

NEWSLETTER FROM CATHY BUCKLE IN ZIMBABWE



Seizing maize and déjà vu

3 June 2022

Dear Family and Friends

Winter snuck in the back door in an icy blast this week in my home town. It came after two months of bizarre weather: pounding, flooding rain when it should have been bone dry, then cold and misty, then hot again and now a biting wind, four degrees at night, struggling up to the mid teens in the day. Woolly hats, Zimbabwe's unofficial national dress whether its four degrees or forty, coats, boots, doubled up blankets and windows closed, we are preparing for the coldest two months of the year. Zipping my jacket up to my chin and with head down against the wind I headed into the supermarket, promising a shivering old man who asked for help that I'd bring him a loaf of bread on the way out.

The shocks await us every time we go in the supermarkets with inflation officially stated at 131% but realistically at [256% according to Johns Hopkins economist Steve Hanke](#) who's been watching Zimbabwe's economy for a very long time. Zimbabwe's own respected economist, Tony Hawkins said this week he agreed with Steve Hanke and that "Zimbabwe now has the highest inflation rate in the world." The deeper we go into the mire however the more the figures become almost irrelevant.

Almost everything going into the supermarket trolley now is at least Z\$500, even a loaf of bread is just under that price. It's all so absurd when the highest bank note here is Z\$100 and you need five of them just to buy a loaf of bread. As usual I head to the maize meal shelf, Zimbabwe's staple food, and for the third week in a row, there's still none to buy, not a single bag. A week ago the GMB (Grain Marketing Board), which controls all the grain in the country, said they had indefinitely suspended grain allocations to millers for unclear reasons. Its murky to say the least as to why allocations were stopped, one top milling company executive said: "I can confirm the allocations were stopped and we don't really know why."

Another miller said: "We have gone for more than six weeks without an allocation." (NewsDay)

Farmers can only sell their maize to the GMB and are paid at a ratio of 70% in Zimbabwe dollars (which devalue almost by the day) and 30% in US dollars. In obvious panic the Secretary for Lands and Agriculture said he had ordered a "grain busting operation" to seize stocks of maize farmers were holding back due to low prices. According to the law no one can 'buy or acquire' maize from any farmer other than through the GMB. The Secretary for Lands said they would even intercept grain being moved from one area to another. "Not more than 5 x 50 kg bags maize can be moved without any authorized person or police officer having to confiscate the maize," the legislation says.

How well we all remember police and 'other' road blocks checking our vehicles and ordering people out of buses to check if we were hiding our own maize to take to our own families back in 2007. Every day now is a case of déjà vu in Zimbabwe and I headed back out into the wind and cold and gave the old man a loaf of bread. Food for a day, it's all any of us can do.

Later on I met a man who put the crisis into perspective when he told me he usually harvests a ton of maize but "this season we only got 2 buckets," (40kg) and it was drying on the roof of his house. A picture speaks a thousand words, see it here: <https://cathybuckle.co.zw/>

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 22nd year, and my books about life in Zimbabwe, a country in waiting.

Love Cathy

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