

A photograph of a woman in a pink patterned shirt and a white headscarf carrying a young child on her back. They are in an urban, possibly informal settlement, environment with various items and structures visible in the background. The image is overlaid with a semi-transparent dark grey rectangle containing the title and subtitle.

# Housing Cooperatives, Political Symbols, & Corruption in Urban Land Governance

THE CASE OF ZIMBABWE



### ABOUT THE WRITER

Farai Mutondoro is a governance, democracy, human rights and policy expert with over seven years' experience in the non-profit sectors of livelihoods, natural resource governance, service delivery, transparency and accountability, and anti-corruption.

Farai has managed various governance studies assessing the drivers, impact and extent of corruption on key sectors to the Zimbabwean political economy such as mining, land, state-owned enterprises, service delivery and climate finance.

He has presented and facilitated dialogue at national, regional and international platforms such as the 2015, 2016 and 2017 World Bank Land and Poverty Conferences, 2017 Australia-Africa Research Forum, 2017 Namibia Anti-Corruption Commission Extractive Industry Strategic Review, Zimbabwe Parliamentary Committee Trainings on Transparency and Accountability, as well as the International Anti-Corruption Conference. Currently, he is the Transparency International Zimbabwe (TI Z) project lead in the implementation of the Land and Corruption Project in Zimbabwe.

# 1 INTRODUCTION

Corruption in Zimbabwe has permeated all sectors crucial to the political economy. The urban land sector is one of such that has been hard hit by political corruption. Although there is a growing body of work on urban land governance, challenges and corruption in Zimbabwe, there still remains a gap in research detailing on the drivers and impact of urban land corruption (see Chirisa et al 2015, Muchadenyika 2015 and 2016, Mutondoro 2016 and 2017, and Chiweshe 2017).



Man gathers the remainder of his property after his house is demolished and property scattered

(PHOTO CREDIT: NEWSDAY)

Transparency International Zimbabwe (TI Z), through its Land and Corruption Project in 2015, has since contributed towards citizen awareness and policy responses to urban land corruption in Zimbabwe. TIZ has done this through investing in a series of community meetings, policy dialogue, documentaries, and research reports on urban land corruption in Zimbabwe.

Corruption, in the context of urban housing, still occupies a peripheral role on the policy agenda, especially in terms of how the latter relates to key issues such as ease of doing business, opening Zimbabwe for business, and respect of human rights in the country.

One would wonder, then, why the state, even after the Mugabe resignation, hasn't shown an increase in political will in responding more reactively to urban land corruption which continues to manifest; that, and being linked to noticeable and evident factors such as housing demolitions, land barons, illegal housing cooperatives, as well as multiple allocation of stands. While it is notable that Government has commissioned an inquiry into urban land irregularities (and this is currently underway) - and that in itself

---

is a good starting point - there is also need for the realisation that there already are official documents indicating land irregularities from the Land Audit report on Chitungwiza, whose emerging issues the state could have taken action on.

More so, the state had the opportunity to take advantage of the Anti-Corruption Commission to prosecute incriminated land barons, therein. Instead, the state seems to be buying time and would likely take meaningful action after the July 30, 2018 elections.

The motive is simple - and it is what this paper seeks to demonstrate: **that urban land in Zimbabwe is a crucial tool and asset for political patronage.**

Controlling urban land and housing allows political actors to control and contain the outcome of elections.

In this paper an account of the dynamics around housing, cooperatives, and politics in Zimbabwe especially during the Mugabe era is provided. A highlight is put on how political symbols (such as names) and the political capital that such names carry have been used to legitimize illegality in the urban housing sector.

The working paper makes a case that the ruling party, knowingly, has committed various acts of corruption ranging from policy capture to rent-seeking behavior in the urban land sector for the sole purpose of retaining political power. The paper will conclude by sharing the worrying impact of corruption in the urban housing sector on investment and growth opportunities that global cities have come to offer today.



Urban land in Zimbabwe is a crucial tool and asset for political patronage.

---

## 2 BACKGROUND

In developing this working paper, insights in three important articles by Chirisa et al (2015), Muchadenyika (2015) and Chiweshe (2017) are worth exploring. A journal article by Chirisa, et al (2015) notes that in the absence of state capacity to provide for housing, cooperatives have emerged and are controlled largely by patronage. It underscores that political elites and Zimbabwe African National Union Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF), in particular, have taken advantage of this capacity inadequacy to practice distributive politics over the scarce resource of urban land for housing (ibid).

