ZIMBABWE LAWYERS FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

Founded 2 February 1996



STRATEGIC PLAN

2026–2030

Strengthening Democratic Resilience Through Law

Contents

Part I: Setting the Strategic Direction 4

Foreword from the Chairperson of the Board 4

Message from the Executive Director 5

Executive Summary 6

Strategy at a Glance 8

Why This Strategy, Why Now? 9

Guiding Philosophy 10

How This Plan Was Developed 10

Part II: The Future of Public Interest Law in Zimbabwe 11

Transformation One: From Defending Rights to Strengthening Democratic Systems 11

Transformation Two: From State Accountability to Whole-of-Society Accountability 12

Transformation Three: From Responding to Today's Challenges to Preparing for Tomorrow's Risks 13

Transformation Four: From Organisational Resilience to Institutional Leadership . . . 13

Looking Ahead: The Practice of Human Rights to 2030 14

Part III: Who We Are Becoming 16

Strategic Identity 16

The Strategic Framework 17

Theory of Change 18

ZLHR's Comparative Advantage 20

Part IV: Strategic Goals and Objectives 21

Goal One: Rights holders and communities are strengthened to access and use justice to claim their rights 21

Goal Two: Civil society and other accountability actors are strengthened to influence laws, policies and the exercise of power. 24

Part V: Delivering the Strategy 27

Organisational Enablers 27

Investment Framework 28

Measuring Success 29

Managing Strategic Risk 30

Conclusion 30

Part I: Setting the Strategic Direction

Foreword from the Chairperson of the Board

Rudo Magundani
Chairperson of the Board



For three decades, Zimbabwe Lawyers for Human Rights (ZLHR) has stood at the frontline of the struggle for constitutionalism, justice and human dignity. Founded in 1996 by lawyers who believed that the law could be an instrument of protection rather than repression, the organisation has grown into Zimbabwe's leading public interest law and human rights organisation, with a record of landmark jurisprudence, courageous representation and principled public engagement.

This strategic plan is presented at a time when Zimbabwe's future will be shaped by political contestation, technological disruption, environmental change and economic transformation. These forces are redefining the practice of public interest law and demanding new approaches to protecting rights, strengthening democratic governance and advancing constitutional accountability.

The Board's response is deliberate. This strategy commits ZLHR to strengthening democratic resilience through law, which means building the legal, institutional and civic foundations that enable constitutional democracy to survive and thrive. The organisation will never abandon its first obligation, standing beside those whose rights are under threat. At the same time, we will deepen our work to strengthen the institutions, policies and civic understanding that sustain rights protection. The Board has also taken an intersectional approach to this strategy by confronting how geography and poverty combine with gender and disability to determine who reaches justice.

On behalf of the Board, I commend this strategic plan to our members, partners, supporters and the people of Zimbabwe, and reaffirm the Board's commitment to the independence and integrity that this work demands.

Rudo Magundani

Chairperson of the Board

Message from the Executive Director

Bellinda Chinowawa
Executive Director



A strategic plan is only as good as an organisation's willingness to execute it. This one reflects what ZLHR has learned over three decades about what actually works in Zimbabwe's context.

It rests on a conviction that has always guided ZLHR, that is, *the next generation of public interest law will be defined by how successfully it anticipates change, shapes institutions and strengthens democratic resilience before rights come under threat.*

Over 2026 to 2030, ZLHR will continue what it has done with distinction since 1996. We will represent human rights defenders, litigate to hold the powerful accountable and bring justice within reach of communities the formal system has left behind. We will also deepen the institutional work that these cases enable, strengthening the courts, supporting public accountability and building the civic understanding that makes rights protection durable rather than episodic. That work will be carried through a feminist and intersectional lens. Gender justice, disability mainstreaming and intersectionality are not ornaments on this plan; they discipline how we litigate, whom we reach and how we measure success, because exclusion in Zimbabwe rarely arrives alone. It compounds across gender, disability, geography and poverty, and a practice that ignores this will serve the reachable and miss the excluded.

This is possible only because of the people who make ZLHR what it is, our staff, our members, our Board, the communities we serve and the partners who invest in our mission. This plan asks all of us to think more systematically about how our individual work contributes to something larger than any single case or intervention.

It is ambitious, but it is grounded in what we have proven we can do.

Bellinda Chinowawa

Executive Director

Executive Summary

Zimbabwe faces converging challenges that will shape its democratic future over the next five years. Political contestation, technological change, environmental pressures and economic transformation are reshaping the context within which rights are protected and institutions function. These forces present significant challenges for constitutional governance and human rights, while also creating opportunities to strengthen democratic institutions, expand access to justice, advance gender equality and build more accountable systems.

Over the past three decades, ZLHR has established itself as the country's leading public interest law and human rights organisation. Through strategic litigation, legal representation, legal empowerment, policy engagement and coalition building, the organisation has protected fundamental rights, defended civic space and contributed to constitutional jurisprudence. This legacy provides the foundation for the next phase.

This strategy rests on a conviction that strengthening democratic resilience requires legal work that simultaneously defends rights, strengthens institutions, shapes policy and builds civic understanding of constitutional values. These are not competing aims. They reinforce one another. Each strategic litigation case can be a foundation for institutional reform. Each community engaged in legal empowerment can strengthen civic participation. Each policy reform can extend protection to people the courts have yet to reach.

