ZIMBABWE’S SAVING GRACE: 
THE ROLE OF REMITTANCES IN HOUSEHOLD 
LIVELIHOOD STRATEGIES IN GLEN NORAH, 
HARARE

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ABSTRACT
The political and socio-economic challenges over the past ten years, broadly referred to as the ‘Zimbabwe crisis’, have witnessed the flight of millions of Zimbabweans to save themselves and the families they leave behind. As a result, remittances being sent back to support such families are estimated to be around US$1 billion a year. Despite these huge flows of remittances to Zimbabwe, studies that try to understand their implications amongst recipients are scant. This article takes a micro-level approach by looking at the role of remittances in household livelihoods in the high-density suburb of Glen Norah, in Harare, primarily by examining the practice and character of remittances and how they are used by recipient households. The article utilises longitudinal evidence gathered from in-depth interviews with recipient households in Glen Norah at the peak of the crisis in 2008 and after the formation of the unity government in 2009. It shows that households were not passive victims of the crisis, but were rather active, adopting multiple strategies to survive. This article shows specifically how patterns of remittances changed with the fluid economic and political environment to allow households to cope as the crisis mutated.

Keywords: crisis, livelihoods, remittances, Zimbabwe

INTRODUCTION: THE PEOPLE’S SAVING GRACE
The multifaceted Zimbabwe crisis, that dominated the greater part of the past decade, was characterised (amongst other things) by hyperinflation, unemployment and a critical shortage of basic goods. As a result, dominant narratives about the country focused on the political economy and its negative impacts on citizens. The language of ‘crisis’ that appends the politico-economic transformation of Zimbabwe casts people and households as helpless, vulnerable, passive or essentially as victims. However, in-depth interviews and ethnographic fieldwork conducted in June and July 2008 (at the
height of the crisis) and again in October 2009, in Glen Norah, Harare, revealed another side of the Zimbabwean ‘crisis.’ Remittances from Zimbabwe’s massive diaspora were, undoubtedly, the people’s saving grace.

Actively seeking sustenance through resources from outside the country, households creatively negotiated the crisis through the use of remittances. Despite the seemingly obvious positive impacts, studies that seek to understand how remittances contributed to households’ wellbeing remain scant. This article looks, first, at the patterns of remittances and their usage. I argue that recognising the importance of remittances can be part of the process of better appreciating peoples’ own contribution to survival, rather than rendering them inert and ‘crisis-affected’ victims. However, remittances were not the sole source of livelihood, and the second part of this article looks, in passing, at the other strategies households adopted in the quest to maintain their living standards. A brief global, regional and Zimbabwean overview will be provided to contextualise the discussion.

REMITTANCES: A GLOBAL, REGIONAL AND LOCAL OVERVIEW

The International Organisation for Migration (IOM) has highlighted that remittance flows in general have continuously increased in the past 20 years and have, until recently, remained largely unaffected by the woes impacting global financial markets and violent conflicts. However, the effects of the most recent financial crisis on remittances are yet to be quantified. Remittances now represent the second most important source of external funding in developing countries after foreign direct investment (FDI) and are about double the level of official aid-related inflows to developing countries (Adams & Page 2005). Consequently, various studies have shown remittances to be a largely positive phenomenon in which migrants’ earnings have assisted families and communities to alleviate poverty (see Acosta 2007; Adams & Page 2005; Bracking & Sachikonye 2006; Gupta et al. 2007). In Africa, remittances represent an important financial flow with significant development potential because they are private income transfers that directly address sub-Saharan Africa’s ultimate challenge of poverty (World Migration 2005). Gupta et al. (2007) note that remittances address poverty because they are part of a private welfare system that transfers a degree of purchasing power, from relatively richer to relatively poorer members of a family or community.

