**Press Statement**

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**CRD Responds to SONA: Abandoned Reforms Worsen Resource Inequality and Service Delivery Collapse.**

**Issued by:** Centre for Research and Development (CRD)

**Introduction**

In response to the State of the Nation Address (SONA) delivered to Parliament on 28 October 2025, the Centre for Research and Development (CRD) notes with serious concern that it did not account for the collapsed legislative reform agenda that underpins Zimbabwe's National Development Strategy 1 (NDS1) and the country's aspiration to attain an upper middle-income economy by 2030.

The address presented a narrative of progress across all sectors, yet it omitted any reference to the critical governance and legal reforms in local government and the extractive sector that are essential to achieving the developmental and social justice targets of NDS1. This silence raises fundamental questions about government's commitment to implementing the policy foundations of Vision 2030.

**Abandoned Legislative Agenda and Centralisation of Power**

The Government's legislative commitments since 2018 were clear: to align governance frameworks with the Constitution's devolution and accountability principles. Yet, seven years later, the majority of those laws remain abandoned. The only bill from that original reform package still before Parliament is the Mines and Minerals Amendment Bill (MMAB), itself outstanding since 2018.

The following bills have not been reintroduced in the Tenth Parliament, effectively halting the promised reform process:

1. Provincial Councils and Administration Amendment Bill
2. Urban Councils Amendment Bill
3. Rural District Councils Amendment Bill
4. Regional Town and Country Planning Amendment Bill
5. Traditional Leaders Amendment Bill
6. Gold Trade Amendment Bill and Precious Stones Trade Amendment Bill

This legislative paralysis stands in direct contradiction to the constitutional commitment to devolve power and ensure equitable development across all provinces (Section 14). Instead, fiscal and decision-making powers remain tightly centralised, preventing communities from benefiting from the natural resources within their territories.

CRD first raised this concern in its 2022 policy brief, "Vision 2030: Will National Development Strategies Succeed Without Key Reforms in Local Governance?", warning that delays in passing these governances and mining reforms would entrench opacity, weaken accountability, and fuel unregulated extraction. Three years later, these warnings have materialised: resource exploitation has intensified under outdated laws, and the absence of devolution has deepened inequality and service delivery collapse in mineral-rich areas.

**Devolution Without Law: Fiscal Transfers Without Accountability**

The so-called devolution funds currently distributed to local authorities remain extra-legal, as there is still no enabling Act of Parliament governing their allocation or oversight. While Section 301(3) of the Constitution guarantees that not less than 5% of national revenues must be allocated to provincial and local authorities, some local authorities have reported in 2025 receiving between 1% and 3%. The absence of a legal framework allows discretionary and opaque distribution, reducing devolution to a political slogan rather than a constitutional process. This failure has weakened local governance, denied rural communities access to adequate services, and entrenched dependency on central government handouts.

**Mining Without Accountability: An Outdated Regime**

The Mines and Minerals Act (Chapter 21:05) remains the primary law governing Zimbabwe's extractive sector, despite being enacted more than fifty years ago. The long-delayed Mines and Minerals Amendment Bill, now in its seventh year of drafting, has stalled due to repeated executive interventions and disregard of stakeholder submissions. In the meantime, mining operations have expanded rapidly under this outdated law, which grants the Minister of Mines broad discretionary powers while offering little protection to local communities. As a result, the country has witnessed rising land conflicts, unsafe mining practices, environmental degradation, and widespread water contamination**.** The Gold Trade and Precious Stones Trade Amendment Bills, which were meant to improve traceability, security, and accountability in mineral trading, have been shelved. As a result, the mining sector continues to operate in secrecy, dominated by politically connected elites and foreign interests. This has given rise to rampant mineral leakages, illicit financial outflows, and unexplained wealth accumulation, as revealed in numerous public reports and international investigations. Consequently, mining communities remain trapped in cycles of poverty, pollution, and dispossession.

**Rising Land Conflicts and Tenure Insecurity**

The expansion of mining concessions into communal and farming areas, often without proper consultation or compensation, has intensified land conflicts and livelihood loss across many districts in Zimbabwe.CRD's monitoring in areas such as Manhize (see https://www.crdzim.org.zw/manhize/manhize%20newsflash.html), Buhera, Penhalonga, to name but a few, has documented forced relocations, inadequate compensation, and growing environmental hazards as mining spreads into agricultural and residential zones. Traditional leaders and local authorities remain powerless under outdated laws that centralise land control. This ongoing situation undermines the principles of Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC) and contradicts NDS1's goal of inclusive and sustainable development.

**Service Delivery in Decline**

The continued centralisation of resources has caused a systemic decline in service delivery across rural communities. CRD is particularly concerned that in resource-rich districts, where national revenues should ideally translate into local development, there are stark contradictions between NDS1's key result commitments and the lived realities of residents.

- Up to 70% of households lack access to safe water.
- Health centres are distant, some incomplete or understaffed, with persistent drug shortages.
- School infrastructure is inadequate, with classes often exceeding 80 pupils. Authorities struggle to meet the demands of the new curriculum due to resource constraints, leading to poor pass rates, high dropout rates, and an increase in child pregnancies.
- Local roads remain unmaintained, isolating communities from essential services.

These findings demonstrate that even in areas generating significant mineral wealth, public services remain weak and uneven, reflecting not merely fiscal limitations but a governance crisis, a deliberate sidelining of reform that leaves rural populations bearing the cost of extraction without benefits of development.

**CRD's Position and Recommendations**

Against this background,CRD calls for urgent corrective action to restore the integrity of national reform processes and ensure that governance aligns with the constitutional vision of equitable resource distribution. Specifically:

1. Reintroduce and expedite the seven key reform bills on local governance, land, and mining to ensure transparency, decentralisation, and community participation.
2. Align mining and land legislation to guarantee community tenure security, benefit sharing, and environmental rehabilitation obligations.
3. Enact a Devolution Act to transfer powers to provincial and local authorities, enabling communities to derive direct benefits from the exploitation of resources within their localities, while simultaneously regulating fiscal transfers, ensuring transparency, and upholding the 5% constitutional threshold for devolved funds.
4. Guarantee Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC) in all extractive and land allocation processes.
5. Strengthen parliamentary oversight to prevent continued executive delays and restore legislative accountability.

**Conclusion**

Zimbabwe cannot achieve Vision 2030 while its legislative framework remains outdated, centralised, and unresponsive to citizens' rights.The failure to reform the governance of land, minerals, and local authorities has entrenched inequality and fuelled conflict, while weakening the capacity of communities to sustain their livelihoods.CRD urges a renewed commitment from both the Executive and Parliament to restore the rule of law**,** uphold constitutionalism, and ensure that Zimbabwe's natural wealth serves its people, not the privileged few.

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