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CHALLENGES OF SUSTAINABLE URBAN GOVERNANCE IN AFRICA, URBAN INFORMALITY IN ZIMBABWE

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ABSTRACT

The paper discusses the challenges associated with sustainable urban governance in Zimbabwe. Urban informality in Zimbabwe, while it has roots in the colonial period, intensified in the last decade of the 20th century with the adoption of Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs) that sought to restructure the economy through massive cost cutting budgetary measures. It later exacerbated post-2000 with the decline of the formal economy which threw thousands into the informal economy. In the face of growing urban informality, the government of Zimbabwe has exhibited a hostile attitude towards the informal sector, often inconsistent with the situation obtaining on the ground. The argument advanced by the paper is that the behaviour displayed by 'city fathers' and central government departments frustrate efforts by the United Nations to create inclusive, safe, and resilient cities. In light of the challenges highlighted by the paper, the authors recommend a raft of measures to improve governance of cities and address challenges of urban informality within the broader Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) framework.

Key Words: Informality, Sustainable Urban Governance, Sustainable Development Goals, Livelihoods, U

INTRODUCTION

This paper discusses challenges of urban governance in Zimbabwe and how the government through its various arms has in the past responded and continues to respond to urban informality. It also examines the implication of such responses within the broader sustainable urban governance discourse. Countries across the length and breadth of the globe have exhibited different approaches to urban informality -from outright hostility in countries like Zimbabwe to more accommodative approaches in countries such as Mali, India and South Africa. Against this background, generalisations about government attitudes and responses to urban informality on the continent should, therefore, be approached with extreme caution. However, an underlining trend is that in countries where informality is perceived negatively, the urban space remains a contested constituency. For example, urban administrators obsessed with 'modernity', cleanliness, 'order' and 'formality' whose origins have remained insignificant even to the new crop of black urban administrators often thwart the urban poor's right to the city. Experience in Zimbabwe's urban spaces is such that these contestations usually result in violent clashes between city authorities and informal operators in the broadest sense. When confrontations of this nature ensue, not only are livelihoods disrupted, even Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), especially Goal 11 which strives to make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable is highly compromised. To warrant a broader perspective, this paper discusses urban informality as it extends to housing, the economy, solid waste management and public transportation in Zimbabwe.

OPERATIONALISING INFORMALITY AND SUSTAINABLE URBAN GOVERNANCE

There is no single approach to defining informality; thus definitions used in theoretical and empirical research often lack consistency from one study to another (Guha-Khasnobis et al., 2006). However, for purposes of this discussion, the paper adopts a more generic definition of urban informality which is perceived to be those forms of activities that exist beyond state regulation and planning. Ironical but interestingly, the Brundtland Commission (2002) defines sustainable development as development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own. Application of this definition to urban governance implies that urban governance takes into cognisance the ecological, social and economic dimensions of governance. Justifiably so, sustainable urban governance must, therefore,

put into consideration issues of social justice at its core. As part of a post-2015 global development agenda, the United Nations (UN) adopted 17 SDGs that replaced the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) marking a significant break from the MDGs development paradigm. SDGs will, therefore, apply to all countries in recognition that transition to more sustainable development globally in a globalised world requires commitment and substantive changes to the status quo by each country regardless of current state of economic and social development. A key innovation with the SDGs includes an introduction a sub-national goal for the first time focussing on urban areas in recognition of today's predominantly urban world (Arfvidsson et al., 2016).

A CASE OF ZIMBABWE'S CITIES & TOWNS

While informality has always been a feature of human development, dating as far back as the Victorian times in Britain and Europe, there is a consensus among scholars that the introduction of Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs) under the flagship of the Bretton Woods institutions precipitated a rise in informality in many developing countries. Magure (2014) notes that neo-liberal restructuring for developing countries entailed the creation of a policy environment that privileged free market forces in a manner that departed from the Keynesian-welfarist economic paradigm. In Zimbabwe, the economic programs sought to restructure the economy by promoting trade liberalisation, budgetary cuts and the removal of subsidies in line with the dictates of the Bretton Woods Institutions. Disappointingly, these programs packaged as 'development answers' failed to be a panacea to poor countries' development challenges but instead facilitated a race to the bottom as the policies eroded social gains primarily in education, housing and health achieved in the few years following Zimbabwe's political independence from Britain in 1980. Budgetary cuts led to massive retrenchments in both the public and private sectors, throwing thousands into the informal sector. Heintz (2006) notes that employment elasticities for Zimbabwe's manufacturing sector alone declined from 0, 65 per cent between 1963 and 1979 to 0,06 between 1980 and 1996. With a collapsing productive sector, thousands sought economic refugee in the informal sector which fast developed and matured into an economic 'shock absorber'. The informal economic sector necessitated a unique 'urban survivalist lifestyle' sustained by a range of informal activities.