Prior to the mid-1990s, Zimbabwean remittances were insignificant because up until then, the country’s migration lagged behind other countries in the region as its economy was relatively stable. However, the failure of the Economic Structural Adjustment Program (ESAP) in the mid 1990s resulted in increased economic stagnation and unemployment, which consequently led to a steady increase in migration to other countries in the region. Zimbabweans also went overseas in search of the proverbial ‘greener pastures’. Out-migration increased sharply at the turn of the new millennium, when the country began a generalised plunge that was set in motion by the fast-
track land reform programme initiated in 2000, amongst other things. While reliable estimates of the number of Zimbabwean migrants from this period onwards are scarce due to the undocumented nature thereof and the incapacity of Zimbabwe to capture accurate and timely migration statistics due to resource constraints, it is widely agreed that South Africa has attracted the vast majority, with an estimated 2 to 2.5 million Zimbabweans living in the country. Approximately 500,000 and 400,000 are believed to be in the United Kingdom (UK) and Botswana respectively (Bracking & Sachikonye 2006). Significant numbers of Zimbabweans have also settled in America, Australia and neighbouring countries like Mozambique and Zambia.

Remittances from this large pool of Zimbabwean migrants have, at least anecdotally, also surged during this period but they are also difficult to discern because most find their way into the country informally via taxi and bus services, traders and friends. Nonetheless, recent estimates have put remittances to Zimbabwe at over US$1 billion annually, and recognise that the actual figure is likely to be even higher. The following section discusses the contribution of remittances to household livelihood strategies in Glen Norah.

REMITTANCES IN GLEN NORAH

The contribution of remittances to household livelihood strategies can be illustrated by their patterns and use. The character of remittances and the practice of sending them to Zimbabwe is fluid, so as to cater for the unpredictable and ever-changing political economy. This section firstly discusses how patterns of remittances have changed to adapt to the volatile environment, thereby allowing households to cope. Crush (2008) notes that understanding the processes and patterns of remittance behaviour can help shed light on their usage and impact, both on recipient households and on wider socio-economic development in migrant-origin countries.

The practice and character of remittances in Glen Norah

Migration became a viable option for the skilled and unskilled alike to secure their livelihoods, as the employment market persistently shrank from the mid-1990s, leading to 80 per cent unemployment by 2008. This led most households to send more than one member out of the country to secure the household’s survival. South Africa has been the most attractive destination, because of its close proximity to Zimbabwe and the opportunities provided by its massive stable economy. The dominance of South Africa as a destination country is also evident in the sample used in this study, as according to respondents 56 per cent of migrants lived and worked in South Africa, with 27 per cent based in the UK and the remainder scattered around the world. It must be noted that the practice and nature of remittances from developed countries (such as the UK) are different from those stemming from South Africa, as will be highlighted in this section.
Forms of remittances

Research on remittances has mainly focused on money which is sent to recipient households, and its effect on them. However, the Zimbabwean case is peculiar, because in-kind remittances are significant due to chronic shortages of basic commodities. Despite this, the effect of remitted goods has been largely ignored. However, this article shows how in-kind remittances have played an important role in sustaining the social fabric of the country. Studies on remittances in Zimbabwe should, therefore, consider the implications of in-kind remittances in order to gain a full understanding of their implications.

In this study, Glen Norah remittances from South Africa were found to be largely in kind, while those from international destinations tended to be mostly cash. It is important to understand the different forms of remittances to Zimbabwe, because at different conjunctures of the crisis, a change in the nature of the remittances enabled households to stave off some of the more negative manifestations of the turmoil. Pendleton reported that the importance of goods remittances is noteworthy in Zimbabwe, since the proportion of households receiving remittances in the form of goods was approximately 68 per cent. Similarly, 87 per cent of households in the sample under study received significant in-kind remittances – especially from South Africa – thus supporting Pendleton’s estimate. The increasing significance of in-kind remittances could be attributed to the economic environment, which at that time was characterised by chronic shortages of basic commodities.

