

## 2 The Urbanization, Housing and Local Governance Crisis in Zimbabwe

From a human settlements perspective Operation Restore Order did not occur in a policy vacuum. It can be seen, in many ways, as a genuine attempt, albeit a misguided reaction, to cope with rapid urbanization and urban governance. Two distinct periods can be discerned: the first phase starting in 1980, and a second phase starting in the late 1990s to the present.

### 2.1 Rapid Urbanization, the Impoverishment of Cities and Poor Policy Responses

The transition to majority rule in 1980 saw the lifting of decades of racial restrictions to the “Right to the City”. The urban population of Zimbabwe rose rapidly from 23% in 1982 to 30% by the early 1990s. This trend, typical of many developing countries, can be described as the “challenge of rapid urbanization” whereby people migrating to urban areas improve their livelihoods in terms of income opportunities and access to social services, while cities, as economic units, witness impoverishment. This impoverishment arises from two inter-related phenomena. First, many migrants to the city operate in the informal economy, despite their active contribution to the urban economy, and they rarely pay taxes or fees in direct proportion to the services they use. Second, most local authorities depend to a large extent on central government transfers which rarely increase in proportion to demographic growth, thus contributing to declining municipal revenues and expenditures in per capita terms. This vicious circle translates into a serious erosion of local government capacity in terms of planning, environmental management and the provision of basic services.

**Table 1: Comparative Levels of Urbanization**

	Level of Urbanization %			Urban Population (000)		
	2000	2010	2020	2000	2010	2020
Africa	37.2	42.7	47.9	295,228	425,596	589,408
Asia	37.5	43	48.7	1,375,519	1,783,600	2,231,108
LAC	75.4	79	81.8	391,342	469,755	543,166
Zimbabwe	35.3	42.5	49.1	4,459	6,380	8,652

*Source: Global Report on Human Settlements 2003, UN-HABITAT*

Zimbabwe is no exception. The major cities of Harare, Bulawayo, Mutare and Gweru attained population growth rates of over 5% per annum throughout the 1980s. This strained the capacities of both central and local spheres of government to provide housing and basic urban services for the urban poor.

A series of events, starting in the 1990s, further contributed to the dramatic decline of Zimbabwe’s cities. These included:

- a. A failed attempt at Economic Structural Adjustment (1991 to 1995) which led to contraction of the civil service, the collapse of the domestic industrial sector, and to massive layoffs;
- b. A bitterly disputed Fast Track land reform programme (since 2000) which resulted in the transfer of land mostly from experienced white commercial farmers to inexperienced

- African, mostly absentee landowners or to smallholder producers poorly supported by agricultural extension and support services;
- c. Cash handouts to appease grievances of War Veterans in 1997 sparking an inflationary spiral;
  - d. Military intervention in the conflict in the Democratic Republic of Congo leading to budgetary constraints and overspending; and
  - e. Persistent drought.

Food shortages, a negative balance of payments, budget deficits, and chronic shortages of foreign exchange led to a contraction of the economy and rising urban and rural poverty. Urbanization accelerated rapidly leading to 6 to 8% per annum increases of the urban population, explosive growth of the urban informal economy, and the proliferation of alternative housing solutions, many of them informal and unauthorised.

**Table 2: Urbanization trends, exchange rates, inflation and per capita income trends, Zimbabwe, 1985-2005**

	1985	1990	1995	2000	2005 (est'd)
Total Population (000s)	8,392	10,241	11,190	12,627	13,805
Urban Population (000s)	2,116	2,797	3,556	4,387	5,370
Urbanization level (%)	25.2	28.4	31.8	35.3	38.9
Households (000s)		2,031	2,331	2,664	3,088
Household average size		4.88	4.83	4.70	4.48
Z\$ to 1 USD	1.64	2.64	9.31	55.07	9,896.02
Inflation %	8.49	17.38	22.59	55.86	140
GDP per cap. (const. Z\$)	1,995	2,099	1,988	1,986	<1,000
% GDP growth pa. per cap.	3	4	-2	-7	-7

