Volume 14 Issue 41
Originally issued as B9

Global Journal of Management and Business Research: B
Economics and Commerce
Volume 14 Issue 9 Version 1.0 Year 2014
Type: Double Blind Peer Reviewed International Research Journal
Publisher: Global Journals Inc. (USA)
Online ISSN: 2249-4588 & Print ISSN: 0975-5853

The Rolling Blackouts in Zimbabwe: A Zombie to Economic Recovery Prospects (2013 – 2014)

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GJMBR - B Classification : JEL Code : N10

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Dr. Silas Luthingo Rusvingo

With incessant power blackouts in Zimbabwe appearing a real zombie to economic recovery the primary objective in this Paper is to carry out a survey to measure the intensity of the problem. Following the survey are the Summary, Conclusion and Recommendations to address the problem in order to increase the prospects of economic recovery now in its 14th year of recession.

Keywords: rolling, blackouts, zimbabwe, zombie and economic recovery prospects.

I. Introduction

According to senior officials in the Energy sector, energy starved Zimbabwe will suffer longer and more frequent power shortages for the next 10 years. The country's power utility will extend power blackouts until it can boost capacity. Patson Mbiriri, Secretary for Energy and Power Development told an annual congress of the Confederation of Zimbabwe Industries (CZI) in Nyanga recently, 'By about 2022 is when the country will be able to generate enough electricity for domestic and industrial needs,' said Mbiriri. Zimbabwe needs about 2200 megawatts of electricity at peak consumption but generates just below 1300 megawatts, while relying on imports to fill the gap (Staff Reporter 2014).

Due to ageing equipment, power generation is often disrupted following breakdowns. In most cases, the generators operate below capacity. In recent months Zimbabwe could only afford to import 25 megawatts from neighbouring countries after major electricity suppliers in the region turned off the switches over non payment of dues.

> "Most of our woes in terms of blackouts will end in 2015" Mbiriri said.

The then energy minister Honourable Elton Mangoma said Zimbabwe had whittled its debt to power providers to under US$20 million from around US$100 million in a bid to resume power imports. There were plans to revamp the Northern Kariba hydro power station and the Hwange Ethanol power station in the West of the country.

So much about the ignition to the discourse in this Paper laid before you. Up next is a statement on the logistics to carry out a survey to expose the Research Findings. In case you go away details on the said statement coming your way in just a moment.

II. Statement on the Related and Relevant Literature Review, Research Methodology and Research Findings

In order to achieve the required Research Findings in this study the Author made a hasty retreat to the private media where he made a strategic stopover to study the various inputs on the said topic of this Paper to come up with what the Author believed was the relevant and related Literature which exposed the Research findings to underpin the study.

Zano (2014) of the Newsday argued that the genesis of our power problems in Zimbabwe are more to do with unfair distribution of power by Zimbabwe Electricity Authority (ZESA) and nothing else. Let us hear him give his contribution. More details on this contribution in just a moment.

a) ZESA must distribute supply power fairly (Zano 2014)

Zano (2014) did not mince his words when he presented his disappointing performance by ZESA. It is disheartening that ZESA holdings is dismally failing to fairly distribute and supply its power to its valued customers. High density suburbs in Harare like Glen View, Glen Norah, Budiriro and Highfields had been victims of the power Company spending days and nights without electricity. Sadly the norm by ZESA is that electricity will be switched on at night around 10 pm and switched off around 5 am. What boggles the mind is that 10 pm is normally after demand peak period (6 – 8) when valued ZESA customers are doing most of their cooking for the day. But the sad reality is that the power is switched off by ZESA. Come 5 o'clock in the morning the power is switched off when people are waking up for the day to prepare their breakfast and warm water for ablution in readiness to go for work. But sadly the power is nowhere to be seen (Zano 2014).

In January 2013, Zimbabwe Electricity Transmission and Distribution Company (ZETDC), a subsidiary of ZESA Holdings embarked on a comprehensive replacement of all conventional post-paid meters with pre-paid meters. Currently ZETDC had installed prepaid meters in most suburbs countrywide. As consumers, people thought they would finally heave sighs of relief after the power utility's on-going

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installation of these pre-paid metres. Sadly the bad load shedding problem had actually worsened when every consumer expected an improvement. People had thought that since winter was over the rate at which people would be utilising their electricity would also be reduced, thereby minimising load shedding. Load shedding had a number of negative impacts both on the nation's economy and social life of citizens (Zano 2014).