International remittances from England or the United States (US) were largely cash remittances, because it is easier and cheaper to send cash rather than goods from these countries. Freight charges for goods were identified as the biggest deterrent, hence the dominance of cash. Monica, whose sister lives in the UK, indicated:

\[\text{Sometimes we get clothes, but she says that it is very expensive ... She has always said that it is very expensive to send goods, you know shipping and stuff. She has told us that she has bought flat screens and the like, but she says it's too expensive to ship the items, so she's probably going to take forever.}\]

Nonetheless, due to the shortage of commodities in the economy, a significant proportion of these international remittances were transformed into goods through regular shopping trips to neighbouring countries. Gladys, whose husband had been working in the UK for five years, is one such case. From 2005 to 2008, she would make bi-monthly shopping trips to Johannesburg, after receiving cash from her husband. Gladys would buy virtually all her groceries in Johannesburg, and in 2008 she even transported meat back home as the shortage of basic commodities had reached critical levels. The prevalence of these shopping trips led scholars like Polzer (2007) to categorise ‘shoppers’ as one ‘type’ of Zimbabwean migrant who entered South Africa to shop for food and basic goods before returning almost immediately to their own country. An article in the *Mail & Guardian*
(14 January 2008) also noted that Zimbabwean cross-border shoppers were largely responsible for the growth in retail sales in South Africa – sales rose from 8.7 per cent in 2006 to 18 per cent in 2007, when Zimbabweans contributed R2.2 billion to the South African economy, thereby making them the biggest non-South African spenders.

The economic crisis shaped the type of remittance. Cash remittances used to be the dominant form, and as the economic situation changed, the forms of remittances also changed to allow households to maintain their living standards. In 2008, after the presidential election the economic meltdown deepened, which resulted in the unprecedented scarcity of goods – including the staple maize-meal. When households had to look outside the country, their migrant relatives stepped in to make up for shortages. This was illustrated by Munashe, who came to South Africa in 2003 and has been working as a boiler-maker in Johannesburg ever since. In addition to his parents in the rural areas, he has a wife and two children in Zimbabwe who are dependent on his support. In the past, he sent them cash on a monthly basis. From around 2006 and 2007 he mentioned that he began sending mainly goods, because everything was in short supply in Zimbabwe. Every month he sent groceries worth about R2 000, and he even sent the staple mealie-meal which had traditionally been available despite the economic turmoil.

With the formation of a unity government between ZANU-PF and the MDC in February 2009, followed by the official dollarisation of the economy at around the same time, the country seems to be in a post-reconstruction period after years of decline, as evidenced by the improved availability of goods and commodities on shop shelves, and a decrease in inflation. A follow-up field trip in October 2009 revealed a completely different picture: the adoption of a multiple currency system and the introduction of duty-free regulation on imported basic commodities had brought about a marked improvement in stocking levels in most shops, with stable pricing. However, prices have remained high for most poor urban households with limited purchasing power, as unemployment has worsened to over 90 per cent. The average salary is US$200, yet the poverty datum line stands at US$500. Therefore, since 2009 the importance of in-kind remittances has been decreasing, as the supply of goods has improved in the country and cash remittances have increasingly come back to play a central role in household livelihoods, as will be discussed in the following section.

Remittances in hard currency

In September 2008, when the Reserve Bank of Zimbabwe (RBZ) issued licences to retailers and wholesalers to sell their goods in foreign currency to ease food and fuel shortages (a move considered to be the partial formal dollarisation of the economy), this sidelined the Zimbabwe dollar (ZWD) and further increased the importance of foreign currency amongst households to access goods and services. The complete dollarisation of the economy was formalised in early 2009, after which the supply of goods improved almost forthwith. As the US dollar, the SA rand and the British pound sterling dominate
the local market cash remittances have been welcomed, as they permit access to goods being sold in foreign currency – especially for poorer households without access to other sources of foreign currency within Zimbabwe.

Volume of remittances

The largest proportion of cash remittances from migrants in developed countries ranges between US$100 and US$500 a month. Households with the highest remittances received them over a couple of months, for example Wes pointed out that they receive US$1 000 every two or three months. However, average monthly remittances are between US$300 and US$400, which is relatively high compared to the monthly average of other crisis-affected countries like Somalia, which is roughly around US$215 (Lindley 2006). Cash remittances from South Africa, which were lower, ranged from R200 to R1 000 per month. Although cash remittances from South Africa are lower, it must be noted that they tend to be largely in the form of goods valued at anything from R400 to R2 000 a month. The difference in the volumes is explained by Sander and Maimbo (2003: 16), who note that intra-regional and domestic remittances are generally significantly lower than international remittances, because income levels for migrants in industrialised countries tend to be higher than for domestic or intra-regional migrants.

