



## ZIMBABWE – A TURNAROUND FOR THE COUNTRY AND THE FISHERIES SECTOR

Zimbabwe, formerly Rhodesia, has been in the news for the last two decades for all the wrong reasons – what do we know about this country? Zimbabwe, named after the historical stone structures known as “Great Zimbabwe”, was a major trade center for Africa many centuries ago, but has since flourished in agriculture and mining, as well as having a unique geographic position as the gateway from Mozambique in the East to Namibia in the west, from South Africa in the south to Zambia and the Congo in the north.



Zimbabwe, like many African countries had a turbulent period of colonization by the British. This culminated in the Unilateral Declaration of Independence (UDI) from Britain in 1965 which ushered in white rule under the stewardship of the Prime Minister, Ian Smith. 1972 saw the start of a 7 year war of true independence which witnessed the first universal multi-racial free elections in 1980. This was the start of a 37 year rule by President Robert Mugabe as head of ZANU (PF) and government.

On a new path to democracy, Mugabe made several reforms notably in universal education and health care – the country prospered in the first decade of his leadership. The post-independence honeymoon finished in 1997 as bribery and corruption, mismanagement of the economy and voter discontent triggered violent land reform and oppression of opposition movements. Zimbabwe suffered some of the world’s highest recorded hyperinflation, and eventually opted for a multi-currency economy in 2009, along with a government of national

unity. A return to ZANU (PF) rule in 2015 did nothing to reverse back governance habits, and the Mugabe era came to a rapid end in November 2017, after a bloodless stand-off between Mugabe and the military. Mugabe was succeeded by his former deputy and long-time colleague, Emmerson Mnangagwa. Mnangagwa faces a long road ahead of him as he looks to rebuild the effects that the last 20 years of poor governance which has halved the Zimbabwean economy, run down its infrastructure and demoralized its people. Mnangagwa has started positively coming down heavily on all forms of corruption, attracting foreign investment, land compensation for dispossessed farmers and promises of a free and fair election which must be held before August 2018.

The new Zimbabwean government has correctly maintained focus on the economy which should grow by 5-10% per annum over the coming few years, starting from a low base. This will be done through agricultural financing, economic reforms and policy interventions in order to scale back on unnecessary government spending. On the agricultural front, a growth of up to 15% has been predicted, which is to be attained through increased hectares under the command agricultural programme and in close collaboration with and support to the private sector. Agriculture and mining have always underpinned the Zimbabwean economy – with a renewed interest in foreign investment and a relaxation of indigenization legislation, this growth is realistic.

One part of the command agricultural programme is command fisheries. The Zimbabwean government has initially identified 5 000 dams across the country which it will aim to improve food and nutrition requirements as well as bolster the amount of fish that are produced through cage production and through the introduction of more fingerlings. The ultimate aim is obviously to increase fish production in the country, as more and more priority is given to the protein that fish provides, and where an estimated 50 000 jobs are also to be created through this exciting initiative. The Minister of Environment, Water and Climate is quoted to have said, “there are success stories like Lake Harvest, which is producing significant volumes and generating >US\$20 million a year from fish”.

Lake Harvest is the largest tilapia farming operation in Africa which includes having operations on the Zambian side of Lake Kariba and on Lake Victoria in Uganda. The fish that is produced

mainly supplies depots and supermarkets from South Africa to Kenya. Lake Harvest has integrated its business to include a feed mill, hatchery, lake-based cage farming, processing plant, refrigerated freight and distribution outlets. This integrated business plan allows Lake Harvest to abide by the highest quality of standards set which includes regulations set by the European Union, allowing produce to be shipped to Europe and the Middle East. Lake Harvest manages its risks by controlling all aspects of its operations – from the supply of fingerlings and feed to the processing and sale of its products, and its own cage operations in between. Management of Lake Harvest have indicated their willingness to play their role in government’s command fisheries programme.



*ACF/Lake Harvest Aquaculture tilapia cages on Lake Kariba*