



Slum upgrading and inclusive municipal governance in Harare, Zimbabwe: New perspectives for the urban poor



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ABSTRACT

The story of the urban poor in Harare and Zimbabwean cities in general is a story of evictions, fear and misery. In May 2005, at the behest of the Government of Zimbabwe the infamous Operation Restore Order, a house demolition campaign left more than 700 thousand people homeless. Nearly a decade later, there are increased opportunities for improvement and change in the lives of the urban poor in Harare, Zimbabwe's capital city. The purpose of the paper is to present how the Harare Slum Upgrading Programme is creating and strengthening municipal and community partnerships to tackle city challenges in an inclusive manner. This research indicates the housing struggles of the urban poor and the emerging City-community engagement in urban services provision (water, sanitation, tenure security and roads) and changing municipal attitudes towards the urban poor. In particular, the article presents participatory urban planning and development, slum upgrading institutional structure, profiling and enumeration, and slum upgrading impacts (resilience of the urban poor, living in slums without fear, expansive pool of beneficiaries, review of planning regulations and land ownership) as major issues promoting inclusive municipal governance. Inclusivity is implemented through incremental development, which is allowing people to settle on land first and access municipal services gradually over time. Two main factors explain such positive steps towards inclusive governance in Harare. First are indications of gradual institutional change in which the City of Harare's governance culture is changing through 'opening up' and embracing the urban poor. Second, over the years, the urban poor have built a strong and vibrant alliance which is acting as a medium of participation in City governance. The paper concludes that slum upgrading sustainability at city-wide level requires active City participation and institutionalisation as opposed to a project based approach. Lastly, addressing concerns of the urban poor is susceptible to political contestations, requiring strong impartiality to counter such forces.

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1. Introduction

That there are considerable housing challenges in Zimbabwe's major cities is not in doubt. Zimbabwe's housing backlog is estimated to be at least 1 million units, though there is no comprehensive assessment to substantiate this figure (GoZ, 2012). The City of Harare's estimated housing backlog stands in excess of 500,000. Meanwhile, Zimbabwe's urbanisation rate has increased from 10.64% in 1950 to 38.25% in 2010 and is expected to increase to 64.35% by 2050 (UNHABITAT, 2010). Increasing urbanisation is putting a strain on housing, urban services and infrastructure. Admittedly, this is happening against a backdrop of sluggish economic growth rendering most local authorities to shelve low-cost

housing targeted at the urban poor. By definition, the urban poor are urban residents who live in poverty (Kamete, 2002); with little or no access to land and basic infrastructure and social services.

Within the context of rapid urbanisation, socio-economic and political crisis; post-2000 Zimbabwe realised significant changes to housing delivery. These changes challenged the conventional urban planning and housing delivery methods; as Zimbabwe's urban planning standards have been widely criticised as stifling housing delivery. Town planning standards have been castigated as 'very high, very elaborate, rigid and not amenable to physical and climatic conditions', irresponsive to end users with planners criticised for planning for themselves (GoZ, 2009). Further, the urban planning system is inherently technocratic, robustly bureaucratised, and manifestly modernist and has not responded adequately to changes over time (Kamete, 2006). The Government of Zimbabwe adopted planning related changes which focused mainly on

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reducing stand sizes. However, an Urban LandMark study found out that 'in general the adjustments to planning standards are still inadequate' (Marongwe, Chatiza, & Mukoto, 2011: 47). Reducing planning standards was deemed piecemeal, hence the continued clash between planning authorities and the urban poor over planning procedures in housing delivery.

One of the key challenges of the 21st century is the construction of new relationships between citizens and governments (in particular local government) (Gaventa, 2001; Mitlin, 2004: 3). Governance refers to 'the formation and stewardship of formal and informal rules that regulate the public realm, the arena in which state as well as economic and societal actors interact to make decisions' (Hyden, Court, & Mease, 2004). Governance arrangements decide the distribution questions of who gets what, when, and how. The debate on governance and democracy is extended from governance at the level of policy making and implementation to governance at the level of politics and decision-making (Hyden et al., 2004; Sorensen & Torfing, 2007). Other scholars argue that participation, citizenship and development is not only about inclusion and voice in projects, programs and policies, but also about politics, power and influence (Gaventa, 2007; Hyden et al., 2004). This view emphasises on participation that changes and reconfigures the balance of power and politics.

