is demonstrating its commitment towards achieving visible developmental projects" *(Participant 7).*

The insights shared by participants confirmed government's commitment to creating a digital economy by establishing information and communication technology infrastructure to promote digital literacy and entrepreneurship and by establishing 50 ICT laboratories. These initiatives have been supported to promote youth employment through participation and innovation in the global digital economy. There have been notable investments in healthcare, including the refurbishment of the Parirenyatwa Group of Hospitals and the establishment of telemedicine services at three institutions. Ultimately, these are meant to enhance service and promote capital productivity.

The positive sentiments expressed by the participants corroborate existing literature, including the work of Kabonga and Zvokuomba (2021), which highlights that the Second Republic in Zimbabwe has prioritised economic development through targeted investments in key sectors of the economy. They also reflected the efficacy of the NDS1, which emphasized opening Zimbabwe for business and modernising the public sector. From a governance perspective, the study's findings align with those of Jensenius *et al.* (2018), who indicate that political governance is assessed by the government's capacity to deliver public goods. These efforts are driven by the "Zimbabwe is Open for Business" and *"Nyika inovakwa nevene vayo"* mantras, promoting stakeholder involvement and a "brick by brick" approach to economic reconstruction. As a result, Zimbabwe's GDP is projected to grow by 6.6% in 2026, driven by agriculture, services and mining investments.

Infrastructure-led Development and Economic Revitalisation

There was a prevailing belief that infrastructure development programmes would drive the major economic recovery. Participants associated improvements in transport networks with job creation and the economy's investment potential. They associated the pace of infrastructure development with economic recovery, improved business conditions and job creation. It was noted that developments in infrastructure, such as roads, common energy and digital projects in water, were key indicators of economic activity. Some of the key highlights with that:

> "Having excellent transport infrastructure is important for business" *(Participant 2).*
>
> "Recently, we have been experiencing stable electricity supplies, which I think will assist local industry to recover and prosper" *(Participant 4).*
>
> "We have been blessed with rains this season and with more dams and irrigation schemes, I believe we will be in a position to reduce food shortages" *(Participant 5).*
>
> "The rollout of ICT labs and digital training programmes is helping young people to become digitally illiterate and start new businesses" *(Participant 8).*

The positive sentiments expressed by the participants are supported by key transport and communications infrastructural projects that have been undertaken by the Second Republic, which include the expansion of the Robert Mugabe International Airport, the expansion of the Harare-Beitbridge highway, the upgrading of the Harare-Bindura Highway and the building of the magnificent and eye catching Trababalas interchange that was constructed by local companies and engineered by local engineers for the benefit of their country. In addition, there has been significant progress in upgrading water infrastructure, including the construction of Tokwe-Mukosi Dam, the rehabilitation of the Kariba Dam wall and the construction of the Coffer Dam. Other notable developments in the energy and water supply sectors include the Great Zimbabwe 5-Megawatt Hydropower Station, the Kunzvi Dam (62% complete) and the Gwayi Shangan Dam (73% complete). The executions of these infrastructure development projects were long overdue and the intervention of the Second Republic demonstrates its seriousness in modernising infrastructure.

The Second Republic in Zimbabwe has completed several housing projects as part of its NDS1 aimed at transforming the country into an upper middle-income economy by 2030. Notable projects include the Midlands Park Housing Project, Marondera Dombotombo Flats, Glaudina Flats Project, Mathendele Project, Zvishavane Mixed Accommodation (Phase 2) and Marimba Flats. Additionally, the Tomlinson Depot flats, now known as Chimoio Camp Flats, have been completed. These projects aim to address Zimbabwe's housing backlog, estimated at 1.2 million and provide affordable and decent housing for citizens thereby not leaving no one behind (Murwira, 2025).

These sentiments are consistent with existing literature, which emphasizes TSP's thrust on national competitiveness and economic stabilisation (Helliker and Murisa, 2020) and the National Development Strategy priority on food security, infrastructure development, private sector growth and digitalisation. These results indicate widespread acceptance of infrastructure-led development, which citizens viewed as a pathway to national development.