Uses of remittances

There is general consensus in the literature that the bulk of remittances to developing countries is used primarily for consumption and then for investment in human capital (which includes education, health and better nutrition). Investment in land and livestock or in building or improving a home is also relatively common, but is secondary to daily needs and human capital expenses (see Lindley 2006; Maimbo 2006; Sander & Maimbo 2003). Coss (2006) notes that remittances improve human development outcomes, since generally remittance recipient households spend more on healthcare and have higher school attendance rates. Similar usage patterns were also evident in Glen Norah, where remittances were mainly used for household consumption, education, health, rent and investments. Table 1 shows how households spend their remittances. It is difficult to discern the proportion of remittances used on each item, because of the volatility of the environment which forces households to constantly change their allocations to different items.
Table 1: Use of remittances

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Remittance use</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Food expenditure</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>53.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Healthcare</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accommodation/rent</td>
<td>26.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Investments (building, acquiring assets)</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other household expenses</td>
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While the patterns of remittance use in Glen Norah were similar to those in other developing countries, the excessive reliance on remittances for food expenditure is unique, and the high investment in human capital – given the unfavourable economic conditions – is striking. Therefore, it is necessary to determine how households in Glen Norah used their remittances for food and human capital accumulation, which includes investments in education and healthcare.

**Food expenditure**

Due to the severe economic constraints in Zimbabwe that manifested in the shortage of basic goods, the use of remittances on food was critical to all households in the sample under study. Food insecurity in urban areas, as in other parts of the country, was rampant and there was inadequate humanitarian support compared to rural areas. Remittances therefore played a key role in stabilising household food security – the amount of food remittance and the use of cash remittances to buy food in Glen Norah is testimony to this. The use of remittances on food was more evident in Zimbabwe than in other countries, as shown by a survey by the Southern African Migration Project (SAMP) in five SADC countries. The survey found that 90 per cent of households purchase food and other basic goods with remitted funds (Hughes, Kajee & Peberdy 2007).

Food remittances which mainly came from South Africa were, therefore, important in ensuring some level of household food security. Eighty-seven per cent of respondents who had relatives in South Africa received remittances mainly in the form of goods (primarily groceries like cooking oil, soap, rice and other products which constituted a central part of their food supply). Revai explained her family’s reliance on remittances for survival, as follows: ‘For the groceries that is what we eat because if you go to the shops, you will not get bread or maize meal, these things are scarce these days.’

In-kind remittances seem to have facilitated another survival strategy, i.e. barter trading. The shortages of goods and the increasing irrelevance of the local currency resulted in a tendency to barter trade commodities. Many people resorted to barter trading to acquire basic commodities as shops continued to run empty. Revai made regular trips to rural areas to barter washing soap for maize, and she mentioned that even labour was increasingly being exchanged for groceries – especially domestic...
work. Revai confessed that she gave her domestic worker some groceries every month, and from my interactions with the domestic worker it appeared as if she was pleased to be able to provide for her children in this way, since a salary could not buy her anything.

**Education**

In 2008, many schools had to close down, but some managed to remain open by relying on the teachers and parents' own initiatives – a process in which remittances were central. Some of the initiatives adopted to keep the schools afloat involved charging tuition in foreign currency and groceries, while teachers increasingly resorted to giving private lessons to supplement their salaries. Phineas had a child who attended a boarding school which remained fully operational, because parents agreed to pay US$50 a term. In addition they supplied a whole range of groceries, for use by the pupils and, on occasion, for consumption by the teachers. Phineas reiterated: 'We now have to take care of the teachers otherwise they will just go down to South Africa.' Phineas also highlighted the fact that the groceries and money sent by his son in South Africa had to be channeled to his daughter, otherwise she would have to leave school like others whose parents could not manage. Phineas stated: "*Vasina vana kunze kwenyika varikutseteka kudya nekuendasana vana kuchikoro* [those without children outside the country are struggling to eat and to send their children to school]."