URBAN INFORMALITY IN ZIMBABWE: A NUISANCE?

Mpofu (2012) notes that after independence in 1980, Zimbabwe's cities experienced a proliferation in the number of squatter settlements. He attributes the surge in the informal housing to failure by the urban economy to offer adequate housing and jobs, leaving the peri-urban as the only sanctuary for the urban poor to live and eke out a living. Because of historical reasons, urban informality in Zimbabwe has always been viewed in extremely negative terms. For example, phrases and words such as 'vagrants', 'social deviants' and 'outcasts' have characterised national debate, planning and discourse on informality. In most cases, the attitude and response by the government have largely been confrontational and in some instances even violent as evidenced by mass evictions of slum residents, harassment of street vendors by municipality police with the assistance of the Zimbabwe Republic Police (ZRP). Sadly, what government authorities might be or might not be aware of is that obsession with order, and 'proper' urban planning is itself a legacy of colonialism couched in white supremacy. To Potts (2007, 238), 'callous campaigns against the urban poor by both central and local government are indicative of the government's strict adherence to the ideology of planned and orderly cities'. Potts (2011, 15) further adds that the African city is often understood in three senses, firstly as sites of control and restriction, secondly as a planned and planning space and finally as political sites for disaffection. Fixation with 'planned', 'orderly' and 'modern urbanity' explains why government and city authorities perceive urban informality in the pejorative sense of urban pathology (Potts 2007).

As a result of high unemployment figures and youth poverty, Zimbabwe's cities have become breeding grounds for touting- a common survival strategy for thousands of unemployed young men. The practice also presents a tranquil escape from poverty and crime and demonstrates young people's innovativeness in a structurally inhibiting environment. These young men besiege lifting spots along major highways in search of alternative sources of income. In a surprise move, the government chose to respond by enacting Section 40 of Zimbabwe's Road Motor Transportation Act. The Act makes it an

offence for pirating taxis to pick and drop passengers at undesignated points within the city. Offenders are subject to vehicle clamping and fined amounts ranging between 20-100 USD depending on the severity of the offence. While enactment of the Act into law was meant to punish touting, the provision has been subject to abuse often becoming a new cash-cow for lowly paid municipal police who engage in acts of corruption and bribery. Given the difficulties encountered by the poor in urban areas, Kamete (2012) notes that urban technical planning in Zimbabwe leaves no room for urban informality, and it for this reason that spatial policing usually entails control, criminalisation and the penalisation of the urban poor.

Arfvidsson et al., (2016) note that public transport operators in Kisumu, Kinshasa, Mogadishu and Addis Ababa are usually privately owned and informally run. Like public transport operators in Zimbabwe, they stop as the need arises, to drop or pick up passengers often causing traffic jams or in extreme cases accidents. Both Kisumu and Harare has witnessed an exponential growth of Boda-boda and or umshika-shika taxis. Like in the majority of developing countries, this sector provides an alternative source of livelihood for the urban poor and unemployed mostly young men. In Zimbabwe, piecemeal efforts are under consideration to find what government refers to as a 'lasting solution' to the public transport nightmare with indications that central government is mulling the re-introduction of public buses as a viable alternative to the public transportation nightmare. However, critics are already questioning the viability and sustainability of such programs given that the sector failed to adequately compete in a free market economy leading to its sudden collapse in the early 1990s. Others have gone to the extent of questioning government's commitment to dealing with an ever-ballooning pool of unemployed young people and whether such a move will not likely throw out of employment thousands who have found sanctuary in this trade.

With regards to informal settlements, Dorman (2007) argues that the salient perception by government officials that all Africans belong to rural areas and have access to land they can fall back on in hard times serves as a lubricant to the state's action of forcibly sending squatters to rural areas. Aldrich and Saudlu (1995) define a squatter settlement as housing that is a result of illegal occupation or developed in an unauthorised fashion. Mpofu (2012) writes that government officials labelled squatters with names ranging from 'outcasts', 'new gipsies', 'bandits' and 'criminals'. This attitude by city authorities shows in the negative treatment of squatters in economic policy, legislation, planning and management. Hart and Padayachee (2010) notes that human lives have been overlooked by bureaucratic planning strategies that ignore the real interests and practices of the people. Government's response to informal housing in Zimbabwe's urban areas has largely been confrontational, characterised by mass evictions, transfers, threats and destruction. For example, in 1982, the Minister responsible for urban housing launched a nationwide war campaign on urban squatters by razing down the Nyambara squatter camp in Harare. In 1983, the Deputy Minister of Lands, Resettlement and Rural Development ordered 2347 Killarney squatters in Bulawayo to disperse from the camp within a week or risk receiving the same treatment as 'criminals'. A year later, strict action against squatters in Killarney followed the threat. Many lost not only property but also their livelihoods in the ensuing fiasco.