The environment within which ZLHR operates is changing rapidly. Democratic governance is increasingly influenced by technological innovation, private sector investment, environmental pressures and evolving regional and global norms. Artificial intelligence, digital surveillance, climate change, natural resource governance and changing patterns of investment are creating new legal challenges that demand fresh thinking. At the same time, civic space remains contested, inequality persists and institutions responsible for protecting rights face significant political, financial and operational pressures.

The strategy is organised around two Strategic Goals, pursued through six Strategic Objectives and supported by six Organisational Enablers. Goal One seeks justice systems that are more effective, accountable and responsive to people's needs. Goal Two seeks laws, policies and institutions that increasingly reflect rights-based, accountable and sustainable governance. Together they operationalise the conviction that democratic resilience is strengthened when legal protection, institutional accountability, policy reform and civic understanding of rights work together. Gender equality runs through both Goals as an explicit commitment. The strategy applies a gender and intersectional lens across litigation, legal empowerment, policy engagement and research, because democratic resilience cannot be built while women face systemic barriers to justice, participation and economic life.

These priorities acknowledge that the next generation of human rights challenges will emerge at the intersection of governance, markets, technology and the

environment. Protection therefore requires legal strategies that engage both public and private actors while promoting accountability, transparency and equitable development.

This strategy also marks an evolution in how ZLHR understands its impact. While continuing to provide high-quality legal assistance to individuals and communities, the organisation will increasingly focus on systemic change through precedent-setting litigation, policy reform, institutional engagement, legal innovation and strategic partnerships. Greater emphasis will be placed on prevention and long-term governance outcomes alongside responsive intervention.

Recognising that uncertainty is now a permanent feature of the operating environment, the strategy adopts an adaptive approach to implementation. Continuous learning, evidence generation and strategic foresight will enable ZLHR to anticipate emerging risks, respond to changing circumstances and refine its work. Success will be measured not simply by activities delivered, but by contribution to stronger institutions, greater accountability, expanded civic space and improved access to justice.

Ultimately, this strategic plan reflects confidence in the enduring role of public interest law as a force for democratic strengthening. By protecting rights, strengthening institutions and promoting accountability across both public and private spheres, ZLHR seeks to contribute to a Zimbabwe where constitutional governance and human rights are sustained not only through legal remedies, but through resilient democratic systems capable of sustaining them.

Strategy at a Glance

STRENGTHENING DEMOCRATIC RESILIENCE THROUGH LAW
Strategic plan 2026 to 2030

VISION
A Zimbabwe where constitutional democracy, the rule of law and human rights are upheld through accountable institutions, responsible governance, active citizenship and equal access to justice.

MISSION
To advance constitutionalism, human rights and democratic governance.

STRATEGIC ANCHOR
The next generation of public interest law will be defined by how effectively it responds to injustice, anticipates change, shapes institutions and strengthens democratic resilience before rights come under threat.

VALUES **Professionalism · Inclusivity · Independence · Integrity · Non-partisanship**

CROSS-CUTTING COMMITMENTS Gender justice · Disability mainstreaming · Intersectionality

GOAL ONE
Justice systems are more effective, accountable and responsive to people's needs.

1 Constitutional justice and the rule of law
2 Civic space and democratic participation
3 Access to justice and citizen agency

GOAL TWO
Laws, policies and institutions increasingly reflect rights-based, accountable and sustainable governance.

4 Laws, policy and governance systems
5 Business, environment and technology
6 Evidence, knowledge and strategic foresight

SIX ORGANISATIONAL ENABLERS
Leadership, governance and accountability · Financial sustainability and resource mobilisation · People, culture and organisational excellence
Digital infrastructure, knowledge management and innovation · Strategic partnerships and collective impact · Learning, evidence and adaptive management

Why This Strategy, Why Now?

Every strategy responds to a moment. Three realities define this one.

1
The environment has changed
Rights are now shaped by states, markets, technology and international actors alike

2
Strength creates obligation
3 decades of jurisprudence and standing demand leadership of the field

3
The limits of responsive work
Litigation alone cannot sustain constitutional democracy

3 Realities Behind the Strategy

First, the environment has changed fundamentally. The enjoyment of rights in Zimbabwe is no longer determined by the state alone. Businesses, investors, technology platforms and international actors now shape labour rights, privacy, land governance, information flows and civic participation. Artificial intelligence, digital identity systems, climate change and critical minerals will reshape constitutional governance over the coming decade. A strategy designed only to respond to violations after they occur would leave both the organisation and the people it serves permanently behind.

Second, ZLHR enters this period from a position of strength that creates obligation. Three decades of jurisprudential contribution, an unmatched litigation footprint across Zimbabwe's courts, observer status before the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights and deep partnerships across the legal profession and civil society give the organisation influence that few of its peers command. Institutions of that standing either lead the evolution of their field or watch others do it.

Third, experience has confirmed both the power and the limits of purely responsive work. The previous strategic cycle demonstrated that ZLHR's integrated public interest law model works: litigation, legal empowerment, advocacy and research reinforce one another and produce change under Zimbabwean conditions. It also showed that litigation alone cannot sustain constitutional democracy. Durable progress depends on institutions that are transparent, accountable and capable of preventing violations before they occur.