However, the economic costs of load shedding are well known compared to the societal effects. Load shedding can affect a country's economy mainly because it slows down industrialisation and affects people's life styles. During the daytime, it affects commercial and industrial operations. In the evening load shedding can also affect students' studies. What about the people's electrical gadgets? Schools third term in Zimbabwe means examination time. Most students prefer reading at night as the temperatures will be cooler compared to daytime. It is so surprising that some places in the country never experience such disturbing load shedding timetables. It is indeed upsetting to see a location very close to your home with electricity almost every day while it's a complete blackout in your area. ZESA should take note of these incidents and start to distribute its electricity fairly. All consumers whether poor, rich, black, white or yellow need fair treatment from ZESA. For the much hyped ZimAsset to be fully implemented ZESA should play its part effectively. It is fundamentally true that electricity is the back bone of each industrialised society and economy. Previous reports had it that this power company is exporting electricity to neighbouring countries during the night time. As understanding citizens, people including the Author, also thought that positive idea would lesson load shedding as the extra revenue generated from exporting electricity during off peak hours would then be used to produce more electricity, which in the case of Zimbabwe is not the case. Why it is like that? Somebody somewhere is playing God with the people of Zimbabwe (Zano 2014). *Dai Mwari maramba* (meaning may God forbid?).

Madanhire of Newsday again convincingly argued that incessant power blackouts as is the norm in Zimbabwe pose a big challenge to economic recovery, let alone to a comatose Zimbabwe economy. In a feel good contribution to the topic under active discussion in this Paper the Author argues the audience should never go away until Madanhire's informative contribution on this burning issue is over. More details on this coming your way in just a moment.

b) Blackouts Pose Biggest Challenge to Economic Recovery (Madanhire 2014)

It is no secret that the Zimbabwean economy is under siege from a host of internal and external factors, a small percentage of which is beyond human control. However it is the internal factors such as incessant power cuts, policy discordance, political rhetoric and corruption that tend to militate against all efforts aimed at economic recovery more than the external factors or forces. The erratic power supplies have been experienced since the beginning of September 2014. If left unchecked they are sure to spell a death knell to the local industry and further push the comatose economy further down the drain. Domestic consumers have also been caught in the crossfire and are now forced to adjust to unscheduled power cuts and run for hours if not days on end without supplies from the perennially bungling ZESA. There is no doubt that the current power shortages have raised the ire of consumers who after paying heavily for electricity in prepaid tokens, find themselves digging deeper into their shallow pockets to buy gas, paraffin, firewood and even the dangerous candles to power their homes. So the perennially bungling power utility should not take offence when consumers demand an explanation to the current incessant power cuts. In fact the power utility should practise good corporate customer care and corporate customer relations and take the initiative to keep its consumers aware of any developments affecting the power sector. Industry, regardless of whether large, medium or small scale, formal or informal, has been the main victim, forcing many to switch to expensive power from standby generators (Madanire 2014).

By its very nature, power from diesel or petrol powered generators is only supposed to be an interim or emergency measure, because if it is allowed to run full time, it tends to erode envisaged profits. Relying on standby generators to run industry should not be accepted as the norm in a country striving to jumpstart an ailing economy because of the energy sources prohibitive costs. But from the looks of things use of generators seems to have become a norm instead of an exception. The cause given by the authorities in the troubled energy sector that the current power shortages were due to planned maintenance work and diversion of some 200 or so megawatts to power winter wheat cropping is not convincing enough considering that most winter wheat is being or has already been harvested. The only plausible explanation for the current power utility was that it was caught flat footed after it failed to invest in alternative energy sources when it became clear that the demand for power would keep rising. The people at ZESA should have been pro active and invested heavily in alternative energy sources such as solar, biogas, methane gas and wind to cater for domestic consumption and dedicate the national grid to power the manufacturing and other high energy consumer sectors. Government should stop labouring us with energy policy documents that do not translate into workable programmes. The ZANU PF government's economic blueprint policy, ZimAsset, risks turning into another Paper tiger if problems bedevilling the energy sector are not addressed urgently as they have a

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bearing on the envisaged economic turnaround strategies (Madanire 2014).