*Source: UNHABITAT, Global Report 2003, Financial Gazette, IMF*

## 2.2 The Rise of the Informal Urban Economy, Conflicts and Crisis in Urban Governance

By the mid 1990s, the major cities of Zimbabwe began to witness rising unemployment. Government provided the impetus for the ascendance of the informal sector through a series of policies. These included reducing regulatory bottlenecks to allow new players to enter into the production and distribution of goods and services, supporting indigenous business development and black empowerment, and relaxing physical planning requirements. Statutory Instrument 216 of 1994 of the Regional Town and Country Planning Act effectively allowed for the development of non-residential activities in residential areas. Many activities such as hairdressing, tailoring, book-binding, wood or stone carving were deregulated. Similarly, small and medium enterprises employing 5-10 people in such areas as welding, carpentry, tin-smithing, shoe repair and small scale car repair were accorded special consent. While these latter activities were subject to local planning permission, Statutory Instrument 216 sent a clear signal to local authorities of the government's desire to promote the informal economy in residential areas.

Statutory Instrument 216 was a centrally driven policy that was not espoused by all local authorities as it was perceived as taking away part of their powers to regulate and control the development process within their respective jurisdictions. However, as the economic crisis continued unabated, Statutory Instrument 216 provided a pretext for many local authorities, including the City of Harare, to turn a blind eye to what could best be described as an explosion

of the informal economy. By 2004, the informal economy was estimated to have accounted for 40% of all forms of employment. The informal economy had effectively become the mainstay for the majority of the urban population, 70% of whom are estimated to be officially unemployed, and 75% living below the poverty line. Another indicator of the importance of the informal economy is provided by associations of informal traders, the biggest one of which has a membership of 1.8 million.<sup>38</sup> Besides flea markets, vending stalls and home-based service industries, cities and towns throughout Zimbabwe witnessed the growing phenomenon of street hawkers and makeshift stands, many of which were supplying the same range of goods sold by stores in front of which they plied their business, clearly violating the rights of the formal sector which continued to pay taxes. The Central Business District of Harare was often described by many stakeholders as an eyesore and as totally chaotic. Many middle class persons<sup>39</sup> blamed this situation on the Government.

At the other end of the spectrum, formal ties, including sub-contracting, were established between the formal and informal sectors in manufacturing (e.g. furniture-making, wood and metal-working industries), building and construction and between the urban informal sector and the rural economy.<sup>40</sup>

### 2.3 Unrealistic Housing Standards

The combination of economic decline, rapid urbanization, and poverty growth was also evident in the housing sector. Serious shortfalls in housing delivery were recognised by the National Housing Delivery Policy of 2000 which acknowledged a cumulative backlog of over 1 million housing units. It further recognised the need to adopt a more flexible approach to housing delivery and the lack of security of tenure as a causal factor of the housing crisis in Zimbabwe.<sup>41</sup> A subsequent policy document – the National Housing Programme of 2003 further acknowledged the inability of Government to provide decent and affordable housing. It noted that Government plans for housing fell far short of the annual target of 162,000 units between 1985 and 2000 with actual production ranging between 15,000 and 20,000 units per annum. It further noted that the formal sector housing production rate was decreasing and that by 2002 only 5,500 plots were serviced in eight major urban areas compared to an estimated annual demand of 250,000 units.<sup>42</sup>

Government reiterated the need for a broader response, including incremental housing production as a means of responding to demand which was not foreseen in the law.

### 2.4 Inconsistencies between central and local government roles and responsibilities

A variety of instruments were applied to encourage alternative housing supply. These included the allocation of un-serviced stands (plots) to individuals, housing cooperatives and building

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<sup>38</sup> Zimbabwe Chamber of Informal Economy Associations

<sup>39</sup> Confidential sources.

<sup>40</sup> Several studies show the intricate two-way relationship between the urban informal sector and the rural economy that includes the supply of foodstuffs including produce and meat, tobacco and wood from rural areas, and commodities, shoes and clothing, cosmetics, consumables and agricultural inputs, tools and hardware from urban areas.