Muchadenyika (2015) notes how rural and urban land has been the main tool used by ZANU-PF to bolster its waning support in the urban constituencies. Through aligned cooperatives and land barons, the party became a major player in deciding who had access to land for housing (ibid).

Chiweshe (2017) puts the nail on the cross by making it explicit that political power is at the heart of any analysis of land-related corruption. He further argues that land corruption is largely a function of political power.

By any measure, the insights in these three publications points to how the reproduction of political power in Zimbabwe lies at the core of the urban

land governance and housing crisis in Zimbabwe.

Particularly, they show how housing cooperatives that mushroomed after 2000 have become an extension of the ruling party machinery. They also converge in detailing how urban land has become a political commodity that one accesses through party-oriented housing schemes. In essence, the three publications provide a good foundation to better understand how patronage and clientelism have manifested in the urban land sector. Building onto this informative work by these scholars, this report seeks to elevate the discussion on housing and politics in Zimbabwe with a viewpoint highlighting nuances around political corruption in the land sector.

This report analyzes how political symbols belonging to, and associated with the ruling party, ZANU-PF, have been used to legitimize and mask the blatant abuse of power by political elites managing and controlling urban land directly, and indirectly.



Political power is at the heart of any analysis of land-related corruption. Land corruption is largely a function of political power.

Budiriro, Harare, Zimbabwe  
Children look on from one of many demolished sites

(PHOTO CREDIT: THE INDEPENDENT)



### 3 CORRUPTION IN THE URBAN HOUSING SECTOR: THE EVOLUTION

Changing political dynamics from 2000 and increased demand for urban land propelled by urbanization has made corruption in the management of urban land highly inevitable.

On the political front, a strong opposition in the name of the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) emerged in 2000. The MDC established political dominance in urban localities as urban areas became their stronghold. To that effect, since the movement began, they increased their footprint and dominance in areas such as Harare, Bulawayo and Mutare, amongst others. This political development became a thorn in the flesh for the ruling party (ZANU-PF)

Owing to such changing political dynamics, urban land - which is tied by a strong umbilical cord to residents occupying such spaces - has gained much political value. ZANU-PF, which controlled the central government, resorted to ways of controlling urban spaces, while undermining MDC-led local Councils. Muchadenyika (2015) notes that ZANU-PF used three instruments to undermine the functioning of MDC and controlled urban councils, which are: the local government minister, changes to the Urban Councils Act (Chapter 29: 15), and ZANU-PF party structures, including youth militia. Thus, as Muchadenyika (2015) concludes, MDC-controlled urban administrations were incapacitated, as most land was under a *de facto* ZANU-PF administration. Political actors from the ruling party used their power and influence to shape the housing policy and urban land policy in ways that accommodated their patronage strategy around urban land.

#### POLITICAL SYMBOLS, LEGITIMACY AND PATRONAGE IN THE URBAN LAND SECTOR

From 2000, the sheer number of housing cooperatives in Zimbabwe skyrocketed to alarming rates. A sizeable number of these have key distinguishing features such as the use of symbols that either belong to, or are associated with the ruling party (ZANU-PF). These political

symbols often stand for the party's beliefs in a way that is understandable and recognizable.<sup>1</sup>

Typical cases of political symbols used by housing cooperatives are names belonging to prominent political actors such as the former first lady, while others held names of liberation heroes, or names linked to the liberation struggle which saw Zimbabwe attaining independence in 1980. Such names include:

- Graceland Housing Cooperatives (named after the former first lady, Grace Mugabe)
- Gushungo Housing Cooperative (Gushungo is the totem of the former President Robert Mugabe)
- Chitepo Housing Cooperative (named after the former liberation hero Herbert Chitepo)
- Joshua Nkomo Housing Cooperative (named after the late Vice President Joshua Nkomo)
- Magamba Housing Cooperative - (Magamba is a Shona term used to describe liberators or war veterans)
- Mujibha naChimbwido Housing Cooperative (Mujibha and Chimbwido were names given to war collaborators)
- Mbuya Nehanda Housing Cooperative (named after the traditional leader and spirit medium, Mbuya Nehanda, who played a key role in the resistance against settler occupation)

Worth noting is that the names held a fierce amount of political capital. Case in point: former leader Robert Mugabe and his wife Grace's names, at the height of Mugabe's rule, carried a lot of coercing force and influence that legitimized what was illegal, and silenced critics