The choice before ZLHR is therefore not whether to change, but whether change will be deliberate and grounded in evidence about what the organisation can actually achieve. This strategy chooses deliberation. It is a decision, made from strength, to deepen the integrated approach that has always defined ZLHR while remaining firmly anchored in the protection of rights as the first obligation.

Guiding Philosophy

The rule of law is the foundation of democratic resilience. Protecting rights requires more than responding to violations after they occur. It requires strengthening the institutions, governance systems, legal frameworks and civic capabilities that enable rights to be realised, defended and sustained over time.

One conviction anchors this strategy:

The next generation of public interest law will be defined by how effectively it responds to injustice, anticipates change, shapes institutions and strengthens democratic resilience before rights come under threat.

Democratic resilience refers to the capacity of institutions, communities and citizens to uphold constitutional values, protect fundamental freedoms and respond effectively to political, economic, technological and environmental change. Building that resilience requires strategic litigation, legal empowerment, policy engagement, research, coalition leadership and knowledge generation working together, so that accountability and citizen agency are strengthened equally. This work is informed by feminist principles of substantive equality, intersectionality and the equitable sharing of power, which recognise that rights are not truly protected until they are enjoyed by women and by those facing overlapping forms of exclusion.

How This Plan Was Developed

This Plan is the product of structured reflection rather than routine renewal. Its analysis draws on the organisation's implementation evidence, independent evaluation of the previous strategic cycle, political economy analysis and horizon scanning of the forces that will shape Zimbabwe to 2030. Its choices were tested through engagement with the Board, management, staff, members, partner organisations and the communities ZLHR serves.

Three lessons from the previous cycle inform its design. The public interest law model works best when litigation, empowerment, advocacy and research reinforce one another rather than operate as separate programmes. Institutional resilience is a precondition for programme impact, not an administrative afterthought. Lastly, a strategy must set direction without prescribing every action, leaving implementation detail to business plans and annual workplans that can adapt as circumstances change. This document accordingly is a strategic plan, not an operational one. It establishes where the organisation is going and why and entrusts the how to the planning cycles that will translate it into results.

Part II: The Future of Public Interest Law in Zimbabwe

Public interest law is entering a new era. The institutions that will remain influential over the next decade will be those capable of responding to a rapidly changing landscape in which political authority, economic power, technological innovation and environmental sustainability increasingly intersect. These changes are reshaping both the nature of rights violations and the tools required to prevent them.

For Zimbabwe Lawyers for Human Rights, the question is not whether to change, but how to evolve while remaining anchored in its founding mission. This chapter asks what is changing about ZLHR's role and what the organisation must do to remain relevant. Four transformations define this strategic moment.

T1	**FROM** Defending rights	→	**TO** **Strengthening democratic systems**
T2	**FROM** State accountability	→	**TO** **Whole-of-society accountability**
T3	**FROM** Responding to today's challenges	→	**TO** **Preparing for tomorrow's risks**
T4	**FROM** Organisational resilience	→	**TO** **Institutional leadership**

Four Transformations Driving Strategic Direction

Transformation One: From Defending Rights to Strengthening Democratic Systems

For much of our history, we have used public interest law to focus on protecting individuals whose rights have been violated. That work remains indispensable and will continue to define ZLHR's identity. However, experience has shown that litigation alone cannot sustain constitutional democracy. Zimbabwe's political environment illustrates why. While the Constitution provides for fundamental rights and freedoms, their practical enjoyment remains uneven. The landscape is marked by a strong executive, contested constitutional reform processes and the selective application of the law, particularly in matters involving dissent, civic mobilisation, elections and governance accountability.

Durable progress depends on institutions that are transparent, accountable and capable of preventing violations before they occur. Public interest law must therefore

contribute not only to securing justice in individual cases but also to strengthening the systems that uphold constitutional governance including independent courts, effective oversight bodies, robust public participation and vigilant constitutional litigation.

What this means for ZLHR. Over the life of this strategy, ZLHR will increasingly combine legal representation with efforts to strengthen institutions, influence public policy, promote accountability and build citizen agency, while sustaining its engagement with regional and international human rights mechanisms as levers for visibility, scrutiny and normative development.

Transformation Two: From State Accountability to Whole-of-Society Accountability

The protection of rights is no longer determined solely by the actions of governments. Businesses influence labour rights, environmental protection, privacy and community wellbeing. Technology companies shape access to information, civic participation and freedom of expression. Investors increasingly affect land governance, natural resource management and local development. International actors influence domestic legal and governance reforms through trade, finance and regional cooperation.

These dynamics are already visible in Zimbabwe. Investment in mining, agriculture, energy and infrastructure is accelerating. That investment carries potential for development and equally real implications for land rights, labour standards, community consent, environmental protection and access to remedy. The global normative environment is evolving. Mandatory human rights and environmental due diligence regimes are establishing binding standards for companies operating in or trading with major markets, with effects reaching deep into value chains touching Zimbabwe's minerals, agriculture and energy sectors.

Accountability must also answer to those whom power most often overlooks. Poverty, unemployment and currency instability disproportionately affect women, youth, persons with disabilities and rural communities, increasing exposure to exploitation and exclusion. Gender inequality continues to limit women's access to economic opportunity, land, leadership and justice despite progressive constitutional provisions. Accountability that is not gender-responsive is incomplete. This strategy therefore applies a feminist and intersectional analysis to how power, both public and private, is exercised over women's lives, livelihoods and bodily autonomy.