As a way to intensify the war on urban informality in 1983, the Zimbabwean government gazetted the Emergency Powers (Vagrancy) Act targeting people living off prostitution, those not in 'proper' houses or without adequate income living as vagrants. According to Mafico (1991), in October 1985, Minister Chikowore announced his intention to form 'squatter hunting units' to smash any squatting tendencies. Two months after issuing threats, squatter camps around Bulawayo were either set on fire or bulldozed leaving an estimated 1000 families homeless. In 2005, the state unleashed a campaign targeted at the urban poor through Operation Restore Order commonly known as Operation Murambatsvina which was seen by the international community as a direct attack on the livelihoods of the urban poor. The campaign not only displaced thousands but also exacerbated urban poverty by destroying sources of livelihood for the urban poor such as backyard tuckshops and vending stalls while government used the same tired excuse that everyone had a rural home. Potts (2011; 594) notes that Operation Murambatsvina was an attack on the poor without housing and jobs. Potts maintains that the operation was, in fact, a challenge to the urban poor's right to the city on the flimsy grounds that everyone had a rural

home'. Kamete (2010) adds his voice, contending that the campaign was an attempt to restructure the urban areas as geographical spaces. Mpofu (2012) writes that another method employed by the government to remove squatters from urban areas in the 1980s involved issuing them with travel warrants through the Social Welfare Department so that they could return to their former communal areas. Ironically, some of the squatters assumed to have had a rural home were in fact sons and daughters of immigrants from Mozambique, Zambia and Malawi who had no rural home. In 2007, the Mayor of Bulawayo showed typical government hostility toward squatters when he voiced his discontent arguing that, 'whether they are there (Killarney squatters) because of economic problems, as the council we cannot support them' (The Chronicle, 2007).

The paper argues that negative international portrayal of slums and slum dwellers has probably served as an incentive for governments in many developing countries such as Zimbabwe to deal ruthlessly with slums and squatters. Hansen and Vaa (2016) note that while the term slum can be traced to Victorian times, it regained currency in 1996 in Istanbul, Habitat Summit with the launch of the 'cities without slums' initiative in 1999 through the Cities Alliance jointly funded by the World Bank and the UN-Habitat. Durand-Lasserve (2006) writes that the UN-Habitat defines informal settlements and slums in exclusively negative terms, for example by what they lack; (access to improved water, access to improved sanitation, security of tenure, the durability of housing and sufficient living area) as opposed to what they are. Arfvidsson et al., (2016) note that an estimated 10 per cent of Cape Town's population lived in informal settlements in 2013, excluding informal backyard dwellings in low income formal residential areas. At this rate, the UN 2030 target on SDG number 11 to ensure access for all to adequate, safe and affordable housing and essential services including the upgrading of slums looks to be a far-fetched target. However, there are some pockets of hope in countries such as South Africa, India and Pakistan where governments have undertaken massive slum upgrade projects with the help of international partners. Ferguson (2007) notes that in South Africa, while extreme poverty still exists in the formerly deprived and disorderly peri-urban shanties, townships and locations, these areas are no longer viewed as a horror to be exposed and denounced but are now increasingly understood as places of hope and possibility, sites of development rather than proof of the failure of development.

While many developing countries are typified by large areas of informal settlements that do not adhere to official planning guidelines, building regulations and construction standards, the paper argues that sustainable urban governance takes into consideration issues such as access and affordability of housing by the urban poor. Mass evictions and bulldozing of slums not offer a long-term sustainable solution to the challenge of slum development and growth. The experience of Killarney slum in Bulawayo attests to this simple fact. Numerous attempts by various arms of government to forcibly evict squatters have failed as squatters always return to the slum even after eviction citing different reasons. In post-independent Zimbabwe, Epworth became the only slum to be granted state recognition though critics have cited political patronage as a factor which motivated the government to respond and act in the manner it did. Potts (2006) notes that in Zimbabwe, suggestions by Mafico in 1991 to lower housing standards to make them affordable to the majority of low income earners, including legalisation of relatively cheap traditional African village norms in the planning of low cost housing in urban areas, use of Blair pit latrines and construction of unsurfaced roads was rejected by urban planners who were obsessed with cumbersome standards. Delivery of low-cost housing had worsened during the 1990s with the introduction of SAPs and almost came to a complete standstill during the hyperinflationary period which reached its peak in 2008.