<sup>41</sup> National Housing Policy for Zimbabwe, National Task Force on Housing, Ministry of Local Government and National Housing, February 2000

<sup>42</sup> The National Housing Delivery Programme, Ministry of Local Government, Public Works and National Housing, 2003

societies to encourage self-help incremental housing schemes. The Government did not, however, reform the colonial-era Regional Town and Country Planning Act or the Housing Standard Act. This effectively placed local authorities in an impossible situation as these Acts require municipalities to service plots with infrastructure prior to land allocation for self-help building. It further requires local municipalities to ensure strict compliance with minimum standards prior to authorizing occupation. The norms and standards contained in these Acts, which were applied by the colonial regime as instruments of apartheid, include individual connection to water supply and water-borne sewage for high-density low-income neighbourhoods, previously known as African Townships. Water-borne sewer systems, which are particularly costly to build and to maintain, are not only unrealistic in the present economic circumstances, but are not required of medium and low density areas occupied by middle and high-income segments of the population which are authorized to use on-site sanitation and septic tanks. Similarly, the prevailing building codes and standards are also unrealistic and exceed standards currently used in several developed countries.

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Despite the gap between supply and demand for housing, Zimbabwean cities remained largely immune to the explosive growth of slums and squatter settlements, characteristic of African cities. Official statistics compiled by UN-HABITAT showed in 2001 that only 3.4 % of the urban population lived in slums, a figure even much lower than that for industrialized nations that had about 6.2% of their population considered to live in slum-like conditions.<sup>44</sup>

The explanation of this unique case for a developing country is attributable to two factors; firstly, the enforcement of stringent building bylaws and standards, and secondly, the lack of access to public land as most of the land surrounding cities was primarily privately owned farms. The acquisition of peri-urban farms during the Fast Track land reform programme in 2000 provided one of the first opportunities for the urban poor to occupy land in the vicinity of the city and establish slum pockets all of which have now been demolished.

Unable to squat on public land, low-income urban dwellers resorted to what is commonly referred to as “backyard extensions” of legal dwellings. These extensions, many of which were built with durable building materials and on serviced plots, proliferated as a form of affordable rental housing catering to effective demand by the majority of the urban population and providing a source of much needed income for their owners.

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<sup>43</sup> The Act further requires access roads to be 8 to 10 meters in width, tarred or gravel and does not allow for houses to be built out of wood or mud (adobe), a commonly accepted practice in North America and Australia and Oceania. Although water-borne sewage systems may be recommended in areas with high water tables, technological alternatives, such as small diameter sewer systems and bio-sanitary or composting latrines have not been propagated to date in Zimbabwe.

<sup>44</sup> UNHABITAT: *Slums of the World: The Face of Urban Poverty in the New Millennium*, 2003. Slums are defined by the United Nations as settlements which are lacking one or more of the following: secure tenure, access to improved water, access to improved sanitation, durability of dwelling, and sufficient space to avoid over-crowding. Most of the Zimbabwean backyard extensions could not be considered or captured by this definition as slums, thus the low figure.

**Table 3: Levels of urbanization, urban population and percentage of slums**

	<b>Total Pop, (000s)</b>	<b>Urban Pop (000s)</b>	<b>% Urban</b>	<b>% Slum</b>	<b>Slum Pop (000s)</b>
Europe	726,315	534,263	73.6	6.2	33,062
S.S. Africa	667,022	231,052	34.6	71.9	166,208
Lat. Am. & Caribbean	526,657	399,385	75.8	31.9	127,567
East Asia	1,364,438	533,182	39.1	36.4	193,824
West Asia	192,445	124,943	64.9	33.1	41,331
CIS	282,639	181,182	64.1	10.3	18,714
Zimbabwe	12,800	4,600	36.0	<b>3.4</b>	157

*Source: UNHABITAT, 2003*

As in the case of the informal economy, local authorities turned a blind eye to these developments. Neither their own resources nor those transferred from central government enabled them to supply the requisite infrastructure and services to meet housing demand.

By 2004, backyard tenancy had become a dominant source of housing for low-income households living in urban areas. In Mutare, for example, the mission was informed that there were 34,000 backyard extensions compared to 27,000 legally recognised and approved dwellings. In Victoria Falls, they comprised 64% of the housing stock.

The sudden decision by central government to enforce laws and standards is clearly inconsistent with its own policy statements that had previously identified those same instruments as an obstacle to the provision of housing for low-income groups.