A significant proportion of households in this sample (53.3%) used their remittances on education, including school fees, stationery, transport and uniforms. If I only include households with school-going children, about 70 per cent of households used their remittances on education. An estimated 45 000 teachers had left the profession since 2004, and the remaining teachers resorted to absenteeism in protest against meagre salaries, opting to engage in other informal economic activities. Schools failed to function as they could not settle their bills from school fees due to the hyperinflationary environment. Nonetheless, this unusual quest for education in a hostile environment that had precipitated over at least ten years was possibly out of the realisation that education offered more opportunities to establish stable longer-term livelihood strategies. Education was seen as increasing the prospects of migration and securing a job in another country that would result in remittances.

**Health**

Remittances also became central to people's access to healthcare. In Biri's household, remittances are central to their health expenditure. Their mother, who has a heart problem, regularly needs to visit a doctor for check-ups and she requires chronic medication which costs them US$100 a month – a sum they would have found impossible to raise in Zimbabwe. Biri's brother in England takes care of the health expenditure and the family's rent, while her two brothers in South Africa are responsible for food expenditure.

Zimbabwe's health system had not been immune to the wider economic meltdown in the country. In early November 2008, the Zimbabwe Association of Doctors for
Human Rights (ZADHR) reported that hospitals were closing due to a shortage of drugs and equipment (News24). Private hospitals had been the main option for those who could afford to pay high fees for medical care, while others sought medical attention and drugs outside the country. At that time medical fees in private hospitals ranged from US$200 for consultations to US$3 000 for operations (such as a Cesarean section, for instance).

However, these challenges in the healthcare system led others to simply ignore healthcare in the hope that they would not need it. Mary acknowledged this when responding to a question whether they used remittances for this purpose: ‘For healthcare it is very negligible, you can put it at zero comma zero something per cent. I mean with the situation around, hospitals are not really something that people can subscribe to. We have not been accessing healthcare that much …. ’ The overall situation in Glen Norah was that households were forced to ignore normal access to healthcare because of the prohibitive costs, but when they needed to access medical care, remittances were central to households’ capacity to pay.

OTHER HOUSEHOLD LIVELIHOOD STRATEGIES IN GLEN NORAH

As noted earlier, households adopted multiple livelihood strategies as a form of diversification, which can be considered an insurance plan in an ever-uncertain environment, so that if one failed, there would be another to fall back on. Some of the strategies households in Glen Norah adopted include the following:

Moonlighting

Moonlighting involves engaging in economic activities outside one’s job. Salaries for the majority, paid in the local ZWD, were irrelevant due to the hyperinflationary environment that always outpaced salary increments, and due to cash shortages that caused delays and meant that people received their money at a fraction of its original worth. Monica, whose parents are both teachers, confessed that their combined salary was ZWD300 billion (equivalent to R80 on the parallel market exchange rate in June 2008). As a result of this situation, most workers resorted to moonlighting to supplement their meagre wages – especially in the informal economy. One respondent, Joe, indicated that ‘what is happening with those who go to work is that in their workplaces they take care of each other. Some have farms, so they sell maize-meal, meat and other stuff. So those who go to work link with others to get whatever they can.’ In other words, the work environment was being used as a platform to engage in more rewarding activities, it was used as a space to establish networks important for accessing scarce resources. Company resources like telephones, cars and even offices were also used when workers engage in moonlighting. As Mandy stated: ‘People are now just going to work to use the phones to do their own business ….’ I sell my foreign
currency to someone who works in a bank and I just go there and do my business in his office sometimes.'

The informal economy

A recession in the formal economy and the resultant high rate of unemployment have caused the informal economy to flourish in recent years, as this became an obvious opportunity for households to sustain themselves. Diverse informal economic strategies proved to be more profitable than most formal jobs. In 2008, Zimbabwe's informal economy constituted nearly 60 per cent of the country's GDP – the largest such proportion in Africa, followed by Tanzania at 58.3 per cent and Nigeria at 57.9 per cent.10 The presence of the informal economy was also evident in Glen Norah, as every household in the sample had at least one member who was involved in such activities. There are many different informal economic activities, but I will focus on three main types, which include petty trading, cross-border trading and self-employment.