Apart from names, some housing cooperatives in and around Harare (especially the unregistered ones) have enacted symbols such as pictures, flags and even political statements that are associated with the ruling party. Prior to the political developments of November 2017, it had become the norm to see enacted pictures of either the former

<sup>1</sup> <https://sites.google.com/site/politicalpartiesanalysis/political-parties/political-party-symbols>





President or the former first Lady on walls, motor vehicles and bridges in areas such as Hopely, Southlea Park, and Arlington. In some of these areas, the old ZANU-PF flag was also pitched together with keywords such as 'empowerment' or 'sovereignty' inscribed on bridges and walls. It is important to illumine that against this, ZANU-PF, as a party, has claimed constant ownership of the liberation struggle narrative.

This use of political symbolism can therefore be understood as blessed and supported by the party; the symbols were employed to mark a territory of influence and control. Consistently, where such symbols are present, it is observed that members belonging to opposition parties are unwelcome.

However, it's not just in the land circles that these symbols have come into play. Other extensive users of this capital include miners, motorists and vendors (at Mbare Musika and Sakubva second hands clothes market) - effectively alluding to this systemic use of party symbolism to mask and legitimize actions that are illegal in nature.

#### **POLITICAL CORRUPTION IN THE URBAN LAND SECTOR**

At the very core, the ruling ZANU-PF party has captured the policy process (policy capture), where decisions over policy matters are consistently and repeatedly directed away from the public interest and channeled towards a specific agenda. This has effectively exacerbated inequalities and undermined democratic values, economic growth and trust in government (OECD, 2017). In line with this, ZANU-PF has crafted laws and policies that seek to benefit the

organisation's current and future political ambition at the expense of the public. The 2016 World Cities Report states that public interest must be considered as a fundamental principle by which the policies and actions affecting urban areas should be judged.

#### **THE GOVERNMENT OF ZIMBABWE'S URBAN HOUSING**

Policy actions and inactions have seen the establishment of new settlements and institutions such as UDICORP. The intended purpose and principal aim of all such policy changes is not aimed at improving the life of ordinary Zimbabweans, neither is it focused in promoting sustainable development in any way. While the policy may be paraded as benefiting ordinary Zimbabweans, and some can even benefit from such politics, it would be ignorant to accept such policies at face value. As this paper exposes, the negative impact of such policies far outweighs their positive gains.

ZANU-PF political actors, for instance, abused their political authority through altering political boundaries and constituencies. A case in point is the incorporation of the Caledonia farm into Harare Municipality through the Presidential proclamation Statutory Instrument (SI) 119 of 2012 - an action largely interpreted as gerrymandering.

Southall (2013) argues that ZANU-PF won the 2013 elections through distorting the electoral delimitation of constituencies to its advantage. The number of constituencies was increased from 120 to 210 and areas supportive of ZANU-PF were disproportionately favored in the allocation of new constituencies (ibid). Dube and Makaye (2013) also state that in

Government earth-mover demolishes an 'illegally' constructed house

(PHOTO CREDIT: THE INDEPENDENT)

”

With policy capture public decisions over policies are consistently or repeatedly directed away from the public interest towards a specific interest. This exacerbates inequalities and undermines democratic values, economic growth and trust in government.

## BARRIERS TO ACCESSING HOUSING IN 2017

53%

Land allocation

31%

Unaffordable housing schemes

11%

Cost of infrastructure servicing

the 2013 Harmonized elections gerrymandering can be seen in the case of Harare South constituency that has components of Harare urban as well peri-urban areas where there was land settlement by ZANU-PF party loyalists.

Another notable case of gerrymandering is the Chiwundura constituency that had sections of Gweru urban (precisely Senga and some parts of Mkoba high density suburb), conjoined with Chiwundura rural areas (ibid). As a result of this the MDC-T party candidate, Tim Mkhlera lost to ZANU-PF's Kizito Chivamba (ibid).

What was crucial for gerrymandering strategies to work was the capture of the urban planning profession. Muchadenyika and William (2017) cite a report by the City of Harare (2010) which shows when the Minister of Local Government fired council officials - consequently incapacitating commission and planners in executing their professional duties according to the standards of town planning. The City of Harare report cited by Muchadenyika and William (2017) noted that appointed commissions made planners appendages of political party interests. This is revealed by corrupt procedures during land alienation processes, with ZANU-PF officials as major beneficiaries (ibid). Through these means, ZANU-PF political elites crippled local authority operations.

