

NEWSLETTER FROM CATHY BUCKLE IN ZIMBABWE



Helping hands change everything

9 January 2026



Dear Family and Friends

Christmas in Zimbabwe was about pounding rain and red mud, giant potholes and slippery roads. It was a Christmas when the Diaspora came home for the holidays, foreign cars and number plates from South Africa, Botswana, Zambia, Mozambique and Malawi filling roads and car parks. It was about full trolley loads of groceries being pushed by Diasporans and their long calculations as they tried to navigate our largely invisible ZiG currency and get to grips with the fact that shops don't have coins to give change so you must buy items you don't want so as to round up bills to the nearest dollar.

It was a time of brand new, crisp, clean one US dollar notes that came in from the Diaspora and filled up tills, a time when we luxuriated in clean bank notes that hadn't been tucked away in shoes, socks and bras, glued together or washed and dried in the sun.

Christmas was a time when National Railways staff didn't get their December salaries at all after a notice came to all branch offices and stations saying: "December salaries will be paid from the 5th to 23rd January 2026 due to 'financial challenges.'" Railway employees were "implored to be patient with the organization during this challenging period."

Christmas was the time when we faced the reality of the IMF statement which said that in Zimbabwe every US\$100 we had saved in January 2025 would only be worth US\$77 by December. "Prices are rising faster than wages," they said and we saw that in those bills we couldn't pay.

Christmas was a time when South African soldiers intercepted 1,174 Zimbabweans trying to cross the border illegally into South Africa in one day on the 26th December. A week later the numbers were much higher as Zimbabweans headed back to their jobs in South Africa, the jobs they cannot get in Zimbabwe, the jobs that keep them alive and let them support their families back in Zimbabwe. On the 3rd of January alone 22,483 Zimbabweans were processed through the Beitbridge border post going into South Africa.

As we moved into 2026, rural villagers had to face the reality that now they have to pay a 'per capita development levy.' Formerly the levy had been per household but now it's changed to per person. Under the new system, rural district councils are charging between US\$1 and US\$5 per person and it's really hurting the poorest of the poor.

One Rural Chief said: "It is unheard of that local authorities would extract money from impoverished villagers. People are struggling to survive. Many rural dwellers are the elderly, who are taking care of their grandchildren, whose parents are away trying to make ends meet." Villagers say that despite their levy payments "nothing is changing. There are no roads, no clinics and no clean water."

[\(Newsday\)](#)

When Christmas and New Year was all over and the Diasporans had gone home, I sat outside watching the dawn early one morning thinking about our Zimbabwe and how much longer we must live like this, struggling to survive. The sky was heavy with low hanging clouds, more rain and red mud was coming and I saw something small and dark sitting on a blue plastic pipe floating in the pool. A very small mouse was clinging on to the pipe, shivering and soaked, hanging on to survive. As soon as I rescued it, the mouse disappeared into the undergrowth, free of its struggle. Sometimes a helping hand changes everything so quickly.

I end this Letter with a message of recognition and thanks to the many thousands of family members and friends who came home from the Diaspora this Christmas and brought love, laughter and comfort with them. It is their sacrifice and helping hands that keep us going and change everything.

There is no charge for this Letter From Zimbabwe but if you would like to donate please visit my website.

Until next time, thanks for reading this Letter From Zimbabwe now in its 25th year, and my books about life in Zimbabwe, a country in waiting.

Ndini shamwari yenu (I am your friend)

Love Cathy
9 January 2026.
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