Arfvidsson et al., (2006) notes that informal practices dominate the entire waste management sector in Kisumu ranging from collection, low level sorting and recycling at the source to transportation to the dumpsite. To a large extent, the activities at the current landfill are informal and dominated by scavengers and waste pickers primarily street children. However, this not unique to Kisumu but quite common in several low-income countries where a significant portion of the urban poor are involved in waste collection and recycling as a source of income (Moreno-Saudez and Maldonado, 2006). The response by municipalities to informal recycling is nonetheless problematic. Grest et al., (2013) are of the view that informal waste collectors are either often ignored by city authorities despite their significant contribution to waste

reduction and recycling or regarded merely in negative terms such as backward, unhygienic and generally incompatible with a 'modern' waste management system (Wilson, Velis and Cheeseman, 2006). In Harare, waste pickers are exposed to a range of health-related diseases such as respiratory complications, cuts on both their hands and feet resulting from indiscriminate dumping of biodegradable and non-degradable waste. Even worse, there has been no attempt at both central and local government level to come up with a policy that protects the health and wellbeing of waste pickers/collectors who are undeniably playing a pivotal role in waste management.

Another major challenge facing informal traders in Zimbabwe is that in instances where 'market' places for the urban poor are designated, they are usually in the periphery of the cities where business is low resulting in vendors and sometimes taxi operators encroaching the central business district where business is attractive. Upon encroachment, the urban poor is subjected to harassment by municipal police and their wares confiscated. Using the definition of sustainable urban governance provided for in the paper, the authors argue that the behaviour exhibited by urban administrators in Zimbabwe falls far from fulfilling SDG11 and as such falls outside the purview of sustainable urban governance. The misunderstanding between government agencies and informal operators should serve as a rallying point for increased dialogue and engagement to iron out sticky issues and find a win-win solution that satisfies both parties. Potts succinctly sums up the situation obtaining in cities of many developing countries by describing the attitude of many governments to informality as, 'seeking to accommodate new types of urban poverty but not necessarily accepting informality' (2007;283).

CONCLUSION

Informality is a natural urban feature that must be acknowledged by urban administrators. Attention must be drawn to efforts at incorporating urban informality within the broader sustainable development programs, this calls for direct strategies aimed at informing public policy in line with Sustainable Development Goal 11 to create safe, clean and inclusive cities in Africa. Any sympathetic view of informality in this paper should not be interpreted as private support for disorder in cities, but an attempt to highlight the ordinary human qualities of those whose activities are deemed informal, the motivations for entering the city or operating in the 'dark' economy. All these should be conceived as attempts by the urban poor to better their lives in the face of severe structural constraints such as massive job losses, high unemployment rates and the debilitating effects of neo-liberal policies. Without claiming a monopoly over the subject or pretending to know everything, the authors offer the following as recommendations for improving urban governance in Africa and addressing the omnipresent challenge of urban informality which is only set to get worse in the absence of well-informed policy to inform public discourse.

1. There is need to mainstream the activities of informal traders into the formal economy through provision of credit facilities. The creation of a stand-alone ministry to cater for the needs of informal traders will demonstrate government's commitment to coming up with a permanent solution to squabbles that characterise the relationship between informal traders and central government. The ministry in question will need to broaden its scope of activities to include mass public education on registration, tax collections and licensing processes to demystify perceived challenges associated with registering a small business.
2. Licensing and registration of informal traders will enable the government to collect taxes that will contribute to national revenue flows. Taxes should not be punitive but give room for growth and expansion. Tax collections and registration will formalise the activities of informal traders entitling them to the provision of social services like water supply, health facilities in line with Sustainable Development Goals.
3. Business and Project start-up loans should not be given indiscriminately, but instead, the government through the (said ministry) should target beneficiaries of various entrepreneurship programmes. This practice will ensure that funds disbursed for such initiatives yield tangible results.
4. Formation of Unions like the Commuter Omnibus Operators Union, Transport Operators Association, Vendors Union and many others should not be seen as a threat but positive initiatives that can be harnessed for the realisation of SDG 11. Creation of such organisations can be platforms for negotiation, discussion and dialogue between unions and government.

5. There is also need to overhaul the current housing policy in the country and align it with SDG 11 that seeks to promote inclusive, clean, safe, resilient and sustainable human settlements and cities.
6. Waste collectors/pickers need to form associations which will help them bargain with government and or local authorities given their importance as a constituency to urban councils.

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