

Sustainable Cities: Zimbabwe's Future Cities



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Abstract

The Post-2015 development agenda committed to 'make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable'. This paper examines strategic focus areas that are fundamental in building sustainable, resilient and inclusive cities for Zimbabwe. The paper argues that developing sustainable and inclusive cities requires a deliberate plan of action by all the three tiers of government. Such strategic and long-term action should focus on transforming cities and holistic management of the urbanisation process. The fundamental areas of focus are government prioritisation of SDG 11, regulation of the planning profession, land information management system, redesign of public transport system, city development agenda, respect of the autonomy of cities to run their own affairs, city-based title registration, inclusive urbanisation and inclusive municipal governance.

1. Introduction

The issue of sustainable cities comes to the fore on the backdrop of two important facts. First, the global population living in cities crossed the 50% mark in 2008. In this regard, sub-Saharan Africa is the least urbanised but rapidly urbanising region. In Africa, urbanisation is characterised by features such as 'unregulated growth, limited opportunities for gainful employment in the formal economy, severe environmental degradation, lack of decent and affordable housing, failing and neglected infrastructure, absence of basic social services, pauperization, criminality, negligent city-management, and increasing inequalities' (Murray & Myers, 2006: 1). It has been argued that as Africa urbanises, the urbanisation of poverty is a common phenomenon (UN-Habitat, 2010). In a nutshell, the features of urbanisation point to the essence of developing sustainable, resilient, safe and inclusive cities.

Second, for the first time, cities have been included in mainstream international development goals. In particular, SDG 11 focuses on making 'cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable'. SDG 11 essentially means that governments and international development agencies should prioritise policies and programmes aimed at promoting sustainability, inclusivity, safety and resilience in cities.

The two points above are imperative as they provide the inspiration to this paper. In essence, the paper aims to stimulate debate on fundamental issues for consideration in building Zimbabwe's sustainable cities. Such proposals are based on a scan of the context of cities and urbanisation in Zimbabwe.

2. Sustainable Cities: Theoretical Issues

The importance of cities in sustainable development is reflected by an Urban Goal (SDG 11 in Box 1) (Barnett & Parnell, 2016). The new urban agenda as reflected in SDG11 put cities at the heart of both national and international development. Such policy thrust is unprecedented and is likely to lead to more prioritisation of cities by governments and international development agencies. Perhaps, SDG11 represents the most determined international development effort to transform cities. However, the role of cities in sustainable development will boil down to policies and programmes adopted and implemented by city governments, governments and international development agencies.

A standalone Urban Goal 'provides a platform for collaboration among humanitarian agencies, local authorities and development actors' in building resilience and inclusion in cities (Earle, 2016). However, collaboration between diverse actors requires a policy and coordination framework at national and city level. Such a framework should underscore actor interests, actor roles and responsibilities in the new urban agenda. Following this argument, governments at national level should develop a national urban agenda taking into consideration comparative advantages of various actors.

Inclusive urbanisation is pivotal in dealing with 'exclusion from the city and exclusion and segregation in the city' (McGranahan, Schensul & Singh, 2016: 13). Inclusion can be defined as 'The process of improving the ability, opportunity and dignity of people, disadvantaged on the basis of their identity, to take part in society' (World Bank, 2013). In cities, people can be excluded through municipal services, economic opportunities, location i.e. informal settlements, professions, race, and land markets among others. Exclusion in cities is rife, partly due to globalisation and neoliberal approaches to urban planning.

For instance, Governments use policies and planning tools to constrain access to and organise urban spaces in ways that advantage the urban wealthy and middle classes and, often ignore or are hostile to low-income residents, and rural-urban migrants in particular (McGranahan, Schensul & Singh, 2016: 16).

Box 1: Goal 11 Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable

11.1 By 2030, ensure access for all to adequate, safe and affordable housing and basic services and upgrade slums

11.2 By 2030, provide access to safe, affordable, accessible and sustainable transport systems for all, improving road safety, notably by expanding public transport, with special attention to the needs of those in vulnerable situations, women, children, persons with disabilities and older persons

11.3 By 2030, enhance inclusive and sustainable urbanization and capacity for participatory, integrated and sustainable human settlement planning and management in all countries

11.4 Strengthen efforts to protect and safeguard the world's cultural and natural heritage

11.5 By 2030, significantly reduce the number of deaths and the number of people affected and substantially decrease the direct economic losses relative to global gross domestic product caused by disasters, including water-related disasters, with a focus on protecting the poor and people in vulnerable situations

11.6 By 2030, reduce the adverse per capita environmental impact of cities, including by paying special attention to air quality and municipal and other waste management

11.7 By 2030, provide universal access to safe, inclusive and accessible, green and public spaces, in particular for women and children, older persons and persons with disabilities

11.a Support positive economic, social and environmental links between urban, peri-urban and rural areas by strengthening national and regional development planning

11.b By 2020, substantially increase the number of cities and human settlements adopting and implementing integrated policies and plans towards inclusion, resource efficiency, mitigation and adaptation to climate change, resilience to disasters, and develop and implement, in line with the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030, holistic disaster risk management at all levels

11.c Support least developed countries, including through financial and technical assistance, in building sustainable and resilient buildings utilizing local materials

3. The Context of Cities and Urbanisation in Zimbabwe

This section attempts to examine the key issues and challenges in Zimbabwean cities. Such a contextual analysis is informed by the need to provide recommendations grounded in the prevailing context. Therefore issues recommended in section 4 are expected to address urbanisation challenges identified in this section.