The implementation of the Operation was effected without consultation with local authorities responsible for compliance and enforcement of the said standards and norms. Furthermore, the Operation was conducted, in the vast majority of cases, in contravention of many of the statutory procedures laid out by Government's own Regional Town and Country Planning Act regarding prior notice to households concerned and the possibility of ex-post regularization.

The Operation has unleashed a humanitarian crisis by destroying homes, assets and means of livelihood for hundreds of thousands of women, men and children people at a time when the economy is already on its knees.

#### **A Tale of Two Evictions**

Operation Restore Order was not the first experience of evictions in post-independence Zimbabwe. For example, an estimated 20,000 residents of **Churu Farm**, lived on a tract of 260,000 hectares on the outskirts of Harare acquired in 1979 by the late opposition leader and onetime archrival of President Mugabe, Ndabaningi Sithole, who subdivided the land and rented out plots. By 1993, Churu Farm had become a well functioning community with a primary school and other amenities. In November of that year about 300 armed police, acting on government orders, moved in after giving the community a week's notice to leave, and evicted them. Many of the families were resettled by the Government on Porta Farm, 40 Km south of Harare. Porta Farm was later demolished on 28 June 2005.

For over twenty years, the **Killarney Farm** community lived on government land on the northern outskirts of Bulawayo. They numbered some 800 people. On 8 June, police told them to remove their belongings pending demolition of their homes. Four days later, on 12 June, the police launched a dawn raid. Giving people barely enough time to wake up, they set homes alight and razed the place to the ground. Many people lost not only their homes, but their possessions as well, along with their livelihoods in the informal sector. Save for 17% of the community, no-one had rural or other homes to which they could go.

## 2.5 Concluding Observations

It is the informed opinion of the mission that the Government of Zimbabwe has to come to terms with rapid urbanization; that rapid urbanization is not only inevitable but brings with it equally rapid social and economic changes; that the scale and pace of rapid urbanization are attributable only in part to rural-urban migration; and that there are no known sustainable means of reversing these trends in a democracy.

The physical manifestations of rapid urbanization are often chaotic. They are symptomatic of profound and far-reaching demographic, social and economic transformations affecting the entire continent, indeed the entire developing world. They require pro-poor gender-sensitive policies that are applied, and perceived to be applied, by all stakeholders in an inclusive and consensual manner.

There is an urgent need on the part of all stakeholders and the Government of Zimbabwe to harmonise policies and strategies vis-à-vis the informal economy and housing for the majority of the urban population. It is equally imperative that the Government of Zimbabwe, in consultation with local authorities and stakeholders, reform its Regional Town and Country Planning Act and the Housing Standards Act as a pro-active instrument of enablement and empowerment rather than exclusion.

Similarly, urban local authorities have a critical role to play in an increasingly urbanising and globalising world. Government needs to recognise that cities, as engines of economic growth, are in the best position to mobilise and put to good use the human, technical and natural resources within their respective jurisdictions. As the sphere of government closest to the people, they are also in the best position to strike a balance between demand and supply for housing, infrastructure and basic services. Lessons learned from successful practices in meeting the social, economic and aesthetic challenges of rapid urbanization and globalisation indicate that positive and sustainable outcomes are indeed possible. They depend, to a large extent, on recognising that housing and urban development is a process, however imperfect, that is best managed through socially inclusive dialogue and participatory decision-making. To be effective, local authorities need to be delegated with the power to make policies and the means to implement them without undue interference and control from central government. UN-HABITAT has been working to help UN Member States devise internationally agreed norms and principles on decentralization and the empowerment of local authorities. The Zimbabwean urban crisis has made this exercise all the more urgent.

## Harare: The Growing Urban Crisis



Salisbury: the exclusive colonial city.



Salisbury: the exclusive colonial city.



1990's Harare: city of boulevards and clean streets.



1990's Harare: city of boulevards and clean streets.



Harare: before Operation Murambatsvina .  
Courtesy: "The Herald" Newspaper



Harare: before Operation Murambatsvina.  
Courtesy: "The Herald" Newspaper

## Operation Murambatsvina



Market stalls demolished in Mbare, Harare.



Family Demolishes own house in Epworth, Harare.



Owners demolishing their own house in Epworth, Harare.



Backyard demolition in Chitingwiza, Harare.



Demolitions outside rural town of Rusape.



Demolished house at Hatcliffe.