Resultantly, the inability of local authorities to deliver created room for housing cooperatives. As shown by the extract below, the concept of housing cooperatives was then sugar-coated and romanticized because it was an enabler to the grand political strategy or retaining political power in urban centers:

---

*ZANU PF has encouraged those who want land for building to get into the co-operatives. Once in the co-operatives, members must adhere to the requirements of the musangano (ZANU-PF) and pledge their allegiance to vote for it or the co-operatives risk losing their land. Such is the housing and the political landscape that has characterized Harare especially in the run-up to July 31, 2013, Harmonized Elections in which ZANU-PF won" - Chirisa, et al (2013)*

---

### MAGNITUDE OF THE PROBLEM AND CITIZEN PERCEPTIONS

There is limited reliable information that can be used to ascertain the true extent of corruption in the urban land sector in Zimbabwe. A study in 2017 on the state of service delivery in Zimbabwean cities of Harare, Masvingo, Bulawayo, and Mutare by the We Pay You Deliver Consortium, noted that 53 percent of respondents attributed corrupt land allocation as a barrier to accessing housing, 31 percent commented that unaffordable schemes were the cause, and 11 percent mentioned that cost of infrastructure servicing were the barriers to accessing housing.

The same study presents interesting findings on how citizens perceive the housing cooperatives. 57.1% respondents indicated that they do not trust housing cooperatives as a strategy to access housing. Such mistrust hinges on matters of bad corporate governance practices, lack of supervision by councils and government ministries, politicization of cooperatives, and dictatorial tendencies exhibited by most cooperative leaders.

The Land Audit Report by Government of Zimbabwe on land management and allocation in Chitungwiza also gives interesting insights on the extent of land corruption. Some of the key findings from this report, as summarized by Muchadenyika (2015), are that:

- 15,604 housing stands were illegally allocated by ZANU-PF-linked land barons, youths, housing cooperatives, council officials and councilors; without any development plans
- Non-approval of housing cooperative plans
- Sub-standard buildings
- Flouting of town planning regulations and procedures
- High incidence of contravention of safety and health standards (due to stands allocated in wetlands, and electricity, roads and sewerage servitudes)

Marongwe, as cited in Chiweshe (2017), shares important information from the Special Investigations Committee's Report of the City of Harare Land Sales, Leases and Exchanges which aids our understanding on the manifestation patterns and trends of corruption in urban land. He notes that this Special Investigations Committee's report



The footprint and outlook of our cities don't inspire confidence in investors, such that a few years from now these will miss out on opportunities that they may come to offer.

of the City of Harare Land Sales, Leases and Exchanges has exposed allegations relating to the gross manipulation of the operation of urban land markets. The report makes reference to cases relating to land swaps between the City of Harare and some political elite, unprocedural sale of public land which violated section 152 of the Urban Councils Act, unprocedural change of reservation of land, unprocedural disposal of council houses and, non-adherence to the council policy on the allocation of stand.

#### **IMPACT OF POLITICAL CORRUPTION IN THE URBAN LAND SECTOR**

The impact of political corruption in the urban land sector should never be underestimated. Political corruption in urban land management has a net impact of stalling the attainment of Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 11 and the New Urban Agenda (NUA) in particular. SDG 11 stresses the need of making cities and human settlement inclusively safe, resilient and sustainable. NUA goes beyond SDG 11 and focuses on what needs to be done to ensure that cities and human settlements are more inclusive, well planned, developed, managed in sustainable ways, and can be vehicles for development. It provides key principles

to inspire and influence policies around urban and city planning. In Zimbabwe's context, political corruption in the urban land sector is possibly spiraling cities in the opposite direction. Already, the emerging settlements such as Southlea Park, for instance, are detached from the realities around SDG11 and NUA. The footprint and outlook of cities in Zimbabwe do no inspire confidence in investors and as such, in future, they might miss emerging opportunities. There is therefore a critical need for government, citizens, and other key stakeholders to rethink housing, politics and governance. The current government, ideally, needs to take live up to its mantra on 'opening up Zimbabwe for business.' To a great certainty, cities properly managed outside the dictates of politics will offer more opportunities for investment and economic growth in Zimbabwe.

The impact of corruption in the context of urban housing also needs to be understood from the perspective of the poor and vulnerable homeless citizens - many of whom have fallen prey to party-aligned and illegal housing cooperatives. Over the years, cases rose of citizens swindled of hard-earned money by housing cooperatives that operate



■ A woman carrying her one-year-old twins looks on defenselessly as her property is demolished (PHOTO CREDIT: KUDA HUNDA)

illegally, but profiteer through party protection. This crime is an existent reality: Transparency International Zimbabwe's Advocacy and Legal Advice Centre has received numerous corruption cases and complaints implicating housing cooperatives and land barons.