Anon (2014) is a perfect example of a consumer who is bitterly incensed by the incessant power cuts by the perennially bungling ZESA. Please do not go away before he makes his sabre rattling contribution coming your way in just a moment.

c) ZESA losing millions in load shedding (Anon 2014)

The intensifying but unexplained load shedding all over the country by the perennially bungling Zimbabwe Electricity Supply Authority (renamed Zimbabwe Electricity Sometimes Available) is losing us millions in United States dollars. Is it noticeable that this chaotic and merciless load shedding situation facing Zimbabwe only intensified immediately at the appointment of the new board chaired by Herbert Murerwa. As it turns out now, an improvement in Zimbabwe's energy situation was obviously too much to expect from an ex-Minister who is not only well versed with complex energy matters but well past his sell – by date to be appointed to be ZESA Board chairman. It boggles the mind what business model, if at all, ZESA is now using to generate its revenue. The now good for nothing parastatal only recently intensified the supply and fixing of prepaid meters in all the households, companies and institutions and after that as consumers, we find ourselves with our money tied up in a product or service which is suddenly not there because of unscheduled and selective load shedding (Anon 2014).

Amazingly in Zimbabwe you find that one section of an area whether residential or industrial can still have the luxury of having their light on during broad daylight while another one just across the road can have no electricity for up to 19 hours a day. After the installation of a prepaid meter at a certain house in Harare, the average power consumption was calculated to be $20 a week, but with the intensified load shedding people had witnessed in the past months in 2014, that same amount of electricity worth is sitting unconsumed in the meter for two weeks. The simple book-keeping calculations tells us that this adds up to a loss of revenue to ZESA from an expected revenue of US$100 to US$52 a month (Anon 2014).

So far so good about the rough and rocky terrain provided by the related and relevant Literature Review and Research Methodology, adopted for the study in this Paper. Up next is the Summary, the details of which are coming your way in just a moment.

III. Summary

The ignition key to the discourse in this Paper kicks off with a heart-wrenching revelation by Permanent Secretary in the Energy Ministry Pattison Mbiriri that Zimbabwe had to grapple with power shortages up until 2022 when the country is projected to have enough of its energy supply. Currently the disheartening power supply and demand statistics for Zimbabwe are a demand of 2 200 megawatts against a meagre power supply of 1 300 megawatts to throw a frightening power deficit of 900 megawatts to be imported from neighbouring SADC countries such as South Africa and Mozambique who have a surplus power supply. But sadly for Zimbabwe the militating factor is the required liquidity to finance that power import some of whom have been suspended for non payment.

After this ignition to the discourse came the Statement of the relevant and related Literature Review and relevant Research Methodology adopted to expose the required Research findings for discussion and interpretation in this Paper.

The first to attack the power utility was Zano (2014). His weight of attack centred on the unfair distribution of electricity in which he complained that a street across the road may have the luxury of having electricity 24/7 while the neighbour across the road may go for 19 hours without electricity to rue the day he/she was ever born a Zimbabwean.

The second to attack the power utility yet again was Madanhire (2014). His weight of attack was the adverse effect that incessant power blackouts was going to have on the prospects of economic recovery for the country. Internal factors more than the external factors did the most damage to the prospects of economic recovery. And those that readily come to mind are incessant power cuts, policy discordance, political rhetoric and unpunished corruption at senior level in both the private and public sectors of the Zimbabwean economy. Madanhire (2014) further argued that the current power shortages had raised the ire of many consumers who after paying heavily for electricity in prepaid tokens but find themselves paying more to buy gas, paraffin, firewood and even the dangerous candles to power their unpowered homes.

The third and final contribution in the then ongoing discourse on incessant power cuts countrywide was Anon (2014). His argument is that for the entire period that the power utility is in a power blackout, the revenue generation capacity of the financially hamstrung power utility is at a standstill to mean that the revenue loss could be as high as 50%.

The long and short of it is that things are not looking good for ZESA in terms of revenue generation, customer care and customer satisfaction. Thereafter with the summary out of the way what remains undone which is up next is the Conclusion. Please don't go away in case you miss the Conclusion coming your way in just a moment.

IV. Conclusion

According to Rusvingo (2008) Kenkel (1984) defines a Research Hypothesis from which a Conclusion is derived as:

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'A statement about the value that a parameter or group of parameters can take.

According to Kenkel (1984:343);

'The purpose of a Research Hypothesis testing is to choose between two conflicting Research Hypotheses about the value of a population parameter. The two conflicting Research Hypotheses are denoted as the Null Research Hypothesis denoted H_o and the Alternative Research Hypothesis denoted H_I. These two Research hypotheses are mutually exclusive so that when one is true, the other one is false.

Therefore the definitions of a Null Research Hypothesis H_o and an Alternative Research Hypothesis, H_I are that:

'The Null Research Hypothesis represents an assumption or statement that has been made about some characteristics (or parameter) of the population being studied. The Alternative Research Hypothesis specifies all possible values of the population parameter that were not mentioned in the Null Research Hypothesis (H_o).

