

## Article

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**Abstract**

Child sexual abuse (CSA) is a serious scourge that affects all countries globally. While there are myriad factors contributing to the prevalence of CSA in Zimbabwe, poverty is arguably one of the major underlying issues and root causes of most of these factors. Over the past two decades, Zimbabwe has gone through an unprecedented economic meltdown; fewer resources are being channelled towards child protection leading to the decline in standards of living for children. Consequently, children are left vulnerable to poverty which exposes them to the risk of CSA. This paper discusses a number of poverty-related factors that are contributing to CSA in Zimbabwe. A qualitative study approach was adopted, and data were collected from 38 participants and four key informants who were selected using theoretical and purposive sampling, respectively. In addition, 300 court files of CSA cases were also reviewed. Notwithstanding other circumstances leading to CSA, findings showed that poverty-related vulnerabilities, such as adverse living conditions, rurality, child labour and migration, exposed children to CSA. The paper ends by discussing the policy and social work practice implications and recommendations in view of the findings.

Child sexual abuse (CSA) is a serious scourge that affects all countries globally (Assabu et al., 2019; Thuong et al., 2019). It has myriad short- and long-term effects on survivors and their families (Chitereka, 2010). Although exact official figures are hard to come by, Zimbabwe is one of the countries that is highly affected by this problem (Gwirayi, 2013; Mantula & Saloojee, 2016; Musiwa, 2019). The prevalence of CSA in Zimbabwe can be attributed to several factors which among other things include: children living and working on the streets, religious practices, vulnerable households due to orphanhood and a bleak socio-economic order that has characterised the nation for the past two decades (Birdhstle et al., 2011; Chamisa et al., 2019; Chikoko et al., 2019; Muchacha & Mtetwa, 2015; Muchinako et al., 2013).

While there are myriad factors mentioned above, poverty is arguably the major underlying issue and root cause of most of these factors. This is worsened by the absence of robust social protection measures to cushion and protect the vulnerable population groups. Kaseke (2009) argues that poverty is a major human welfare challenge faced by not only Zimbabwe but also the Southern African region. Poverty is a multi-dimensional phenomenon that denotes a complex and undesirable human condition of deprivation and disadvantage in society (Muzaale, 1986). Gaidzano (2019) describes poverty as a phenomenon characterised by a lack of access to basic life sustaining goods and services which among other things include food, shelter, health, electricity, housing and water. According to Sepwaul (2014), poverty in Africa results from an interaction of internal and external factors that range from colonial history, the slave trade, corrupt dictatorships, war, unfair trade practices, disease, poor infrastructure and lack of democracy. Similarly, Addae-Korankye (2014) links African poverty to factors that include: cultural and structural factors; poor governance; limited employment opportunities; poor infrastructure; poor resource usage; wars and unending conflicts; poor World Bank and International Monetary Fund policies and corruption. While these issues may be debatable, what cannot be doubted are the devastating consequences that come as a result of poverty such as hunger, homelessness, ill health, inadequate shelter, poor clothing and the entrapment in a cycle of deprivation which erodes the chances of upward social mobility for many families.

Over the past two decades, Zimbabwe has gone through an unprecedented economic meltdown and decline in standards of living owing to political instability (Nyandoro & Hatti 2019), corruption (Moyo, 2018; Muzurura, 2017) and poor governance (Cain, 2015). This has resulted in weak social protection systems, and the poor and other vulnerable population groups, such as children and people with a disability, have been left exposed. Mangena (2019) argues that due to the economic and political challenges of the past two decades, the nation has been plunged into a major humanitarian crisis with chronic poverty being one of the biggest problems bedevilling the nation. The Ministry of Labour and Social Services (2011) estimates that more than two-thirds of the child population in Zimbabwe live below the food poverty line and are not able to access basic services such as education, adequate nutrition and health services. Due to inadequate resources, the Ministry of Labour and Social Services has been unable to provide adequate

social protection cover especially for children who are most vulnerable. Consequently, chronic poverty has become the prevailing norm giving rise to a manifold social, chief among which is CSA. Despite the various views on the causes of poverty in Zimbabwe, poverty is a reality. SOS International (2014, p. 12) reports that 'approximately 78% of the population of Zimbabwe is absolutely poor and 55% live below the poverty datum line'. According to Chitereka (2010), poverty in Zimbabwe leads to children's vulnerability to sexually abuse. Insights from the current study reveal that a number of poverty-related factors are contributing to CSA in Zimbabwe.

