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Making a living and moving on: exploring the livelihoods of regularised Zimbabweans in Johannesburg, South Africa

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ABSTRACT

This research is encouraged by the recent developments in the migration patterns of Zimbabweans in South Africa in the period 2009-2016. The absence of secure livelihoods due to the political stalemate in Zimbabwe resulted in Zimbabweans looking for a safe haven in different parts of the world. South Africa is among many other countries which has been a recipient of both undocumented and documented Zimbabweans. Most Zimbabweans in South Africa were undocumented and in 2010 the South African government made an initiative to regularise the positions of Zimbabweans living in South Africa, yet there is limited academic research on the livelihoods of regularised Zimbabwean migrants in South Africa.

The rationale behind the implementation of the Zimbabwe Documentation Process (ZDP) in 2010 and the renewal of the process through issuing the Zimbabwe Special Permit (ZSP) in 2014 is noteworthy. However, this study explores the livelihood experiences of regularised Zimbabweans in Johannesburg, South Africa. The research examines the livelihood strategies, challenges, opportunities and outcomes of regularised Zimbabwean migrants. The purpose of this formative qualitative study is to investigate if the access to livelihood opportunities and outcomes among regularised Zimbabwean migrants are strongly dependant on documentation. This is an important area of study given the ongoing special dispensation for Zimbabweans in South Africa and the wider migration scholarship in the country.

Based on 15 semi structured interviews with regularised Zimbabwean migrants and 1 key informant conducted in Turfontein and Florida my assertion in this study is that the reported livelihood experiences of regularised Zimbabweans highlight a complex connection between documentation and livelihoods. On one hand findings show that documentation has improved the economic and social wellbeing of regularised Zimbabwean migrant in Johannesburg and on the other hand, documentation is undermining the livelihood options of regularised Zimbabwean migrants. For individuals who are in search of secure and sustainable livelihoods, findings show that mostly regularisation is offering limited protection and temporary rights to migrants who are likely to live in South Africa for years to come.

Key words: documentation, livelihood experiences, regularisation, regularised Zimbabwean migrants, South Africa, Zimbabwe, Zimbabwe Documentation Project, and Zimbabwe Special Permit.