Informal trading

With the collapse of formal trading systems, individuals stepped in to provide goods and services, thereby creating an informal economy that effectively dwarfed the formal one. Mambodiani (2008) asserts that it is quite possible that approximately 60 per cent of the population turned into traders, as there were three or more layers of middle men, such that the same commodities were sold several times before getting to the final consumer. Chronic shortages of virtually all commodities made the trading of almost anything profitable. Scarce goods were sourced from within or outside Zimbabwe for re-sale on the parallel market. Ndinongokiyakiya, literally ‘doing this and that,’ was a common response by people to describe the nature of the activities they engaged in. It involved acquiring a sixth sense to source and sell scarce commodities in an ever-changing economic environment, such that people had to constantly change what they were involved in, depending on what was available at the time. Monica, an unemployed graduate, illustrated this as follows:

*I deal, you know how it is here in Harare, if you just hear that there is a shortage of something and if you can get it from somewhere, you just get it and supply it and you know how it is, that’s it, you make some money.*

Informal cross-border trading

This form of trading has a long history in Zimbabwe, but in the 1980s and 1990s it was despised and associated with low-income earners and unemployed people who had no alternative means of living. It was seen as a mere survival strategy on the part of the poor, to cope with their economic situation (Nyatanga, Mpofu & Tekere 2000). However, over the past couple of years, with the advent of the crisis, cross-border trade was taken to new heights in terms of coverage and the type of goods involved. In
addition to traditional destinations such as South Africa, Botswana, Mozambique and Zambia, international destinations like Dubai and China were added, while the trade mutated from the traditional export of crochet work and other artifacts and second-hand clothes, to the import of groceries and other consumables. Cross-border trade seemed to thrive despite the crisis, or rather because of it, since virtually everything was scarce and importing virtually anything proved profitable. Traders even imported beer, soft drinks and various groceries. In 2008, South Africa supplied half of Zimbabwe’s imports, some $2 billion worth, but it is the unofficial trade born of necessity that was most noticeable here. Just over 30 per cent of households in the sample had a family member involved in cross-border trade. Chipo, a 51-year-old woman who has been a cross-border trader for 13 years, succinctly described how the trade mutated. She exports crochet work and other artifacts to South Africa, and imports second-hand clothes for sale in Zimbabwe, whereas to Zambia she would smuggle whiskey, spirits and brandies. However, as the crisis manifested in a chronic shortage of basic goods, she began to import groceries and other consumables from South Africa. A notice at her gate indicated that soap and cooking oil were available for sale. Such signs were common across Glen Norah, indicating where what has been described as ‘underground supermarkets’ have sprung up.

Self employment

Small-scale producers were also involved in a heterogeneous set of activities that operated small-scale units to produce and distribute goods and services generally within their own communities. A range of self-employment activities was uncovered from observations and interviews with participants in Glen Norah. These included backyard industries (specifically welding and fabrication), peanut butter making, plumbing and vegetable markets. The independence and irregular nature of one’s income are some of the merits of self-employment, as evidenced by Joe:

*I do my own things ... I am involved in welding and fabrication, so I do services to people with broken/damaged things and then I make my own stuff for resale like TV stands and peanut butter-making machines. Plus I am also involved in peanut butter making which I also sell ... we are helping where we can because our money does not wait for a pay day. So sometimes I can get it today or tomorrow, so it helps because it is not fixed .... I can get it today and buy whatever will be required at home that day.*

Urban farming

Most households resorted to urban farming as a coping mechanism to enhance food security. Masiya and Mazuruse (2007) noted that while widely practised by the poor and lower-income groups in Harare, urban farming became common in affluent areas as well. In well-heeled suburbs like Avondale and Mabelreign, maize and vegetable plots sprouted to counter the expected food shortages brought about by the economic meltdown. The cultivation of sweet potatoes was common, and their role as a substitute
for bread was striking, explaining the increased cultivation of the crop. Popurally referred to as *chingwa*, which literally means ‘bread’, sweet potato farming was visibly widespread in public spaces. In Glen Norah, 73 per cent of households in this sample indicated that they maintained small gardens and fields in the area that contributed to their consumption needs. Gladys, who looks after three children and two grandchildren in their Glen Norah residence, was a very proud self-proclaimed sweet potato master farmer. She boasted that she had overcome the erratic bread supply:

... you cannot get bread anywhere in the shops ... we now grow our bread, we just grow our sweet potatoes and eat them with tea for breakfast.