### Child protection in Zimbabwe

Due to the continued economic decline over the past two decades, fewer resources are being channelled towards child protection (Kanyenze et al., 2011; Mtetwa & Muridzo, 2013; Muchacha et al., 2016). As a result, Zimbabwe has a very poor child protection system. The lack of a progressive and sophisticated child protection system means a lot of children are vulnerable. The scourge of HIV and AIDS has left many children either orphaned or vulnerable when parents succumb to illness (Chitiyo & Chitiyo, 2016; Pufall et al., 2017). While the extended family and communities have been a critical pillar of the indigenous child protection measures in the past (Kurevakwesu & Chizasa, 2020), the role of these institutions is fast declining due to rapid urbanisation, HIV and AIDS, migration and changing social norms as individualism which is propelled by capitalism (Masuka et al., 2012), thereby exposing children to vulnerability.

In theory, the Government of Zimbabwe is taking a more central role in child protection issues through the ratification of international and regional conventions that provide for the protection of children. According to Chitereka (2010), Zimbabwe is party to United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC, 1989), the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACRWC, 1990). These commitments have been domesticated in national statutes that include the country's Constitution (Government of Zimbabwe, 2013), domestic laws that include the Children's Act, Guardianship of Minors Act and the Maintenance Act (Government of Zimbabwe, 2001a; 2001b; 2001c). In addition, Zimbabwe has a number of child protection policies that seek to provide for the needs of children. Such policies include Basic Education Assistance Module, National Action Plan for Orphans and Vulnerable Children, National Orphan Care policy and free treatment orders (Chikova, 2013; Kurevakwesu & Chizasa, 2020). Despite the existence of well spelt out and explicit child protection policies and systems in Zimbabwe, children remain vulnerable given the widespread poverty. Gwirayi (2013) notes the lack of implementation of existing child protection policies and programmes as the major weakness in the country. On the other hand, Bhaiseni (2016) argues that the laws are flawed and characterised by discord such as contradictions between the constitution, child protection policies and existing statutes, making the law inefficient. Kaseke (2015) reasons that existing protection systems are limited by access challenges and the residual nature of services. It is therefore apparent that Zimbabwe, as a country, lacks a robust child protection system. Due to a weak economy, fewer resources are being channelled towards child protection. Consequently, children are left vulnerable to poverty which exposes them to the risk of CSA.

### Research approach and design

The study adopted a qualitative approach, and a multiple case study design was used. Given that the research sought to uncover the lived experiences of children affected by CSA, a qualitative approach was the most suitable because its methods help researchers to explore phenomenon in an in-depth manner in order to describe and understand issues of particular interest (Creswell, 2014; Rubin & Babbie, 2011). The Victim Friendly System (VFS) was selected as the case to be studied. The VFS is multi-stakeholder forum made up of different organisations that provide complimentary CSA services. It is made up of 29 Government and Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) that provide medical, legal, social and psychological services to sexually abused children. With regard to this, the study adopted a multi-case design that included the VFS as the main case, but within it several organisations (cases) that form the multi-sectorial body were selected to be studied. The use of more than one case in a study is referred to as a multiple case study design or, what Patton (2002) refers to, as nested and layered case studies.

### Study population and sampling

The study population was made up of all organisations that are represented within the VFS and experts within the CSA field who were targeted as part of data triangulation using key informants. During sampling of the population, theoretical sampling – which is a form of purposive sampling commonly used in qualitative research – was used to select 38 representatives from the organisations that participate in the VFS. Four key informants were also selected as part of the sample, and these included a social worker, a lawyer, a senior officer in the police and a traditional leader: chief. In addition, 300 court files of CSA cases were also reviewed.

### Data collection methods, tools and ethics

The study utilised in-depth interviews as the main data collection method, and two different semi-structured interview schedules, comprising open ended questions, were used to guide the interview process. The first schedule had questions specific to key informants, while the other interview schedule was specific to participants working in the selected NGOs that were part of the VFS system. The interviews were tape recorded to maintain accuracy narratives from interviewees as, according to Patton (2002), audio recording enables researchers to acquire accurate perspectives of the interviewees. To augment and triangulate data sources, documents were also used in the study. In this category, 300 court files were selected using systematic random sampling and additional documents such as minutes of meetings were also selected. As part of abiding by ethical standards, clearance to conduct the study was obtained from the relevant ethics clearance bodies. The study was cleared under protocol numbers H15/02/20 and MRCZ/A/1969 by two ethics clearing bodies.