What this means for ZLHR. ZLHR will broaden its engagement across public institutions, the private sector, communities and regional and international actors, promoting accountability wherever power is exercised and rights are affected.

Transformation Three: From Responding to Today's Challenges to Preparing for Tomorrow's Risks

The pace of change is accelerating. Artificial intelligence, digital identity systems, climate change, critical minerals, cyber governance and new patterns of political participation will reshape constitutional governance over the coming decade. Digital platforms have expanded avenues for information sharing and civic mobilisation, while the expansion of surveillance capabilities, biometric identification systems, data-driven policing and regulatory control over digital spaces poses growing risks to expression, association, privacy and due process. Artificial intelligence is entering the administration of justice and public decision-making worldwide, often ahead of the legal frameworks needed to govern it.

Climate change is now a central human rights concern. Droughts, floods and environmental degradation are reshaping livelihoods, driving displacement and intensifying competition over land, water and minerals. Waiting for these issues to become crises would place both citizens and institutions at permanent disadvantage.

What this means for ZLHR. ZLHR will invest in strategic foresight, legal innovation and emerging areas of public interest law, including algorithmic accountability, data governance, climate and environmental litigation and natural resource justice, ensuring that Zimbabwe's legal system remains capable of responding to challenges that are only beginning to emerge.

Transformation Four: From Organisational Resilience to Institutional Leadership

The effectiveness of public interest organisations will increasingly depend upon more than programme delivery. Leadership will require strong institutions capable of generating evidence, convening partnerships, influencing policy, developing legal expertise and sustaining public trust. The regulatory environment governing civil society has tightened. The international development financing landscape is being restructured, with funders prioritising resilience, localisation, innovation and demonstrable systemic impact.

The organisations that combine legal excellence with financial sophistication, diversified partnerships and clear evidence of results will define the next era of the sector.

What this means for ZLHR. The organisation will strengthen its governance, financial sustainability, knowledge systems, digital capability, partnerships and organisational culture so that it remains Zimbabwe's leading public interest law and human rights organisation for decades to come.

Looking Ahead: The Practice of Human Rights to 2030

For the generation of human rights lawyers now entering practice, the unsettled questions concern machines that make decisions about people, capital that moves faster than the laws meant to govern it, a climate that is redrawing the boundaries of survival, and threats to defenders that no longer respect borders. This chapter identifies where the practice of public interest law is heading. These priorities are pursued through the strategic goals and Objectives rather than as separate programmes, so that the organisation prepares for what is coming without fragmenting itself.

Technology, power and due process
Algorithmic fairness, privacy and AI in justice systems

The accountability of capital
Due diligence, disclosure and remedy across value chains

Climate justice in the courts
Rights-based climate and environmental litigation

Defending the defenders
Holistic protection in a networked age

Justice that reaches people
People-centred services delivered at scale

5 Frontiers Shaping Public Interest Law to 2030

Technology, power and due process

Artificial intelligence and automated systems are entering policing, prosecution, court administration and public service delivery. These tools promise efficiency and carry real risks such as opaque decision-making, embedded bias, and erosion of the reasoned, reviewable exercise of public power on which constitutional justice depends. Zimbabwe's data protection framework and emerging national policy on artificial intelligence will determine whether these technologies are harnessed within constitutional limits. ZLHR will build legal expertise to litigate questions of algorithmic fairness, privacy and due process.

The accountability of capital

The relationship between business and human rights is being rewritten in binding law. Mandatory due diligence regimes in major markets now require companies to identify and address human rights and environmental harm across their global value chains. For communities living alongside mines, plantations and energy projects, these developments create leverage grievance mechanisms, disclosure obligations, investor expectations and civil liability. ZLHR will build a distinctive business and human rights practice that converts this global architecture into local remedy.

Climate justice in the courts

Climate litigation has moved from the margins of legal practice to its centre. The International Court of Justice has affirmed that states carry binding legal obligations in respect of climate change framed in part through human rights law. This emerging jurisprudence will open new pathways for domestic litigation across the continent. For Zimbabwe, where drought, displacement and competition over land, water and minerals already define daily life for millions, the implications are immediate. ZLHR will deepen its rights-based environmental and climate litigation portfolio.

Defending the defenders in a networked age

The threats facing human rights defenders have changed shape. Arrest and prosecution remain instruments of repression, but now operate alongside surveillance software, coordinated online harassment and synthetic media deployed to discredit and intimidate. Protection in this environment cannot stop at the courtroom door. ZLHR will evolve its defender protection work into a holistic practice integrating emergency legal response with psychosocial, digital security and litigation against unlawful surveillance.

Justice that reaches people

Around the world, justice systems are being redesigned around the people they serve rather than the institutions that administer them. Data on justice needs, community paralegal networks, digital legal information services and the digitisation of court processes are making it possible to reach people the formal system has never served. ZLHR will lead the people-centred justice agenda in Zimbabwe, advocating for service delivery models that bring quality legal help to underserved communities at scale.

Part III: Who We Are Becoming

Strategic Identity

Vision.

A Zimbabwe where constitutional democracy, the rule of law and human rights are upheld through accountable institutions, responsible governance, active citizenship and equal access to justice.

Mission.

To advance constitutionalism, human rights and democratic governance.

Identity.

