



ECONOMIC STRUCTURAL ADJUSTMENT PROGRAMMES (ESAP) AND MULTI-PARTY POLITICS: A NEW THREAT TO AFRICAN NATIONALIST PARTIES IN ZAMBIA AND ZIMBABWE

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ABSTRACT

It is widely accepted that political considerations are crucial to understanding why African governments did or did not adopt and implement economic structural adjustment programmes (ESAP). Using Zambia and Zimbabwe as cases, the paper explores why the Zambian government under President Kenneth Kaunda and the Zimbabwean government under President Robert Mugabe abandoned International Monetary Fund/World Bank (IMF/WB) economic reform programmes shortly before the 1991 and 2000 elections respectively. The study is based mainly on qualitative research involving document analysis of books, journal articles and selected press reports. We argue in this paper that the abandonment of SAPs in both countries was as a result of the economic decline as well as the emergence of strong opposition parties and civil society groups which proved to be a major threat to African nationalist parties. We also point out that SAPS conditionalities indirectly acted as a catalyst to speed up the democratisation process thus greatly undermining nationalist goals. To survive politically, the nationalist parties in the two countries abandoned SAPs when they weighed the potential political risks of losing office.

Keywords: ESAP/SAPS, IMF/WB, Ruling Elites, Civil Society, Zambia, Zimbabwe.

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