### Data analysis

The study adopted thematic analysis to analyse data. Creswell (2014) described thematic analysis as a systematic process for organising and coding data in which specific passages of data are analysed and the main ideas from the data that relate to the study focus are arranged into themes. From the interview

transcripts and documents reviewed, the researchers looked for common issues and recurring words related to the socio-economic circumstances that contribute to CSA. These were coded and further refined into themes which were used to guide the write-up. The quality of data collected was assessed in terms of credibility and conformability through member checking (Schurink et al., 2011).

### Limitations of the study

Bryman (2012) notes that qualitative research can be fraught with shortcomings and criticisms. One of the potential limitations of the research design and methodology adopted in this study was the difficulty in generalisation of findings. This limitation was minimised through 'analytical generalisation' which showed linkages between findings and previous knowledge (Babbie & Mouton, 2004, p. 283). Another limitation found within qualitative research concerns trustworthiness. A number of steps were taken by the researcher to enhance trustworthiness. Firstly, trustworthiness was enhanced through triangulation of data sources. As noted by Creswell (2014), triangulation involves use of different sources of information and using it to build a coherent justification for the themes. Data were obtained from multiple sources that included participant narratives, key informants, CSA court files and minutes of VFS meetings. Secondly, member checking was used to enhance trustworthiness. Member checking involves multiple contacts with participants which enabled perspectives to be revisited. Member checking also involves checking findings with participants to see if one's interpretation corresponds to the views of participants.

### Presentation and discussion of findings

This presents and discusses the findings that emerged from the study, focusing on poverty-related circumstances that are linked to children's vulnerability to CSA. The main themes that were reflected in the study were: adverse living conditions, rurality, child labour and migration. The discussion clearly demonstrates a nexus between the poverty-related factors above and CSA.

#### Adverse living conditions

Due to widespread poverty in many Zimbabwean households, the living conditions of many families make many children susceptible to sexual abuse. From the court transcripts reviewed and participants' narratives, it is evident most of the sexual abuse cases were perpetrated by a person known and related to the victim. In most instances, this abuse happened due to the fact that perpetrators and victims share the same sleeping space. In this instance, perpetrators are close relatives who are highly trusted by parents of the victims. In some instances, the perpetrators can be the very guardian upon whom the child depends for daily sustenance. Sharing of the same sleeping space by male and female relatives was therefore found to be a major factor contributing to sexual abuse. Such abuse largely remains hidden and may either never be discovered or gets to be known long after it started. This has several health, psychological and social implications for not only the victims but the family at large. The following quotes from the data illustrate this issue:

*The complainant, 15-year-old boy, and the accuse 22 years, share the same bed. The accused is employed as a domestic worker at the child's homestead (Case 62).*

*The accused, 22 years, visited the complainant's homestead. The complainant's parents made arrangements for the child, 9 years, to sleep in the same room as the accused (Case 84).*

*The child, 5 years, stays with her grandmother and step-grandfather. The three sleep in the same bed. The child's grandmother woke up to find the step-grandfather, 54 years, on top of the child (Case 47).*

*Poverty exposes children to CSA. Accommodation challenges in urban areas forces parents to move their children to rural areas to stay with grandparents. We have cases where perpetrators give guardians [grandmothers] material possessions, maybe food.*

The selected verbatim quotes above clearly show how coming from an impoverished household increases the susceptibility of children to sexual abuse. From a majority of the court files reviewed, it was clear that sexual abuse is happening behind closed doors in households that are mainly poor and the living conditions are such that children become exposed. In many instances, sexually abused children were staying with their grandparents in rural areas while their parent worked in a town. The reason for sending children to rural areas is largely due to the fact that it is expensive to cater for children within an urban setting, especially when one is on meagre wages. Sending children to rural areas, therefore, becomes the only plausible option for many parents who struggle to make ends meet. While this may seem sensible, and is a practice that is rife in Zimbabwe, it exposes children, particularly girls, to sexual abuse away from parental care. Most parents visit rural areas once a year on Christmas holidays. This means by the time the abuse is discovered it is often too late for the child to receive intervention such as post-exposure prophylaxis. In addition, many children contract HIV and other sexually transmitted infections. This clearly points towards the nexus between poverty and CSA.