Whilst others (for instance Hendricks, 2010) have used a governance networks approach to explain how the poor people can influence service delivery, this article uses the framework of gradual institutional change (Van der Heijden, 2013a, 2013b; Mahoney & Thelen, 2010a, 2010b); and citizen participation and civil society engagement as important drivers of inclusive governance (Mitlin, 2004; Thompson & Tapscott, 2010). Such a framework provides proximate explanation of the situation in Harare City. Harare provides a unique and changing way in as far as how the city is engaging and incorporating the urban poor's concerns in urban governance and development. Further, Zimbabwe has gone through an unprecedented economic and political crisis which has made it difficult for cities to provide urban services. On the other hand, the decade-interval urbanisation growth rate is increasing at a rate of between 5 and 6% (UNHABITAT, 2010); providing a fertile ground for change in urban governance approaches. Contextually, the Inclusive Government (2009–13) composed of the opposition Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) and the Zimbabwe African National Union Patriotic Front (Zanu-PF) provided a new political and governance culture with new institutions and rules ushered in by the new Constitution. The MDC is a political party born out of civil society coalitions and hence it prioritised working with civil society organisations in promoting citizen participation and citizen-centred governance. This context provided impetus for change in city governance in Harare.

The following section presents the framework of inclusive governance approaches, and a short literature overview of slum upgrading. After that, the paper provides a brief overview of attempts at housing the urban poor in Zimbabwe before describing housing institutions, actors, and their roles. Thereafter, the article gives a brief overview of slum upgrading in Harare followed by an explanation on the research methodology, and a presentation, and discussion of the research findings. Finally the paper concludes by summarising key findings, and policy recommendations.

1.1. Inclusive governance approaches and slum upgrading

Inclusive and participatory governance contributes to poverty reduction through focusing on the needs of the poor (Mitlin, 2004). The currency of inclusive governance is driven by a number of factors chief among them civil society, government policies like decentralisation, the desire to pursue legitimate politics among

others. By definition inclusive governance emphasises on governance arrangements that promote the inclusion of the people in particular the poor and marginalised. It emphasises the need to introduce mechanisms to encourage the involvement of those who do not find it easy to participate in state structures and processes because they are generally far removed from their own cultures and practices (Mitlin, 2004: 4). In particular, inclusive governance is anchored on new structures and processes of engagement which are friendly, and specific to the needs of the poor. Smith (2004) points to the potency of processes leading to inclusive governance and the role of weaker groups in negotiating, and fighting for transfer of power in urban management.

1.2. Gradual institutional change

The inclusion of the urban poor in city governance is subject to the configuration of existing governance institutions. Over time, institutions change. Such a change can be incremental or a result of exogenous shocks (Pierson, 2004). Sudden shifts in society and government for instance war and financial crisis trigger institutional change. On the other hand stickiness of institutional cultures, the bounded rationality of policy makers and vested interests make it difficult to change institutions (Van der Heijden, 2013a). From an incrementalist perspective, institutions change but gradually over time (Campbell, 2009; Van der Heijden, 2013a). This change takes place between two opposing forces; other actors are pro-change whilst others are struggling to maintain the status quo.

Gradual institutional change is becoming a central focus of explanation in social sciences (Mahoney & Thelen, 2010a). Principally, this is being used to explain how institutions change gradually over time basing on enabling circumstances. Three factors explain institutional change namely features of the political context, characteristics of the institutions, and the type of dominant agents (Mahoney & Thelen, 2010b). The power dynamics for instance who wields more power and authority has a bearing on how institutions change and the direction, and characteristics of such a change. Institutional characteristics relate to the discretion in applying the rules underlying the institutions or enforcing these rules (*ibid.*). Lastly, change agents are the actors behind institutional change.

1.3. Citizen participation and civil society engagement

The notion of citizen participation in governance has changed over time. Literature on citizen's participation is diverse, with Cornwall (2004) pointing to 'invited spaces' of participation with questions of 'who is invited', for what reasons, by who and how as key. Principally, this leads to inclusion, and exclusion of some stakeholders. Further, this has been disaggregated into 'issue-based defined citizenry' which is dynamic and overlapping and 'the people defined citizenry' which is static and geographic (Hendricks, 2010; Warren, 2008). In practice, the application of these approaches yields different results as one is focused on issues and the other on a defined location. Despite this, there is a growing citizenship literature arguing for the poor to opt out of participatory governance and focus on alternative non-state related channels (Robins, Cornwall, & Lieres von, 2008; Thompson, 2007). This body of literature is informed by the disillusionment of participatory approaches through formal spaces (Edwards & Gaventa, 2004, 2005).

Alternatively, this point to citizen participation anchored on civil society engagement. Civil society at the local level with context specific needs, better defined issues, and strategies including the chronically poor, and marginalised leads to the creation of better citizens who would then be able to contribute to social, political

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