3.1 Discord in city planning and governance

Local governments are not recognised and treated as a sphere of government as enshrined in the Constitution of Zimbabwe. This has led to a continuous era of discord and confusion pertaining to the planning and governance of cities. In particular, there are informal networks of governance that are seemingly having a big influence on the planning and governance of cities. However, such informal networks thrive at the expense of sound town planning procedures. For instance, cities have been overtaken by a particular form of urban development that transgresses issues of environmental sustainability and order with housing developments built in ecologically fragile areas. Some of the housing structures are even not safe for human habitation.

3.2 Urban primacy

Urbanisation and urban development is skewed towards metropolitan Harare (Table 1). This trajectory is not only unsustainable, but it has also led to a major urban crisis in the region. In addition, the concentration of urban development in Harare has suffocated other cities leading to a nation-wide urban crisis. The crisis manifests in failures of services such as water, electricity, transport, and housing provision (Ranger, 2007).

Table 1: Urbanisation in major cities (1980-2012)

Name of urban centre	Year			
	1982	1992	2002	2012
Harare	656,000	1,184,169 1	1,435,784	1,468,767
Bulawayo	414,000	621,742	676,650	655,675
Chitungwiza	172,000	274,035	323,260	354,472
Gweru	79,000	124,735	140,806	158,233
Mutare	70,000	131,367	170,466	188,243
Kwekwe	48,000	74,982	93,608	100,455
Kadoma	45,000	67,267	76,351	90,109
Masvingo	31,000	51,746	69,490	88,554

Source: Muchadenyika & Williams, 2016: 267.

3.3 Urbanisation level and its prospects

The current level of urbanisation in Zimbabwe is estimated to be 38.25% (UN-Habitat, 2010). By 2030, more than half of the country's population will be living in cities (UN-Habitat, 2010). What does this imply? Simply, it means more demand for municipal services, expansion of infrastructure and housing, expansion of cities and urban economic development. These aspects require particular attention to issues of inclusion, sustainability and resilience. Without deliberately incorporating such issues, Zimbabwe's urban future will be catastrophic and chaotic.

3.4 Shrinking Towns

Most mining towns such as Mhangura, Mashava, Redcliff, Alaska Mine, Trajan Mine, Renco, Mutorashanga among others are shrinking due to changes on the global minerals market. These towns have been described as ghost towns. These towns' development has been largely linked and based on mineral activity. With the decline in mining activities, an increase in poverty in such areas has been tremendous. Other locations in such towns have turned in to havens of crime, delinquency and informal mining activities. Those shrinking towns have also put pressure on 'vibrant' towns as people migrate to such towns in search of economic opportunities.

3.5 Government neglect of cities

Since independence to date, government has prioritised rural more than urban development. This is evidence by policies and programmes such as CAMPFIRE, growth points, rural electrification, land reform, which all targeted at transforming rural areas. In successive development plans between 1980 and 2013, government has not mainstreamed urban development as its core objective. Partly, this explains the sluggish and haphazard manner in which cities are growing. In addition, as compared to rural areas, government has not financed programmes and projects to transform cities. Government neglect of cities is explained by two things. First, post 2000; cities have been at the epicentre of challenging the ruling party and supporting the rise of the opposition party in urban governance. Second, the national government views strong and vibrant cities as a threat to its hold on power, hence, it has no incentive to support and nurture vibrant cities (Muchadenyika & Williams, 2016). Government's attitude towards cities through recentralisation has weakened local authorities. Such recentralisation has been witnessed in the takeover of electricity, water and sanitation, vehicle licensing functions from local authorities to government entities at some point.

4. Directions in building Sustainable Cities

Below, I suggest strategic areas for consideration in building sustainable, resilient and inclusive cities in Zimbabwe.

4.1 Government prioritisation of SDG 11

The Government of Zimbabwe has prioritised 8 goals dealing with poverty, hunger, energy, infrastructure, water and sanitation, health, education, gender equality and women empowerment. However, the decision to leave SDG 11 is not only problematic but also catastrophic. Why? First, the majority of the 8 selected goals largely depend on how human settlements (rural and urban) are planned and governed. Hence, to achieve the selected 8 goals requires addressing the plight of cities and human settlements. Second, at the time of evaluating the SDGs in 2030, half of Zimbabwe's population will be living in cities (UN-Habitat, 2012). In other words, this means that issues of poverty, education, water and sanitation, hunger and food security, health, climate change, employment and decent work among others will be core priority issues in cities. Following this argument, it is therefore transformational to prioritise SDG 11 now, as all the other development issues will put more pressure in cities than ever before.