Apart from the abuse happening due to parental absence, the verbatim quotes above and many of the cases reviewed for the purposes of this study showed that sexual abuse was also rife within the urban setting where often limited accommodation forces children to share rooms with their older relatives who become the perpetrators of abuse. This abuse is often difficult to detect, largely because perpetrators are people trusted by the victims. Sharing a common bedroom leads to sexual grooming, making it difficult for the child to report the abuse and for the parents to detect the abuse. In some instances, the abuse is done by neighbours who lodge at the same house. Over time, such people become trusted by children and parents leading them to take advantage of the situation and abuse children. Scholars such as Kanyenze et al. (2011), Moyo (2014) and Average (2019) observe that most urban areas in Zimbabwe have a critical shortage of housing due to population increase, high demand and high costs creating a housing backlog. It is, in their view, low-income earners who are most affected. This housing shortage makes children coming from these impoverished circumstances more susceptible to sexual abuse due to their adverse living conditions. It is therefore clear that while poverty, itself, is not a cause of sexual abuse, there is a strong link between poverty and children's susceptibility to sexual abuse.

#### Rurality and CSA

In most rural areas of Zimbabwe, there is a lack of spatial grounding of service delivery points within communities due to a deficit in infrastructural development. As a result, people have to travel long distances to access services. Thus, rurality was one of the major factors in exposure of children to sexual abuse. The spatial features of rural areas often mean people have to travel long distances to fetch water, go to school, visit the local clinic, herd cattle and visit

relatives. Households are spaced out such that often people have to travel on narrow roads through vast tracts of bushland to get to their destination. These isolated places are often taken advantage of by criminals who ambush children walking alone in isolated and uninhabited rural areas. Studies show that a majority of people living in rural areas are poor (Jones, 2019; The Independent, 2014) and the more poor a household is, the more vulnerable children in those households become. This is largely because in poor households, children are likely to go on errands alone and must navigate the rural spaces where perpetrators are likely to be lurking as indicated by the following quotes:

*On 9 May 2015, while coming from the river carrying 2 × 5 litre water bottles for home use, the child, 13-year-old girl, met the accused, 18-year-old, who raped her (Harare case 113).*

*In this neighbourhood, children spend a lot of time queuing at the borehole for water. This normally extends into late hours. In most cases these children are alone. Juveniles at this stage are prone to experiment with sex (Gokwe Case 44).*

*People settled in new areas where there is a deficit of services such as water points and schools. The issue of distance to schools and water points remains a problem. Children still walk more than 5 km to the nearest school. So that is one challenge (Participant 24).*

*People were resettled in Zimbabwe in faraway areas where there are not enough social services such as schools. Usually . . . . children walk long distances through thick forests [to service points] where perpetrators can take advantage and rape those children when they are going to school or coming back. Some children even walk 10 kilometres and they come back late (Participant 18).*

The above selection of quotes clearly shows how the spatial realities of rural life – characterised by poverty and structural disadvantage in terms of service delivery – make children susceptible to sexual abuse. While developing countries have enjoyed relative improvements in social service delivery post-independence, rural areas in particular remain poor and largely unaffected by development (Sewpaul, 2014; Todaro & Smith, 2011). This infrastructure deficit means that rural conditions characterised by poverty and poor service delivery become hotbeds for sexual abuse of not only children, but adults as well. To this end, one can conclude that there exists a clear nexus between rurality and sexual abuse, especially when the rural dwellers live in conditions of chronic poverty which places a significant burden on children whose errands expose them to abuse. Rural households that are well-off provide safety nets for children. For example, a child in a well-to-do rural household is unlikely to be expected to go on errands alone as such duties are done by adults and employed home helpers. This is a privilege that households living in extreme poverty cannot afford, and thus their children become more exposed. This clearly points towards a nexus between poverty and the sexual abuse of children.