Good Governance as a Determinant of Project Sustainability and Credibility

The participants reiterate that current developmental project will have a significant impact when supported by transparency, accountability and institutional oversight. Some of the key insights that were shared by participants indicate that:

> "The current developmental projects are a step in the right direction. However, there is a need to control corruption and promote sustainability" *(Participant 2).*
>
> "New laws on money laundering need to be strictly implemented so that the government will be effectively able to fight corruption" *(Participant 4).*
>
> "If public officials are held accountable, the current developmental projects tend to benefit the ordinary person in the street" *(Participant 5).*
>
> "If the government persists on performance contracts, the leaders are likely to become determined to achieve, since they will be assessed at the end of the period" *(Participant 8).*

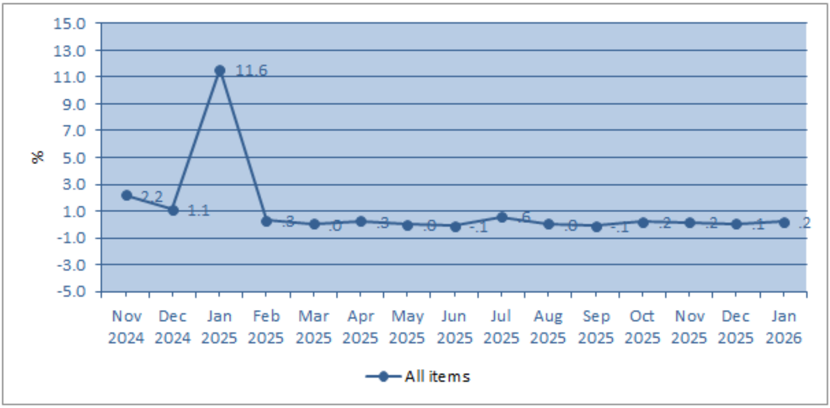

Figure 1: Trends in the Month-on-Month Inflation Rate *(Zimstat, 2026)*

Figure 1 demonstrates a drastic decline in the month-on-month inflation rate from a peak of 11.6% in January 2025 to 0.2% in January 2026. This reflects the cumulative impact of economic policies that have successfully placed the Zimbabwean economy on a growth trajectory (Ministry of Finance, Economic Development and Investment Promotion, 2025).

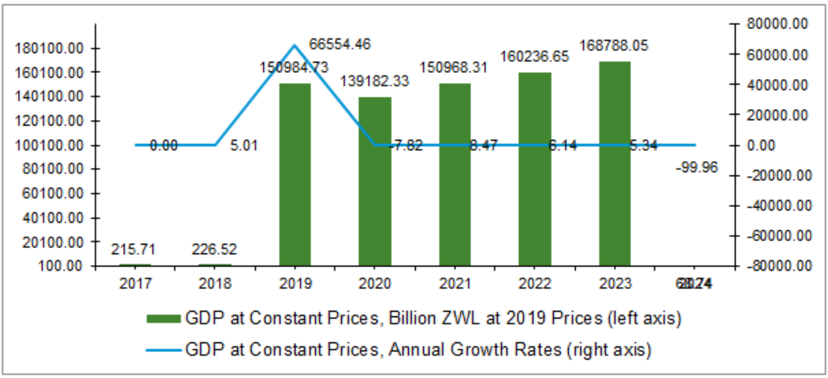

Figure 2: Trends in the Gross Domestic Product (2017 – 2024) *(Zimstat, 2026)*

Figure 2 shows that GDP at constant prices, increased from 2020 to 2023. The GDP growth rate has been constant at 7.8-5.34% over the four years from 2020 to 2023. The depressed performance of GDP is attributed to the disruptive effects of the COVID-19 pandemic (Ribeiro, 2020). The views expressed by participants are consistent with Budihal's (2015) insight that good governance involves a network of oversight and authority. The current study's findings resonate with those of Jensenius *et al.* (2018). Moreover, research outcomes linking governance to efficiency and legitimacy are consistent with the Public Entities Corporate Governance Act (Mthombeni *et al.*, 2023) and the Money Laundering and Proceeds of Crime Act (Alshira'h, 2024; Chitimira *et al.*, 2024).