Therefore for this Paper whose title is 'Incessant power blackouts: A Zombie to the prospects of economic recovery (2014) the Null Research Hypothesis (H_o) in respect of the aforementioned title or topic of this Paper shall respectively be:

H_o

Incessant power cuts in Zimbabwe are not a zombie to the prospects of economic recovery.

H_I

Incessant power cuts in Zimbabwe are a zombie to the prospects of economic recovery.

Given the overwhelming evidence as given elsewhere in this Paper including the Summary above which is again loud and clear for all to see the Alternative Research Hypothesis namely: Incessant power cuts in Zimbabwe are a zombie to the prospects of economic recovery is to be resoundingly accepted while the Null Research Hypothesis as articulated above is to be resoundingly rejected in light of the overwhelming evidence which is pre the Alternative Research Hypothesis while at the same time overwhelmingly anti the Null Research Hypothesis.

With the exciting Conclusion of the study conveniently out of the way up next are the Recommendations which are primarily designed to address what was not done right vis-à-vis the issue of the incessant power cuts in Zimbabwe. So details on this coming your way in just a moment.

V. Recommendations

Before the Author addresses the Recommendations section of this Paper the question to ask himself is what it is that Zimbabwe did not do right to create the problem of a shortage of electricity?

From the Author's perspective the genesis of the problem of why Zimbabwe as a country has a shortage of electricity is because of the low foreign direct investment (fdi) inflows into the country. Zimbabwe needs foreign direct investment to address the underlisted:

- The ageing equipment at most power stations in the country are in need of a massive injection of capital to replace them to avoid constant breakdowns of power generating equipment to normalise power supplied in the country.
- To attract fdi Zimbabwe needs to put in place policies that attract foreign direct investors. The yet to be finalised Land Reform Programme of 2000 and the Indigenisation and Economic Empowerment law of 2007, to name just a few are not attractive to foreign direct investment where foreign 'direct investors' are required to be minority shareholders in a 51/49 investment share model in favour of the locals where the country's regional peers such as South Africa and Mozambique, to name just a few have no such xenophobic laws on their statutes.
- Zimbabwe's diplomatic relations with the West[1] does not inspire confidence. The frequent use of public fora a such as the United Nations General Assembly and EU-Africa to name, just a few, to throw brickbats at Britain and United States of America is deplorable on the part of His Excellence President Mugabe. The two super powers have emerged to become the prefects of this modern world of increasing complexity. They are the custodians of the foreign direct investment for which Zimbabwe is in desperate need as testified by her extensively damaged and destroyed infrastructure. For Zimbabwe, without fdi there is no infrastructure development.

All said and done about what should be done right in Zimbabwe time is now opportune to make a statement about the key assumption to reassure the beloved Reader that everything in this Paper is above board for transparency, accountability and probity.

VI. Key Assumption

In presenting this Paper the Author would, right from the outset, wish to reassure the beloved Reader that all the facts and figures herein contained were stated as they are on the ground without fear, favour or prejudice. And the mission of this statement is to make sure the factual contents of this manuscript are that they are above board and beyond reproach.

The rough ride through the incessant power cuts in Zimbabwe to impede the prospects of economic

[1] West as used in this context refers to the United States of America, European Union, Canada, Australia and New Zealand.

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recovery to the nation of 13 million citizens is certainly in need of a prayer for Zimbabwe to close the discourse in this Paper. Consequently and in conformity with Christian tradition the Author[2], a Christian by religion will shoulder the responsibility to pray for Zimbabwe and so please do not go away before the prayer for Zimbabwe coming your way in just a moment.

VII. The Short Prayer for Zimbabwe (Pew Paper 2014)

Ngatinamatei. Mwari munesimba rese musingagumi, imi makatipa netsitsi mbesa dzepasi munguva yadzo: Tinokutendai nekuzvirereka pamusana kwekunaka kwenyu kukuru, tichikutendai kuti mutipe girasiya rokudzisevenzesa nokufanira kumbiri yenyu, nerokubatsira vanoshaya nerokunyaradzwa kwedu: nokuna Jesu Kristu Tenzi wedu. Amen.

(meaning, Let us pray. Eternal God you crown the year with your goodness and you give us the fruits of the earth in their season: grant that we may use them to your glory for the relief of those in need and for our own well being: through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen).

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[2] The Author, Dr Silas Luthingo Rusvingo is a member of the church of the Province of Central Africa (CPCA), Anglican Church, Avondale Parish, Diocese of Harare.

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