### **Child labour**

The study findings also revealed that there exists a clear nexus between poverty and CSA in instances when children are forced into child labour by their families due to chronic poverty. Wherever there is child labour, it exposes children to multiple layers of vulnerability which has economic, social, physical and psychological dimensions. Many of the selected court transcripts that were reviewed pointed to the fact that a significant amount of sexual abuse was perpetrated on children who were employed as domestic workers with their employers often taking advantage of the children's desperation. In all this, poverty is the underlying factor.

*The accused, 29-year-old, came home and found the complainant, 16-year-old maid, alone at home with the children; while the wife had gone to work [nightshift]. Accused asked the complainant to come to his bedroom as he wanted to give her something. He then raped her (Case 38).*

*Due to the current economic hardships, families send their daughters to work as maids. These girls are vulnerable to sexual abuse (Participant 3).*

*On 27 September 2015 the accused called the child, 16 years from Chipinge, saying that he had found her a job in Harare as a maid. When complainant arrived in Harare the employer said she could not stay with her and they all resolved that the child stay with the accused [friend] while going to work. The sleeping arrangement was that she would sleep on the sofa while the accused slept in his bedroom. On 15 November 2015, while sleeping, the complainant was awakened by the accused who was on top of her having sexual intercourse with her. He threatened to chase her back to her rural home if she revealed the abuse (Case 39).*

*The accused forced the child to have anal sex with him. He threatened the boy with assault if he reported. The boy was employed by the accused. The case only came to light when the child told a neighbour that he once had anal sex with the accused. The matter was reported to the police leading the arrest of the accused (Case 2).*

It is clear from these accounts that children who are forced into child labour owing to their vulnerable family circumstances are prone to being sexually abused. It is probable that these forms of abuse will largely go unreported due to the desperate and dependent condition that children have in relation to their perpetrators. Studies have shown that most child abuse cases that are reported are only the tip of the iceberg with an overwhelming majority of cases going unreported (Bailey et al., 2017; Chandran et al., 2018). Phenomena, such as child labour and the dependent condition of children, partly explain the reasons why most abuse cases will go unreported. What is clear from the foregoing discussion is the nexus between poverty and CSA. The results of this study clearly show that poverty renders children susceptible to multiple layers of abuse. In these instances, children are abused physically, in terms of labour, and also sexually. Despite the existence of an elaborate legal framework that does not allow child labour, children remain vulnerable to this oppressive practice. Such children are deprived of an opportunity to go to school, thereby continuing in a cycle of poverty that becomes intergenerational.

Scholars such as Gwirayi (2013), Chitereka (2010) note that Zimbabwe is party to UNCRC (1990) and the ACRWC (1999). These legal and policy frameworks provide for the protection of children including against child labour. Accordingly, Zimbabwe has several legal frameworks that include but are not limited to the Constitution of Zimbabwe (2013), the Children's Act Chapter 5:06 (2001) and the Labour Act (2016) that outlaw child labour. These legal instruments outlaw child labour, yet the practice remains widespread owing to poverty and structural disadvantage that characterises rural areas. Gwirayi (2013, p. 2) argues that 'although existing laws are meant to safeguard, they seem to have fallen short in doing so'. He goes on to seriously question the adequacy and utility of existing laws that are meant to protect children. It is clear that laws on their own, without a robust and clear mechanism that provides for adequate awareness raising, policing and punitive measures against child labour, will not work. Such measures ought to go beyond mere policing and tackle the underlying issues such as poverty which often cause children to be labouring. This would mean that the state has to prioritise the strengthening of social safety nets for the poor, as well as providing adequate social protection measures for vulnerable households in both rural and urban areas. In the absence of political will by those in power, child protection issues such as child labour and CSA will most likely continue unabated.

### *The nexus between migration and CSA*

The Zimbabwean economic meltdown of the past two decades has led to various yearly waves of migration within and outside the country as people seek for greener pastures and means to sustain their families (Muridzo, 2018). In many instances where people migrate, children are often left behind in the care of relatives and largely with elderly people. The assumption is that children are safer in the care of elderly people, yet it is such circumstances that place children at a higher risk of abuse. In some cases, neighbours take advantage of the frail condition of elderly people and abuse children in their care. It was clear from the participants' narratives that poverty has become one of the main reasons for the breakdown of the institution of family in Zimbabwe. Most parents are no longer the primary caregivers of their own children, and this status quo has become a hotbed of child abuse.