Zimbabwe Lawyers for Human Rights is Zimbabwe's leading public interest law and human rights organisation. The organisation uses the law as a catalyst for democratic governance, accountability and social justice by combining legal excellence, policy influence, research, coalition leadership and citizen empowerment to achieve lasting change.

Ambition.

By 2030, ZLHR will be recognised among Africa's leading public interest law organisations, influencing constitutional jurisprudence, shaping public policy, advancing responsible governance and pioneering innovative legal responses to emerging challenges in technology, business, environmental governance and human rights.

Values

All of ZLHR's work is guided by five values.

Professionalism. The organisation holds itself to the highest standards of legal excellence, ethical practice and quality in everything it does, because credibility is the currency of public interest law.

Inclusivity. ZLHR works for and with all people, giving particular attention to women, young people, persons with disabilities and communities that have historically been excluded from justice and public life. The organisation applies an intersectional lens, recognising that gender, disability, age, poverty and location often combine to deepen exclusion.

Independence. The organisation acts independently, guided by the Constitution, the law and universal human rights principles, and safeguards that independence in its governance, funding and public positions.

Integrity. ZLHR is transparent and accountable for its decisions, resources and results, and expects of itself the standards of conduct it demands of those who exercise power.

Non-partisanship. The organisation serves the Constitution and the people of Zimbabwe, not any political party or interest. Its client is the rule of law.

The Strategic Framework

The strategy is organised around two strategic goals. The first is directed at people and the justice systems that serve them. The second is directed at the laws, policies and institutions that govern how power is exercised. Each Goal is pursued through three Strategic Objectives, and the six Objectives together carry the full breadth of the organisation's work. Six Organisational Enablers strengthen the institution that delivers the Goals. Three cross-cutting commitments run through everything. Firstly, gender justice, pursued as a feminist commitment across every pillar of the organisation's work. Secondly, disability mainstreaming, so that services, advocacy and internal systems are accessible by design. Thirdly, intersectionality, recognising that ethnicity, geography and poverty combine with gender and disability to determine who is reached and who is left behind.

STRENGTHENING DEMOCRATIC RESILIENCE THROUGH LAW
Strategic theme 2026 to 2030

GOAL ONE
Rights holders and communities are strengthened to access and use justice to claim their rights.

1 Advance constitutional justice and strengthen the rule of law

2 Protect civic space and democratic participation

3 Expand access to justice and build citizen agency

GOAL TWO
Civil society and other accountability actors are strengthened to influence laws, policies and the exercise of power.

4 Influence laws, policy and governance systems

5 Advance rights-based approaches to business, environment and technology

6 Generate evidence, knowledge and strengthen the practice of public interest law.

Cross-cutting commitments: gender justice · disability mainstreaming · intersectionality

SIX ORGANISATIONAL ENABLERS
Leadership, governance and accountability · Financial sustainability and resource mobilisation · People, culture and organisational excellence
Digital infrastructure, knowledge management and innovation · Strategic partnerships and collective impact · Learning, evidence and adaptive management

Two Goals Pursued Through Six Strategic Objectives

Theory of Change

This strategy will succeed because it aligns what ZLHR does with where change actually happens. If ZLHR protects the individuals and organisations that defend rights, then civic space remains open and violations carry consequences. If it strengthens the institutions, laws and civic capabilities on which constitutional governance depends, then protection becomes durable rather than episodic. If it influences policy, jurisprudence and public debate with evidence and legal excellence, then the frameworks that govern the exercise of power improve. And if it expands citizen agency and access to justice, then rights are claimed and defended by the people themselves. Since power is gendered, each of these pathways is pursued with a gender and intersectional lens, so that the resilience this strategy builds is shared equally by women and men.

Three features make this theory credible. The first is integration. ZLHR combines litigation, legal empowerment, advocacy, research and coalition leadership within a single public interest law model. The second is evidence. Three decades of jurisprudential contribution demonstrate that this model produces change under Zimbabwean conditions. The third is adaptation. The strategy is built for uncertainty, with foresight, learning and annual planning cycles that adjust course as the environment shifts.

Theory of Change

WHAT ZLHR DOES	PATHWAYS OF CHANGE	IMPACT BY 2030
One integrated public interest law model • Strategic litigation and legal representation • Legal empowerment • Policy engagement and advocacy • Research and evidence generation • Coalition leadership	**If** defenders and civic actors are protected **civic space stays open and violations carry consequences** **If** institutions, laws and civic capabilities are strengthened **rights protection becomes durable, not episodic** **If** policy, jurisprudence and public debate are shaped by evidence **the frameworks governing power improve** **If** citizen agency and access to justice expand **people claim and defend rights themselves**	**DEMOCRATIC RESILIENCE STRENGTHENED** Constitutional democracy upheld by accountable institutions, active citizens and equal access to justice

A gender, disability and intersectional lens is applied across every pathway, so that resilience is shared equally

Theory of Change: How ZLHR Creates Democratic Resilience

ZLHR's Comparative Advantage

ZLHR occupies a unique position within Zimbabwe's governance landscape. Unlike organisations that focus exclusively on legal aid, research, policy advocacy or community mobilisation, ZLHR combines multiple complementary functions within a single public interest law model. Its comparative advantage lies in its ability to integrate strategic litigation and legal representation, constitutional and human rights advocacy, legal empowerment and community engagement, policy and legislative reform, research and evidence generation, strategic communications, coalition building and movement leadership, and national, regional and international engagement.

