

AAINews

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Some reflections on Harare upon revisiting after three years

Recently I had a chance to visit Harare, the capital of Zimbabwe, for the first time since my visit in January 1995. What I felt most strongly during this visit was the fact that Zimbabwe dollar prices had become so much higher, more than twice compared with those I observed three years ago. Just before my departure this time it was reported that thousands of people had rioted in Harare, protesting against the drastic increase in prices of food stuffs etc. The main cause of the skyrocketing prices of food and other daily necessities was the sudden depreciation of Z\$ against US\$. The following is a comparison of the exchange rates and the prices of some items over the past three years:

<u>Items</u>	<u>January 1995</u>	<u>April 1998</u>
Exchange rate	US\$1=100yen=Z\$8 (Z\$1=12.5yen)	US\$1=130yen=Z\$15 (Z\$1=9yen)
Hotel room (4-5 stars)	Z\$500 ~ 800 (6,250-10,000yen)	
Hotel room (3 stars)	-	Z\$780 (6,800yen)
Hotel room (outside Harare)	Z\$250 (3,125yen)	Z\$470 (4,100yen)
Fax (A4 x 1 to Japan)	Z\$30 (375 yen)	Z\$65 (565 yen)
Middle range wine (South African, 720ml)	Z\$30-60 (375-750yen)	Z\$60-120 (500-1,100 yen)
Food (Chinese restaurant)	Z\$50-70 (625-875 yen)	Z\$100-120 (870-1,050yen)
Food (hamburger x 1)	Z\$7-10 (90-130 yen)	Z\$20-25 (175-220 yen)

By the way, what I like in Zimbabwe is the bottle recycling (deposit) system. For example one bottle of beer (350ml) costs Z\$7, but if you return the empty bottle you get Z\$1.3. Basically some 20% of the price of the beer is the deposit for the bottle. You can often find Coca Cola bottles lying under the driver's feet in a truck or taxi. It is worrying, however, that aluminium cans are more and more used for coke and beer these days.

In today's Zimbabwe, 30% of the population live in cities and 70% in rural areas, but it is said that these figures will be reversed in the near future. As has been the case with Japan and other developed countries, and also as is presently seen in developing countries all over the world, the influx of a great portion of the population into urban areas (urbanization) is becoming a problem in Zimbabwe as well. The worsening situation of public security in Harare must somehow owe itself to urbanization. Many people come to the city in the hope of achieving an affluent lifestyle, only to find out that, in reality, it cannot be realized so easily. Being unable to find a job, some gradually fail in their lives. I heard that there had been one murder committed in order to loot a bicycle. Here one can find such insanity, a little bit different from that of school children in Japan, who attack policemen to get a gun.

Needless to say, the problems of urbanization and rural degeneration are two sides of the same coin. What kind of precautionary measures can we take, before the urban environment gets increasingly damaged as a result of excessive human concentrations in cities, and rural areas are left deserted with negative consequences for rural societies as well as the surrounding natural environment?
(by KOTO)



Metropolitan view of Harare



Rural residences - huts