*The levels of poverty in this country are really staggering. You find instances where people have to leave their families in order to look for livelihoods. That leaves the child in a vulnerable situation (Participant 20).*

*It [CSA] also links back to our economy as well. Parents are going out [of the country] to try and fend for the family (Participant 2).*

*Children are left alone in their homes. The older persons, parents and caregivers are going to work. They do not afford someone who will look after the children. So because of poverty children are left unattended and people will take advantage they will come and abuse the children (Participant 36).*

It is clear from such narratives that increased migration of parents and caregivers due to the desire to escape poverty increases children's vulnerability to CSA. Many people have migrated out of Zimbabwe. Kanyenze et al. (2011, p. 327) note that 'although estimates of the Zimbabwean diaspora differ from study to study, it ranges between three and four million'. Other factors also force parents and guardians to leave their children, families and country. Zimbabwe's problems include economic and political meltdown affecting a population already struggling with persistent drought, food shortages, education, unemployment and a collapsed health sector among a catalogue of other problems (Burke & Chingono, 2019). To this end, migration offers opportunities that not only benefit the emigrant, but considerable opportunities for those left behind (Zimbabwe National Statistical Agency and International Organisation for Migration, 2010). On the other hand, this attempt to escape the poverty trap by parents and guardians also creates a vacuum in the lives of their children. The very people trusted with care of these children may be the abusers as already discussed in the foregoing themes. The level of diligence in care is also poor for most caregivers entrusted with childcare as often they have their own burdens to bear. This reinforces the central theme of this paper which is our attempt to demonstrate how poverty is an underlying factor that gives birth to myriad circumstances that make children vulnerable to sexual abuse.

### *Implications for policy and social work practice*

The current findings present poverty as an overarching contributory factor that increases children's vulnerability to CSA. Poverty results in poor housing, child labour and poor infrastructural development. Again, the desire to escape poverty and to provide for families also creates vulnerability of children to CSA. The current findings therefore have far reaching implications for social policy as it relates to housing, child protection and poverty alleviation, in general. While the documented acts, regulations and policies of Zimbabwe's social protection systems compare favourably with other countries (Mupedziswa, 2018), it is clear from the above discussion that children remain vulnerable. The main themes

presented above of adverse housing conditions, rurality, child labour and the nexus between migration and CSA show glaring policy deficits and the need for policy reforms. Economic, political and social reforms are needed to address structural and institutional causes of poverty in Zimbabwe. Such reforms, through addressing poverty, may serve to improve people's lives and reduce children's vulnerability not only to poverty but also to CSA.

The current findings highlight human rights and social justice issues affecting children and have implications for social work practice in the country. Central to the profession of social work are issues of social justice and access to rights. Calls for a paradigm shift and the need for social work to embrace the developmental social work paradigm continue to be made (Muridzo et al., 2018). Developmental social work addresses structural and institutional causes of problems. Instead of concentrating on addressing CSA as a consequence of adverse housing conditions, rurality, child labour and the nexus between migration and CSA, developmental social work could address the underlying causes of these problems. Social workers need to involve themselves with policy issues around housing, rural development, child labour and socio-economic development as social work is, by nature, a political profession that challenges injustice. Social workers could also seriously consider engaging in politics as a way of influencing policies that affect the people with whom they work, most importantly, addressing the problems before they surface. Where policies exist, social workers need to be vocal about the implementation of existing policies and systems that should protect children and people. Gwirayi (2013) argues that the challenge is not the absence of policies, but the deficient implementation of these. Removal of barriers to available systems and services may make a significant difference. Again, removal of lengthy application procedures, increased access to offices and increased levels of assistance to existing safety nets could make a difference and reduce vulnerability of children. Muchacha and Mtetwa (2015) reason that the being proactive is more sustainable.

### **Conclusions**

It is clear from the discussion above that poverty and related circumstances in Zimbabwe are contributing to children's vulnerability to CSA, with the reported increase in the incidence of poverty in the country painting a gloomy picture for children. The adverse effects of CSA require action and the need to view poverty beyond the economic lens. Poverty is multidimensional as are its effects and is linked to the genesis of social ills such as CSA. CSA cannot be divorced from the social, economic and political development of a country, and thus the amelioration of poverty in Zimbabwe must be one of the uppermost considerations.

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