



ZIMCODD

WEEKEND READER

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"Your Weekly Read on Debt, Development & Socio-Economic Justice"

Making Zimbabwe's Lithium Reforms Deliver for Citizens



On 27 February 2026, the Government of Zimbabwe imposed an immediate ban on the export of raw lithium and lithium concentrates. The decision moved forward from the planned January 2027 deadline and was officially justified by concerns over malpractices, under-declaration of exports and significant revenue leakages. ZIMCODD welcomed the principle of value addition however, at the time warned^[1] that the abruptness of the ban, without adequate consultation or transitional provisions, risked undermining investor confidence, disrupting fiscal planning and penalising small-scale miners who are the backbone of the sector.

Now, the Government has issued a framework of conditions that mining companies must meet before the ban can be lifted. These include mandatory investment in local beneficiation and processing facilities, full disclosure of all minerals in export consignments, submission of audited financial statements (from December 2025 onwards), adherence to export quotas, improved worker welfare (decent accommodation and fair wages aligned with National Employment Council standards), establishment of Safety, Health, Environment and Quality (SHEQ) systems and a critical deadline; lithium sulphate processing plants must be operational by 1 January 2027. ZIMCODD views these conditions as a necessary and long overdue step towards cleaning up a sector historically characterised by opacity, elite capture and the quiet export of national wealth. However, conditions on paper are not the same as conditions on the ground. The true test lies in implementation, oversight and whether the benefits finally reach ordinary Zimbabweans, especially the women, youth and rural communities who live in the shadows of the mines.

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Climate Injustice and Sustainable Development: Voices from Chambuta–Chilonga.

By Phillip Jakarasi

Climate change refers to long-term shifts in temperature and weather patterns, largely caused by human activities. The biggest driver of this change has been industrialization particularly in developed countries such as the United States and parts of Europe. For decades, these nations have built their economies through heavy use of fossil fuels, large-scale industries, and high carbon emissions. While this development brought economic prosperity to them, it has come at a cost to the rest of the world.



A picture of 1st world economies

[1] <https://www.zimcodd.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/02/2025-02-27-Opinion-Piece-Lithium-Zimbabwe-2026.pdf>

Today, communities thousands of kilometers away in places like Chiredzi South, Chambuta, and Chilonga in Zimbabwe's Region 5 are experiencing the devastating effects of a problem they did not create.

This is where the concept of climate justice becomes important. Climate justice emphasizes fairness: those who contributed the least to climate change should not suffer the most from its impacts. Unfortunately, this is exactly what is happening in many rural parts of Africa.

In Region 5, climate change is a daily reality marked by extreme heat, low rainfall, and unreliable rain-fed agriculture. Rural communities like Chambuta and Chilonga, which live sustainably and contribute little to carbon emissions, face significant challenges such as droughts that threaten food security and dangerous river crossings for education. Despite their struggles, the perpetrators of climate change remain disconnected from their experiences. For instance, students must brave hazardous conditions to access education, exemplified by a quiz team crossing a damaged bridge to compete in Chiredzi.



As a teacher in the Rural Youth Collective (RYC), I promote sustainable development by integrating climate education into my lessons. In Chambuta, we implement practical farming initiatives, such as planting drought-resistant crops like sorghum and millet, and practicing irrigation and dryland farming to address water scarcity. I also teach students climate-smart agriculture techniques.



This smart agriculture initiative aims for a sustainable future by using schools as learning hubs for the community to adopt sustainable practices. In Chambuta, with a low water table, students learn about water extraction, promoting sustainability. They become change agents, influencing their families to embrace eco-friendly living. Although an attempt to introduce sweet potatoes failed due to soil type, the idea sparked interest. Rural communities are striving for education and livelihoods while addressing climate injustice. Local actions in Chambuta and Chilonga demonstrate that solutions can emerge from grassroots efforts. Climate change is linked to justice and equality, highlighting the need for fair global action and investment in sustainable development, amplifying the voices of these communities as leaders in creating a sustainable future.

Paying to Live: Debt, Taxes, and the Cost of Care

The Hidden Cost of Survival

For many Zimbabweans living with spinal injuries and other disabilities, survival comes with a daily financial cost that is both unavoidable and overwhelming. At least three adult diapers are required per day, with quality options ranging between \$1.50 and \$2.50 each. This translates to a daily cost of between \$4.50 and \$7.50, and up to \$225 per month. However, diapers are only one part of a broader care package. Individuals also require catheters, urine bags, monthly supplies of latex gloves, and daily linen savers. These are essential for maintaining hygiene, preventing infections, and preserving dignity. Yet, in most cases, these items are not provided through public systems and must be purchased out-of-pocket.