This integrated model enables ZLHR to respond to immediate human rights concerns while addressing the structural factors that give rise to them. It is reinforced by three decades of jurisprudential contribution, an unmatched litigation footprint across Zimbabwe's courts, observer status before the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights and deep partnerships across the legal profession and civil society.

Part IV: Strategic Goals and Objectives

The strategy is delivered through two strategic goals, each pursued through three Strategic Objectives. The Goals describe the change ZLHR seeks in Zimbabwe; the Objectives describe how the organisation will pursue it. The issues that will reshape public interest law over the coming decade will be constitutionalism and the rule of law, business and human rights, environmental and climate justice, digital governance and emerging technologies, gender equality and people-centred justice, and knowledge leadership and strategic foresight, are built into the Objectives themselves, so that emerging challenges are addressed as part of the core work rather than at its margins.

Goal One: Rights holders and communities are strengthened to access and use justice to claim their rights

Goal One is directed at people and the justice systems that serve them. It carries forward the work that has defined ZLHR since 1996: defending those whose rights are under threat, keeping civic space open and bringing justice within reach of every Zimbabwean. Under this strategy, that work is pursued with a sharper systemic ambition, so that each case, each defended defender and each empowered community strengthen the justice system as a whole.

Objective 1: Advance Constitutional Justice and Strengthen the Rule of Law

The Constitution provides the foundation for democratic governance, the protection of fundamental rights and the exercise of public power within the limits of the law. Its effectiveness depends not only on the quality of its provisions but also on the willingness and capacity of institutions to uphold constitutional principles in practice. An independent judiciary, accountable public institutions, transparent decision-making and equal access to justice are essential to maintaining public confidence in the legal system.

By 2030, ZLHR will have contributed to a stronger culture of constitutionalism through landmark jurisprudence, improved legal and policy frameworks and enhanced accountability of public institutions, and will be recognised as a leading authority on constitutional law and public interest litigation.

To achieve this Objective, ZLHR will:

Advance strategic public interest litigation. Pursue high-impact litigation that protects constitutional rights, strengthens judicial precedent and addresses systemic governance challenges.

Advance gender-responsive constitutional justice. Litigate and enforce the equality and non-discrimination guarantees in sections 17, 56 and 80 of the Constitution,

building on the organisation's landmark jurisprudence against child marriage and discriminatory practices.

Combat impunity and advance socio-economic rights. Pursue civil claims against the perpetrators of violations so that impunity carries a personal cost, and litigate the constitutional guarantees to education, health care, food, water and shelter that give substance to social and economic justice.

Promote constitutional implementation and legal reform. Support the effective implementation of constitutional provisions through legal analysis, policy engagement and legislative reform.

Strengthen accountability institutions. Promote the independence, effectiveness and accountability of the courts, independent commissions and oversight bodies.

Leverage regional and international jurisprudence. Engage the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights and the United Nations treaty and Charter bodies to advance constitutional protections.

Objective 2: Protect Civic Space and Democratic Participation

A resilient democracy depends on an open civic environment in which individuals and institutions can participate freely in public life, express diverse views, organise collectively and hold those exercising power to account. Zimbabwe's democratic landscape presents both opportunities and challenges for civic participation. Legal and policy reforms and the growth of digital platforms are creating new avenues for engagement, while restrictions on fundamental freedoms and the migration of threats into digital spaces remain significant concerns.

By 2030, ZLHR will have strengthened legal protections for civic actors, contributed to a more enabling legal and policy environment for civic engagement, and helped build a more resilient civic ecosystem capable of protecting democratic values.

To achieve this Objective, ZLHR will:

Protect human rights defenders and civic actors. Provide timely legal assistance, strategic litigation and protection mechanisms for defenders facing intimidation, with protection extended to digital threats and online targeting.

Protect women human rights defenders. Respond to the gendered threats that drive women out of public life, including technology-facilitated gender-based violence, coordinated online harassment and smear campaigns, through emergency legal response, litigation and digital security support.

Strengthen protection planning and regulatory defence. Provide risk analysis and protection planning for defenders and civic organisations, combining technical support on physical and digital safety with regulatory assistance under the PVO Act and related compliance regimes.

Defend civic freedoms. Advance legal and policy reforms that strengthen freedom of expression, association, assembly and access to information. Representation of journalists, students and media practitioners remains central to this work.

Advance digital civic space. Promote rights-respecting approaches to digital governance by addressing online censorship, internet disruption and digital surveillance.

Promote democratic participation. Strengthen opportunities for meaningful citizen participation in public decision-making and constitutional implementation. Deliberate investment will be made in youth participation and in the young digital defenders who increasingly anchor civic life online.

Strengthen civic partnerships and resilience. Build coalitions across civil society and invest in legal empowerment and civic education.

Objective 3: Expand Access to Justice and Build Citizen Agency

Democratic resilience ultimately depends upon citizens who are informed, empowered and able to participate meaningfully in public life. Laws and institutions alone cannot protect rights if people are unable to access justice, navigate legal systems or hold decision-makers accountable. Significant barriers persist for many Zimbabweans, particularly women, young people, persons with disabilities and rural communities. Digital technologies and innovative service delivery models are creating new opportunities to make justice more accessible and responsive.

By 2030, more Zimbabweans, particularly those from historically excluded and underserved communities, will have meaningful access to justice, improved legal capability and greater confidence to participate in democratic processes.

