

SOMETIME back on a cold weekend day of June 1985, my mother gave me Z\$35 to pay rent to our landlord in Cherima, Marondera. I knocked on the kitchen of Amai Munyaradzi, a big woman whose steps and breathing I could hear hundreds of metres away. Amai Munyaradzi was ensconced at the fireplace with her husband, Bitoni Silipa.

Silipa worked at the GMB in Marondera and was a devout Christian. He always sang loudly, every evening, calling the whole street to the saviour. On many occasions I had however seen him sneak into the wooden and almost collapsing cabin of Susan, who lived at the end of Rusvingo Street, but I never told anyone.

As I handed the money to Amai Munyaradzi, Silipa leapt with tremendous force to lift from his chair, almost falling into the fireplace as he attempted to grab the money. The Z\$35 was consumed by the fire.

I was shocked and quietly left the room. I never told my mother or anyone until now.

This incident reminds me of Finance minister Tendai Biti and RBZ Governor Gideon Gono wrangling over the IMF US\$500 million. The IMF loan, for me, came at the right time for Zimbabwe, more so for this unity government. Unfortunately as Zimbabweans, we are reminded daily that we are being governed by a very disunited family that is all too eager to show, at every opportunity, that they are in a forced marriage.

Under Step 1 — the economic recovery programme of the unity government — the sourcing of resources for both public and private sector revival is mentioned as key. This document, despite its overtly private sector deterministic approach to economic recovery, nevertheless contains the main ingredients that have so far brought a semblance of stability and if continued, some hope for citizens.

What can be drawn from the arguments of the two men is that the two parties are still very much driven by self-interest. I don't agree that Zimbabwe should decline the US\$500 million simply because we are poor and cannot repay the money.

My understanding is that Zimbabwe has so far received more than US\$1 billion in loans that will attract even higher interest rates than the IMF loan. Secondly I don't agree that this money should be used to refinance another so called agricultural mechanisation programme, simply to give more farm machinery to some high-placed officials to abuse and use as campaign tools.

Those who are into commercial farming must now go to the banks and negotiate for loans. While they are producing for the country, they are foremostly creating personal wealth. If there is to be any support to them, let it be in areas that don't hit the pocket of the taxpayer.

Zimbabweans, long left out of the management of their resources, are again left baffled as the IMF loan opens another battlefield — an unnecessary one. First Zimbabweans need power, water, affordable housing and functional hospitals.

If the IMF loan is to be repaid by the taxpayer, then the loan should simply go to those areas of concern to the taxpayer. This loan can pay off all of Zesa's debts and finance the refurbishment of Hwange Thermal Power Station and support Hwange Colliery to increase its capacity.

Thousands of Zimbabweans died needlessly in 2008 and 2009 as a result of cholera. Cholera is a disease of poverty. Almost all cities and towns in Zimbabwe have a critical water shortage. Again I believe citizens are prepared to pay for clean water rather than die of cholera. The IMF loan can finance the refurbishment of water reticulation in cities and towns.

A few months ago, prime minister Morgan Tsvangirai toured Harare Central Hospital and was told the hospital needed nearly US\$40 000 to repair a non-functional boiler, apart from shortages of drugs and staff. I would not mind if part of this loan goes to repairing that boiler and buying other critical equipment for hospitals in Zimbabwe.

Again as citizens, we will pay back the IMF loan rather than die from lack of drugs and health equipment. Hundreds of Zimbabweans have also died in the past few months in needless accidents, mostly as a result of bad roads.

As citizens we also would not mind paying toll fees to use better roads. Zimbabwean schools have no books, a dangerous scenario that is creating a generation on illiterates that will be of no use in the next few years apart from being criminals and loafers. Again let the IMF loan buy text books for schools and citizens will not mind paying for the future of their children.

Rather than abuse citizens with all the economic jargon of this and that, Biti and Gono can save us better by directing this loan to things that matter in our lives. And citizens will pay back the loan through their taxes.

I am reminded that as I left the kitchen of Amai Munyaradzi I heard her shout, “Yaa” followed by another “Yaa” from Silipa. The two of them were “happy” but neither had gained. I hope Biti and Gono don’t take us though this zero-sum scenario. Leadership and sensitivity are necessary for the sake of long suffering Zimbabweans.

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