When Care is Privatised

The absence of adequate social protection means that the responsibility for care is shifted from the state to individuals and their families. For many households, this creates a heavy financial strain, particularly where there is no stable income.

People with disabilities often face barriers to formal employment, while caregivers, most of whom are women provide unpaid, full-time support. As a result, households must absorb the full cost of care while simultaneously meeting other basic needs such as food, transport, and shelter. In this context, care becomes privatised, and survival becomes a personal financial burden rather than a shared societal responsibility.

The Double Burden of Taxation

Zimbabwe's tax system is designed to fund public goods, including healthcare and social protection. However, for vulnerable populations, this promise remains largely unmet. Individuals contribute to the tax system through consumption yet still face high out-of-pocket costs for essential care. This creates a double burden: people are taxed and then required to spend again on services and goods that should be publicly supported. In some cases, essential care items remain subject to taxes, further increasing the cost of survival for those already under financial pressure.





Are We Measuring Progress Correctly?

The 2026 national budget allocates approximately ZWG 12.7 billion to social protection, representing about 5% of total expenditure. On paper, this appears to be a positive step, as it exceeds the 4.5% benchmark under the Social Policy Framework for Africa. However, this raises a deeper question: what does progress really mean in Zimbabwe's context?

Zimbabwe's economy is characterised by high levels of informality, inequality, and vulnerability. In such a setting, meeting or slightly exceeding a continental benchmark does not necessarily translate into meaningful impact. Social protection systems remain fragmented, under-resourced, and limited in coverage. For many households, the support available is simply not enough to offset the real cost of survival. For people with disabilities and their caregivers, the gap between policy and lived reality remains wide.

Health Spending in a System Under Strain

The situation is equally concerning in the health sector. At 9.4% of the national budget, health financing remains well below the 15% Abuja Declaration target. This shortfall is visible in the condition of public health facilities, the availability of essential supplies, and the growing reliance on out-of-pocket expenditure. For individuals requiring continuous care, this underinvestment translates directly into daily financial pressure. When public systems cannot provide, households must.

Debt Servicing vs Social Protection

At the same time, a significant portion of public resources continues to be directed towards debt servicing and the clearance of arrears. While managing public debt is important, the social cost of these priorities cannot be ignored. Resources that could be used to subsidise essential medical supplies, strengthen healthcare systems, or expand social protection programmes are instead allocated to meeting debt obligations. In some cases, these debts are contested, with limited evidence that they have delivered meaningful benefits to ordinary citizens. The result is a troubling imbalance: public resources flow towards creditors, while individuals struggle to finance their own survival.

Revenue Without Relief

At the same time, the Zimbabwe Revenue Authority continues to meet its revenue collection targets, demonstrating the state's capacity to mobilise resources. Yet, for many citizens, particularly women and caregivers this does not translate into relief. Women, who carry the disproportionate burden of unpaid care work, continue to stretch limited incomes to cover essential needs. They participate actively in the economy, often through informal trading and household labour, yet remain exposed to high costs and limited support systems. The question is not whether revenue is being collected. The question is whether it is being used in ways that reduce hardship.

The Gendered Burden of Care

Unpaid care work remains the invisible backbone of the system. Caregivers, primarily women provide daily support that sustains households and compensates for gaps in public services. When social protection is weak and healthcare underfunded, this burden intensifies. Women are often forced to reduce or give up income-generating activities, reinforcing cycles of inequality and economic vulnerability. Without deliberate policy intervention, fiscal systems continue to rely on this unpaid labour while doing little to support or recognise it.

