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Zim investor conference set for this week

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There is growing evidence Zimbabwe's economy is recovering under the inclusive Government, according to Imara Asset Management, the firm organising this week's investor conference.

Grant Flanagan, chief investment officer for Zimbabwe at Imara, said: "There are goods on the shelves again for the first time in years, and production has restarted in the mining sector. There is still political risk of course, but it is much less than it was."

Imara says about 40 fund companies, most of whom run Africa funds, are attending its conference on June 29 and 30, listening to presentations from about 20 of the 82 companies listed on the Zimbabwe Stock Exchange. Many of these are partly-owned subsidiaries of international groups such as Barclays, Rio Tinto and SAB Miller.

Imara, which is the former Fleming Asset Management business in southern Africa, has also enlisted Tendai Biti, the new Zimbabwean finance minister from Tsvangirai's Movement for Democratic Change party, to address the meeting.

Flanagan said: "It is primarily aimed at South African investors and we have people coming from the US and UK as well. We are told that a bilateral investor-protection agreement between Zimbabwe and South Africa is imminent, and that is very important."

Flanagan said the Zimbabwe Stock Exchange reopened in February following the abolition of the Zimbabwean dollar and the removal of exchange controls.

In March, government workers received their first pay packets in US dollars, providing a boost to the economy, which was shattered by hyperinflation that unofficially peaked last year at around 80,000,000,000%, according to research from the Cato Institute.

Flanagan is bullish on the market's growth prospects as many companies are operating well below capacity. Since it reopened in February, the stock market has risen more than 200% to a total market capitalisation of \$3.6bn (€2.6bn), he said.