Gladys is just one of many heads of households who resorted to growing sweet potatoes and other crops, to assure a measure of consistent food supply during periods of food shortages.

**Urban–rural linkages**

The utilisation of urban–rural linkages was maintained and strengthened as a pragmatic response to the scarcity of resources. Urban households in Glen Norah supported relations in rural areas with monthly contributions, while they were in turn supported by migrant relatives (indicating layers of social relations). Two-thirds of the respondents in this study maintained their rural links in such a way that it was a deliberate investment that contributed to the household’s wellbeing, as illustrated by Wes, who said:

*We do not buy things like maize and peanut butter; we get them from my mother because she’s a farmer ... we send groceries, money and things like fertilizer; because they do not have any other source of income in the rural areas.*

Despite the adoption of these various strategies, due to the extent of the predicament, most of these strategies failed to provide a stable means of living – they were therefore largely survival strategies, adopted to cope with the short-term constraints on households. However, I argue that with the incorporation of another external coping strategy in the form of remittances, households managed to further endure (to some extent) the ravages of the economic freefall.

**CONCLUSION**

As Zimbabwe’s political and economic freefall accelerated, the residential majority had to look outside the country’s borders for alternative sources of income, resulting in the migration of millions of Zimbabweans to different parts of the world – for their own survival and that of their families. Remittances from Zimbabwean migrants, therefore, became critical for the recipient households left behind.
This article shows that households in Glen Norah were not passive victims of the crisis. Through their own efforts, adopting multiple strategies that complemented and supplemented each other, they managed the crisis. In Glen Norah, as the formal economy succumbed to the crisis, there was a dramatic expansion of informal economic activity. Non-income-generating activities like urban farming, urban–rural links and barter trade were also established as contributors to overall household wellbeing. While some of these strategies were a combination of survival and livelihood strategies, the study also found that the severity of the crisis made it difficult to draw a line between the two. As a result, whatever category one uses, all in all these strategies allowed households to cope with the dire circumstances brought on by the crisis.

The patterns of remittances changed with the crisis – their fluid pattern placed them in a more central position in Glen Norah households. Remittances in the form of goods were crucial during this period, but as the country’s political and socio-economic landscape changes for the better (or worse), remittances are also likely to change. If essential goods become available at normal prices, the importance of in-kind remittances is likely to decrease.

Most households in Glen Norah used their cash remittances on food expenditure because of severe food insecurity – something which has been characteristic of the crisis. However, remittances also contributed to investments in human capital accumulation at a time when the education and healthcare systems were facing tremendous challenges. Their use in human capital accumulation can also be said to foster longer-term livelihood strategies, as investments in education increase the prospects of more stable forms of employment.

Overall, the article has demonstrated that households manage in contexts of crisis through the amalgamation of several strategies. Migration and remittances are important components of these strategies in Glen Norah, with moneys and goods being used in a manner that has enabled households to cope during the Zimbabwe crisis.

NOTES
3 In the Glen Norah sample, 67 per cent of households had more than one migrant outside the country while 33 per cent had a single migrant. In contrast, Lindley (2006) found that in Hargeisa, the majority of respondents (around 80 per cent) received money from one relative, while about 15 per cent received money from two people.
5 Interview with Monica, 30 June 2008, at Glen Norah.
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Interview with Wes, 12 June 2008.

Interview with Revai, 4 July 2008, at Glen Norah shops.

Interview with Phineas, 14 June 2008.

Interview with Biri, 16 June 2008, in Glen Norah.


Interview with Mary, 14 June 2008, at Glen Norah shopping centre.

Interview with Monica, 30 June 2008, in Glen Norah.

Interview with Joe, 17 June 2008, at Glen Norah.

Informal conversation with Mandy (a foreign currency trader) at Glen Norah shopping centre.


Interview with Monica, 30 June 2008, at Glen Norah.


Interview with Gladys, 30 June 2008, at Glen Norah.

Interview with Wes, 12 June 2008, at Glen Norah.

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**BIODEGRAPHICAL NOTE**

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