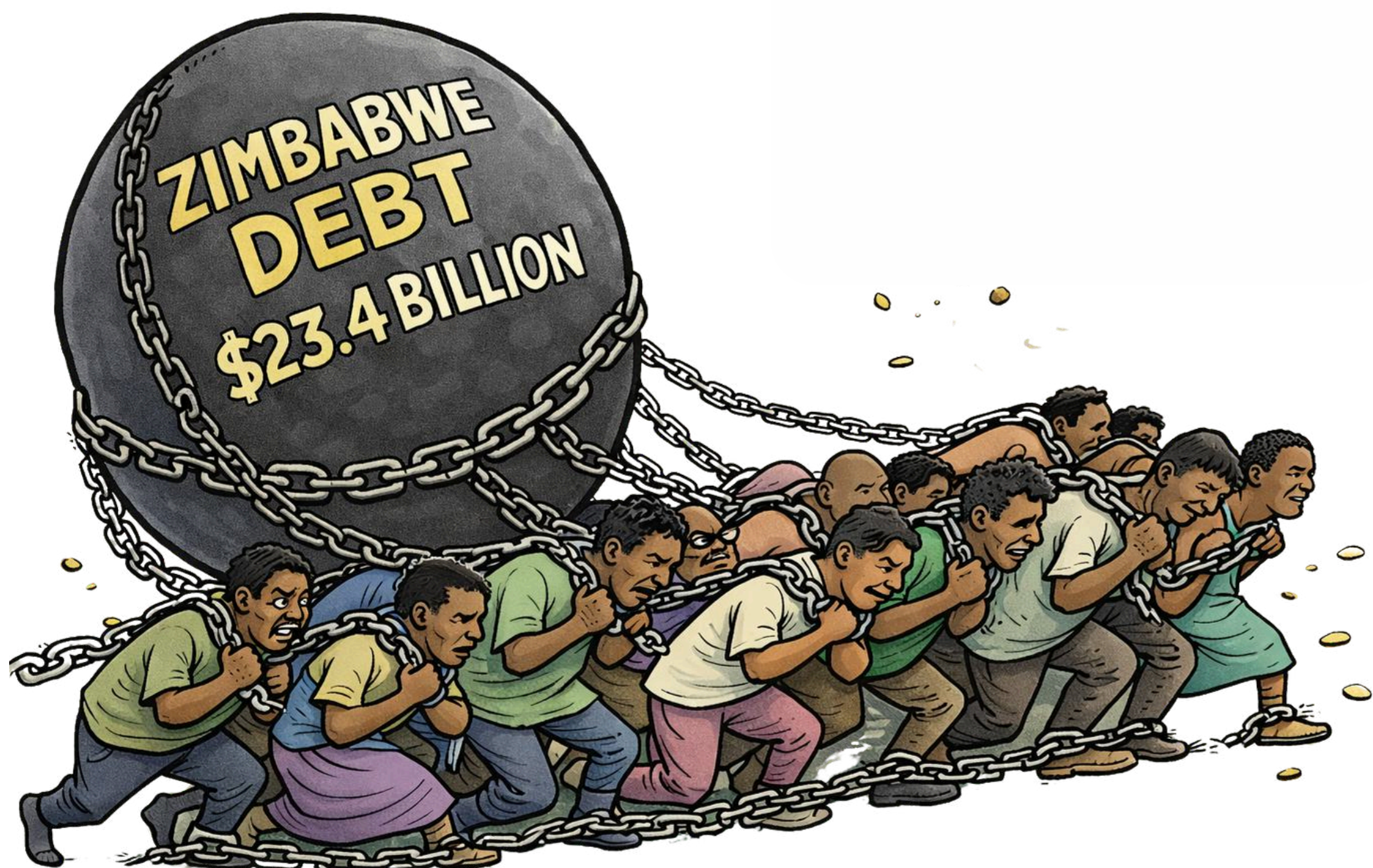
Rethinking Fiscal Justice

The current situation points to a broader issue of tax justice. A fair fiscal system should not only focus on raising revenue, but also on how that revenue is distributed to protect the most vulnerable. This means removing taxes on essential disability-related supplies so that basic care is affordable, while at the same time increasing investment in healthcare and social protection to reflect the real needs on the ground. It also requires ensuring that budget allocations translate into accessible and functioning services, rather than remaining figures on paper. In addition, there is a need to critically review debt obligations and assess their impact on social spending, particularly where they limit the state's ability to support its citizens. Finally, fiscal policy must recognise the central role of unpaid care work and actively work to reduce this burden through targeted support and inclusive social protection systems.

Conclusion: Beyond Percentages

Ultimately, the issue is not only about how much is allocated but about what those allocations achieve. Can 5% of the budget meaningfully support a population facing rising costs of care and living? Can 9.4% sustain a health system already under strain? Can strong revenue collection be justified when it does not ease the burden on the most vulnerable? These are not abstract questions. They reflect the lived realities of individuals who are paying significant amounts each month simply to survive. A national budget is a statement of priorities. If it is to be truly progressive, it must do more than meet benchmarks, it must reduce the cost of survival, restore dignity, and ensure that no one is left to carry the burden alone.

Toon of the week



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Opportunities

Senior Policy Officer – Health Tax Unit

<https://www.taxjusticeafrica.net/about-us/careers/senior-policy-officer-health-tax-unit>

Programmes and Communications lead

https://docs.google.com/document/d/1iNKmaGvVxPMLUAMvbwcizyy_9CHTrMrecbJfjed9EZY/edit?tab=t.0

Call for Applications: Anglophone Africa Extractive Industries Knowledge Hub (Summer School)

<https://acep.africa/2026-afreikh-summer-school/>

Communications intern

https://theacbf.org/the_vacancies/communications-intern/

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