To achieve this Objective, ZLHR will:

Expand equitable access to justice. Strengthen access to quality legal services through strategic litigation, legal aid and innovative service delivery models. Mobile legal clinics will carry these services into rural and peri-urban communities.

Advance public health rights and sexual and reproductive health and rights. Litigate and advocate for access to health care, essential medicines and reproductive autonomy, which carry particular weight for women, adolescents and people living in poverty.

Strengthen legal capability. Equip individuals and communities with the knowledge, skills and confidence to understand the law and claim their rights.

Promote inclusive, people-centred justice. Advance approaches to justice that respond to the diverse experiences and needs of women, children, young people and persons with disabilities.

Harness innovation for justice. Use digital technologies and emerging innovations to improve legal information and public engagement.

Goal Two: Civil society and other accountability actors are strengthened to influence laws, policies and the exercise of power.

Goal Two is directed at the systems that govern how power is exercised. It gives effect to the core conviction that public interest law must not only defend rights but also strengthen the institutions, policies and frameworks that protect them over time. Increasingly, the legal issues that affect constitutional rights arise beyond the courtroom, in decisions relating to economic development, digital governance, artificial intelligence, environmental protection and business regulation. Public interest law must therefore engage proactively with the policies and systems that determine how power is exercised and how rights are realised.

Objective 4: Shape Laws, Policy and Governance Systems

Democratic resilience is shaped as much by the quality of laws, institutions and public policy as by the outcomes of individual court cases. While strategic litigation remains a powerful tool for advancing justice, lasting democratic change requires legal reform, evidence-informed policymaking and constructive engagement with those responsible for exercising public authority. ZLHR is uniquely positioned to bridge legal practice, policy development and institutional reform.

By 2030, ZLHR will be recognised as a trusted national and regional leader whose legal expertise informs legislative reform, public policy and institutional practice.

To achieve this Objective, ZLHR will:

Influence legislative and policy reform. Provide independent legal analysis and technical expertise to support constitutional implementation and legislative reform.

Champion gender-responsive law-making. Support the alignment of legislation and public policy with the Constitution's gender equality provisions and with Zimbabwe's obligations under CEDAW, the Maputo Protocol and the SADC Protocol on Gender and Development.

Convene strategic partnerships. Strengthen collaboration with Parliament, independent commissions and civil society.

Engage the institutions that exercise power. Bring constitutional standards into the practice of public administration and regulatory bodies through dialogue and technical support.

Objective 5: Advance Rights-Based Approaches to Business, Environment and Technology

The next generation of human rights challenges is emerging at the intersection of markets, natural resources and technology. Investment in mining, agriculture, energy and infrastructure carries implications for land rights, labour standards and community consent. Climate change is reshaping livelihoods and driving new jurisprudence. Artificial intelligence, data systems and digital platforms are transforming how public power is exercised. ZLHR intends to lead in these arenas.

By 2030, ZLHR will have established distinctive, recognised practices in business and human rights, environmental and climate justice and digital governance.

To achieve this Objective, ZLHR will:

Advance business and human rights. Promote the implementation of the United Nations Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights by engaging government, businesses and civil society.

Build an international trade law and economic justice capability. Establish a trade rights advisory service so that communities, workers and small producers can understand and assert their rights within regional and continental trade frameworks, including the African Continental Free Trade Area.

Strengthen environmental, climate and natural resource justice. Develop rights-based environmental and climate litigation and influence reforms that promote transparent, accountable and sustainable management.

Address the gendered impacts of business, environmental and technological harm. Ensure that women's experiences of displacement, environmental degradation and violence in mining and investment corridors, and of online abuse, inform litigation, due diligence advocacy and access to remedy.

Shape digital governance and emerging technologies. Contribute to the development of legal and regulatory frameworks governing artificial intelligence and data protection.

Develop financial crime and anti-corruption litigation capacity. Build the expertise to litigate corruption, illicit financial flows and public financial management failures, which drain the public resources on which socio-economic rights depend.

Objective 6: Generate Evidence, Knowledge and Strategic Foresight

Influence follows credibility, and credibility follows evidence. The organisations that will shape law and policy over the coming decade are those able to generate rigorous research, anticipate emerging issues and translate legal insight into public understanding. Knowledge leadership is therefore one of the core Objectives of this strategy.

By 2030, ZLHR will be established as a centre of excellence in public interest law whose research, analysis and foresight inform public debate, legal reform and institutional practice.

To achieve this Objective, ZLHR will:

Generate evidence and knowledge. Produce high-quality research, legal analysis and policy briefs that inform public debate and institutional practice.

Build strategic foresight. Institutionalise horizon scanning and political economy analysis so that the organisation identifies emerging legal and governance challenges early.

Lead public understanding. Use strategic communications and thought leadership to shape how constitutionalism and justice are understood by decision-makers and the public.

Part V: Delivering the Strategy

Organisational Enablers

The successful implementation of this strategy will depend on more than effective programme delivery. It requires a resilient institution with the leadership, people, resources, systems and partnerships necessary to respond to an increasingly dynamic operating environment. Six Organisational Enablers provide that foundation.