Persistent Implementation and Integrity Challenges

The current developmental projects are not without their shortcomings. Participants raised concerns about bottlenecks in implementation and governance risks arising from current development projects.

> "Some developments are taking too long to complete and losing trust" *(Participant 1).*
>
> "We still experience corruption scandals even though we have got stiffer penalties that have been imposed" *(Participant 6).*
>
> "Sanctions and challenges accessing lines of credit have made it difficult for the government to complete some of its development projects within the stipulated time frames." *(Participant 8).*

The most frequently cited challenges include perceived corruption and rent-seeking behaviour in some state-led projects that are affecting their scalability. Limited transparency in procurement and project financing is also affecting stakeholder buy-in. The uneven distribution of projects across Zimbabwe's provinces was also identified as a key concern, with allegations that most projects are being undertaken in favour of urban centres such as Harare. Despite these sentiments, the Second Republic has implemented several measures intended to address corruption in Zimbabwe. These measures include establishing the integrity committee, whose strategic role is to detect and prevent corruption. The reform and capacitation of the Zimbabwe Anti-Corruption Commission (ZACC) have been effective in the investigation and prosecution of corruption cases in the country. ZACC recorded a 74% conviction rate and recovered $30 million in stolen assets. This demonstrates the impartiality and efficacy of ZACC in addressing corruption across the political, social and economic divides (Ndoro, 2025).

In addition, the Second Republic has ushered in a new dispensation that has culminated in the rapid corruption of code systems. This mechanism was established to expedite the resolution of corruption cases. Moreover, the National Anti-Corruption Strategy for 2026 to 2030 clarifies the framework for a multi-stakeholder approach. These initiatives have also incorporated public awareness, education and sensitisation campaigns to promote a culture of zero tolerance to corruption across all sectors of the economy and in society. This is in addition to the Whistleblowers and Witness Protection Bill, which provides for the establishment of a witness protection unit within the National Prosecuting Authority (NPA) and a Witness Protection Appeal Tribunal to encourage reporting of corruption. The Commission of Inquiry into the affairs of the Harare City Council, a 9-month investigation running from May 2024 to February 2025, uncovered gross corruption and financial mismanagement in the Harare town council, with findings revealing that offers of US$1 million were made through illegal land sales. Challenges encountered in the implementation of an enterprise resource planning (ERP) system, as well as in the management of an executive vehicle scheme and this demonstrates the commitment of the Second Republic to ensuring that sanity prevails in local governance, reducing the prevalence of corruption.

Moreover, cost overruns and delays are also affecting the efficacy of current development projects. These results resonate with existing literature like Helliker and Murisa (2020), where it is highlighted that efforts to promote economic recovery in Zimbabwe are constrained by institutional weaknesses, limited integration and limited capital formation. This is linked to implementation challenges arising from economic sanctions and restricted access to international lines of credit and investment, which were further disrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic and climate change (Rodriguez-Morales *et al.*, 2020).

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The Second Republic in Zimbabwe is generating perceived and tangible development projects that demonstrate renewed state activism and economic reconstruction. Key economic fundamentals, particularly gross domestic product and inflation, attest to this growth trajectory. Zimbabwe has registered significant infrastructure development projects across various sectors. There is hope for the economy, in the rehabilitation of transport through road programmes, the upgrading of Robert Mugabe International Airport, the construction of Trabablas interchange, improvements in power generation through upgrades to the Kariba Dam and construction of Tokwe-Mukosi Dam, among others. The success of these projects is attributed to the "Zimbabwe is Open for Business" and "*Nyika inovakwa nevene vayo"* mantras which have enabled diverse stakeholders to play pivotal roles in the country's reconstruction through brick-by-brick philosophy and the repositioning of the economy as a middle-class economy by 2030.

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