4.2 Inclusive urbanisation

Urbanisation should be distributed evenly across city regions for it to be inclusive. The distribution of cities across regions and distribution of land uses within cities is a key defining feature of inclusive urbanisation. Urban primacy in Zimbabwe has led among other things to urbanisation being concentrated in one region – metropolitan Harare. Such an approach is non-inclusive and unsustainable. The future of urbanisation in Zimbabwe pivots on developing cities like Bulawayo, Mutare and Masvingo to the size and level of Harare. Further, the internal development of cities should prioritise both areas for the rich and poor. Regeneration and redevelopment of shrinking towns is a vital strategy of resuscitating decaying mining towns.

4.3 Inclusive municipal governance

Inclusive municipal governance 'emphasises on governance arrangements that promote the inclusion of the people in particular the poor and marginalised' in the management of city affairs (Muchadenyika, 2015: 2). The way cities are governed determines the nature of inclusivity in a city. In this regard, the governance of cities should include the poor and marginalised through incorporating their needs and aspirations. Therefore, the urban poor should not be seen and treated as 'urban nuisance'. Rather, these should be conceived as vital stakeholders in urban governance. Other than providing municipal services to the poor, city authorities should plan and manage cities with the poor in perspective. Here, key issues of regularisation and formalisation of informal settlements should be mainstream in urban governance agenda as opposed to demolitions and evictions (elements of a non-inclusive city). The pricing of municipal services should also depict the economic challenges such a constituency face.

4.4 Mainstreaming climate change in cities

The impacts of climate change are more severe in cities as compared to rural areas. This is mainly because of the concentration of the built environment and people and the reliance of urban dwellers on urban infrastructure systems. As such, climate change should be a cornerstone of the planning and management of cities. In this regard, cities should prioritise the following:

- Research on vulnerability of cities,
- Development of climate change mitigation and adaptation plans,
- Design of resilient city infrastructure (energy, water, sanitation, storm water and transport),
- Design and use of energy-efficient and climate sensitive city energy systems,
- Internalising national policy statements and strategies on climate change.

4.5 Regulation of the planning profession

The conduct and proposals of planners manifests in city designs and the actual development of cities. Planning is a professional activity that requires professional and academic training. As such, in order to build cities that are inclusive, the profession of planning requires regulation. Regulation is a way of standardising and ensuring that the built environment adheres to principles of inclusivity and sustainability. Non-regulation as the current situation portrays is resulting in the built environment that is haphazard, non-inclusive and unsustainable. Here, I argue that the urban crisis such as OM/RO and upsurge in informal settlements are partly a result of an unregulated profession.

4.6 Land information management system

Land is a vital resource for urban development. As such, a credible and transparent land institutional and regulatory system is fundamental in promoting city development. However, an unclear land institutional and regulatory system often provides unnecessary costs to land developers in particular the urban poor. This is normally through demolitions and evictions in instances where people are allocated and build houses on privately owned land. The key argument here is that Zimbabwe ought to invest and develop a transparent land information system where actors can easily see land ownership arrangements. Without such a system, there is a tendency of land hoarding and proliferation of land barons – which both militates against an inclusive city.

4.7 City-based title registration systems

The provision of title to the urban poor is a vital aspect of building the resilience of the urban poor. The majority of the urban poor are allocated either council or state land. However, the present title deeds system is centralised and is skewed towards facilitating title to people who buy land via private developers. This has resulted in the majority of the urban poor without title deeds despite accessing land from city councils and government. Such is an indicator of non-inclusion in cities. Based on this, I propose that major cities should perform title registration functions. This facilitates easy title access to the urban poor – which title is vital in reducing urban poverty.

4.8 Redesign of public transport system

Most Zimbabwean cities are characterised by an unsafe and unreliable public transport system. The system uses incidental termini which are not meant for and designed to cater for loading and offloading of passengers. As such, there exists immense contestation among public transport users, operators and local authorities on the management of public transport in cities. Further, women are vulnerable to abuse by ‘mahwindi’ in cities. Therefore, Zimbabwean cities should invest in mass transport systems with defined transport interchanges, loading and offloading bays.

4.9 Autonomy of cities to run their own affairs

According to section 276 of the Constitution of Zimbabwe, rural and urban local authorities have the right to govern their own affairs. Such constitutional mandate is premised on devolution of powers and functions. In this regard, devolution is one strategy of promoting sustainable cities planned and governed by autonomous entities.

4.10 City development agenda

Zimbabwe does not have a defined city development framework. As such the development of cities and in particular metropolitan cities is left uncoordinated. This provides challenges of infrastructure planning, development and coordination. However, moving forward, Zimbabwe ought to develop a city development agenda which prioritises among others the following::

- Infrastructure planning and development within metropolitan regions,
- Economic development within city-regions,
- Integrated transport systems,
- Land and housing development.

5. Conclusion

Building sustainable, resilient and inclusive cities requires considerable planning and a holistic approach to city development. Such an approach should be anchored on the premise that in 2030, more than half of Zimbabwe's population will be living in cities. At the same time, the world will be evaluating progress made under SDGs. As such, it is therefore prudent to develop an SDG implementation framework that revolves around SDG11.

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