1 Leadership, governance and accountability	**2 Financial sustainability and resource mobilisation**	**3 People, culture and organisational excellence**
4 Digital infrastructure, knowledge management and innovation	**5 Strategic partnerships and collective impact**	**6 Learning, evidence and adaptive management**

The Institutional Foundation: 6 Organisational Enablers

Enabler 1: Leadership, Governance and Accountability

Strong governance is fundamental to institutional credibility and public trust. ZLHR will continue to strengthen its governance systems to ensure strategic leadership, effective oversight, ethical decision-making and organisational accountability. The Board will provide strategic direction while safeguarding institutional independence. Management will foster a culture of accountability, innovation and high performance.

Enabler 2: Financial Sustainability and Resource Mobilisation

ZLHR will pursue a proactive resource mobilisation strategy that strengthens financial sustainability while preserving institutional independence, expanding partnerships with bilateral and multilateral donors, philanthropic foundations and responsible private sector partners. Particular emphasis will be placed on increasing unrestricted funding and building the reserves and income diversity that give a leading institution the freedom to act on its convictions.

Enabler 3: People, Culture and Organisational Excellence

People are ZLHR's greatest asset. Achieving the ambitions of this strategy requires an organisation that attracts, develops and retains highly skilled professionals while fostering an inclusive, collaborative and innovative organisational culture. ZLHR will invest in leadership development, succession planning, staff wellbeing and continuous professional learning. It will pursue gender parity in leadership and decision-making, embed feminist leadership principles across the organisation and maintain robust safeguarding, anti-harassment and family-responsive workplace policies.

Enabler 4: Digital Infrastructure, Knowledge Management and Innovation

ZLHR will strengthen its digital infrastructure and cybersecurity, modernise knowledge management systems and expand its research and thought leadership capabilities. Emerging technologies will be adopted responsibly to improve organisational effectiveness and legal service delivery.

Enabler 5: Strategic Partnerships and Collective Impact

Complex governance challenges cannot be addressed by any single institution acting alone. ZLHR will deepen strategic partnerships with civil society organisations, professional associations, academic institutions, community organisations and international networks. These partnerships will strengthen collective advocacy and enhance the impact of public interest law nationally, regionally and globally.

Enabler 6: Learning, Evidence and Adaptive Management

ZLHR will adopt an adaptive approach to implementation, grounded in continuous learning, evidence generation and strategic reflection. Monitoring and evaluation will move beyond measuring activities and outputs to assessing contribution and long-term institutional impact.

Investment Framework

This strategy directs investment rather than merely describing ambition. Over 2026 to 2030, the allocation of the organisation's resources will be guided by five investment priorities.

1	**Protecting the core** The protection mandate remains the first call on resources
2	**Building future capabilities** Early investment in emerging practice areas
3	**Strengthening the institution** Governance, people, digital and knowledge systems
4	**Securing financial resilience** Unrestricted income, reserves and diversified partnerships
5	**Investing in influence** Research, strategic communications and regional engagement

5 Investment Priorities, 2026 to 2030

Protecting the core. The protection mandate will remain the first call on the organisation's resources.

Building future capabilities. Deliberate, early investment in emerging practice areas including business and human rights, environmental and climate justice and digital governance.

Strengthening the institution. Sustained investment in governance, people, digital infrastructure and knowledge management systems.

Securing financial resilience. Growth in unrestricted income, building of reserves and diversification of funding partnerships.

Investing in influence. Research, strategic communications and regional engagement that convert legal excellence into policy impact.

Measuring Success

The success of this strategy will be assessed through a balanced performance framework that measures institutional strength, programme effectiveness and contribution to the two strategic goals. Performance monitoring will focus on five dimensions: Institutional Excellence, Legal and Policy Influence, Access to Justice, Partnerships and Collective Impact and Learning and Innovation. Performance data will be disaggregated by gender, age, disability and location, so that the strategy's contribution to substantive equality can be tracked, reported and acted upon.

Managing Strategic Risk

ZLHR recognises that achieving its strategic ambitions requires effective management of both internal and external risks. The organisation will maintain a comprehensive enterprise risk management framework addressing governance, financial sustainability, political and legal developments, cybersecurity and reputational integrity. Risk management will be integrated into strategic decision-making to ensure that the organisation remains agile, resilient and capable of responding effectively to changing circumstances while safeguarding its mission and values.

Conclusion

For three decades, Zimbabwe Lawyers for Human Rights has demonstrated the power of public interest law in advancing constitutionalism, protecting fundamental rights and strengthening democratic governance. This strategy builds on that legacy while positioning the organisation to respond to the forces that will shape Zimbabwe over the next five years.

The challenges that lie ahead are increasingly interconnected. Democratic governance, economic development, business conduct, environmental sustainability and technological innovation are reshaping the context within which rights are realised and institutions operate. Addressing these challenges requires a public interest law organisation that is independent, innovative and capable of protecting rights while strengthening the institutions and policies that sustain them.

Strengthening Democratic Resilience Through Law is therefore both the central ambition of this strategy and ZLHR's enduring contribution to Zimbabwe's future. Through strategic litigation, legal empowerment, policy engagement, knowledge leadership and principled partnerships, the organisation will continue to protect the rights of those under threat while working to strengthen the rule of law, expand access to justice and promote accountable governance.

In doing so, ZLHR reaffirms its commitment to a Zimbabwe where constitutional democracy is sustained by resilient institutions, informed citizens, responsible governance and a shared commitment to justice, human dignity and the rule of law.