A mentionable case comes from Mutare. A group of 760 families, under the Zimbabwe Homeless Peoples' Federation, they paid for land since 1996 and Mutare City Council allocated it to them in Dangamvura in 1999. This group however lost their piece of land to another illegitimate group of occupants who claimed to have the political backing and support of then Minister of Local Government, Rural Development and National Housing Saviour Kasukuwere.

The Newsday of 9 June, 2017 also gives us an appreciation of land corruption on ordinary citizens, many of whom are poor and desperate home-seekers. The daily newspaper brought to fore evidence from a Government Land Audit for Chitungwiza which indicated that Mabamba, through his United We Stand Housing Cooperative, was considered as "the 'chief land baron' in a scam involving the sale of more than 14 000 housing stands to desperate home seekers." Newsday's report shows that about 14,000 home seekers were duped of their money.

Notably, this trend has gone for years and ultimately, it's the poor home seekers lose as the council tails back to demolish their houses. This was the case for residents of Arlington park, located close to the near the Robert Gabriel Mugabe International Airport. These residents had paid for land through a housing cooperative, only to them to be told to vacate the area when the former President was officiating the airport road.

Not surprising, TIZ's work on land and corruption has revealed that poor women and children bear the greatest brunt of land corruption.

In addition, poor residents are often caught in the crossfire when factions within the ruling party fight one another and one eventually loses power. It can be observed that after factional fights in ZANU-PF, when one faction lost power, the government, through council, embarked on operations to clear our vendors in the central business district (CBD), demolishing what would be deemed as illegal structures - for instance, when the Gamatox faction lost power.

The extent of the party-play in land allocation can be seen in a typical case of an interviewed woman, residing in Arlington park. She narrated how when the Government demolished their houses and resettled some affected members in Southlea Park, she was told that she couldn't be assisted because she didn't belong to the new *musangano* (faction).

---

## 4 CONCLUSION

This working paper builds upon current narratives on the politicization of urban housing and housing cooperatives in Zimbabwe. This paper, which seeks to contribute to the growing literature on land corruption, and political patronage in Zimbabwe, brings to light supporting evidence on how urban land in Zimbabwe has been used as a political tool to retain political power by the ruling party since 2000.

A highlight is put on how political symbols such as names of political actors carrying considerable political capital, and how they have been used to legitimize and mask the illegal housing cooperatives in Zimbabwe. A number of housing cooperatives in Zimbabwe, especially those that emerged with the political support and blessing of the *musangano* (ZANU-PF), are an appendage of the ruling. These housing co-operatives are conduits of ZANU-PF serving the primary role of recruiting and mobilizing party supporters.

The inability of local authorities to provide housing has the underhand of executive political authority which is being abused as the process of designing urban land policy is captured together with the profession of urban planning. This setup, as the paper shows, has been fertile ground allowing for the mushrooming of party affiliated housing cooperatives in Zimbabwe.

In summation, the paper highlights the impact of urban land corruption on the life of ordinary citizens, and hampers progressive development on sustainable development in line with the articulation of SDG 11 and the New Urban Agenda

---

## A REFERENCES

Chirisa I, Bandaiko E, Takawira- Mutsindikwa N, (2015) Distributive politics at play in Harare, Zimbabwe Case for Housing Co-operatives

Chiweshe M, (2017), Analysis of Land related Corruption in Zimbabwe 1, Africa Insight, Volume 46 (4), Africa Institute of South Africa

Dube and Makaye (2013) How ZANU PF Won the 2013 Harmonized Elections in Zimbabwe: International Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences Invention, Volume 2, Issue 10

Muchadenyika D and William J (2017) Politics and the practice of planning: The case of Zimbabwean cities

Muchadenyika D (2015) Land for Housing: A Political Resource – Reflections from Zimbabwe’s Urban Areas, Journal of Southern African Studies, 41:6, 1219-1238, DOI: 10.1080/03057070.2015.1087163

Southall R (2013), How and Why ZANU PF won the 2013 Zimbabwe Elections, Strategic Review of Southern Africa, Volume 35, No 2

We Pay You Deliver Consortium (2017) State of Service Delivery Report: Cities at the Crossroads Volume 1. Harare Danish Church Aid

