



## **Banning of Housing Cooperatives a retrogressive step in realizing National Policy on Housing for all!**

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**Harare, Background to Introduction of Housing Cooperatives:** In 1983, the government set and agreed to adopt the Transitional National Development Plan (TNDP) which had two types of housing cooperatives, work based and community based after realising that housing was a basic need. The Plan recognized that housing plays an important role in people's wellbeing and the productivity of the country. The State also adopted a policy with the objective of providing decent affordable housing for all, with special emphasis on low-income earners. The concept of self-help was central to policies designed to help alleviate poverty. Housing co-operatives were identified as part of the strategy. The first Housing cooperatives were in the late 1980's.

One of the first housing co-operatives was the *Cotton Printers Housing Cooperative*. It was formed in 1984 as a work based housing co-operative in Bulawayo, the second largest city in Zimbabwe. One of the largest housing co-operatives today, *Kugarika Kushinga Housing Cooperative (KKHC)* was founded in 1986 with about 2000 members, according to Zimbabwe National Association of Housing Cooperatives (ZINAHCO). In 2012 following an intensive consultative process, a National Housing Policy was adopted. The policy is based on three elements: the promotion of housing development strategies to assist the poor, the use of a participatory approach and, the mobilization of the beneficiaries' own resources. Most recently in 2013, the Zimbabwe Agenda for Sustainable Socio Economic Transformation (ZIMASSET) on its social service delivery cluster recognised that there is need for strengthening community based housing organizations for improved housing delivery.

**Current Housing Status:** The current housing backlog is estimated at one million housing units, consisting of new units and existing units needing refurbishment. One fifth of the population is homeless or lives in poor, overcrowded housing conditions lacking basic infrastructure. This is due to poverty, a high rate of urbanization and ongoing campaigns by local authorities to demolish informal settlements. The country's independence in 1980 and the cancellation of racial policies brought a high rate of rural people migrating to urban areas in hopes of improving their living conditions. Urbanization is ongoing. In March 2013, according to the Ministry of National Housing and Social Amenities, there were approximately 1, 2 million people on the government's national housing waiting list, and this figure appears to be growing.

**Housing Cooperatives part of solution to City of Harare Liquidity Crunch Challenges:** The City of Harare have been on the record failing to provide serviced residential land to those in dire need of decent accommodation. The introduction of housing cooperatives was meant to assist council but this did not mean the responsibility of providing housing had been completely taken away from the local authority, on behalf of Central Government. In terms of the Rural District Council's Act (Chapter 29:13), Schedule 71, the powers of providing decent accommodation are vested upon local authorities. The government, through adoption of national housing policies earlier mentioned, housing cooperatives play a complementary role in providing the basic housing need.

**The Folly of Disbanding Housing Cooperatives:** Disbanding cooperatives does not guarantee that the City of Harare will be able to adequately deliver houses on their own given their record of financial mismanagement and dry coffers. The position announced by the Government and the follow up policy announced by the Harare City Council is both counter-productive and retrogressive. The council needs to sit down and come up with the transparent ways of plugging corruption by housing officials and Housing Cooperative leaders to safeguard desperate home seekers. The majority of the people living under the fragile Zimbabwe economy are largely from the informal sector which is not properly covered under the pay schemes, employer assisted schemes and public/private partnerships that the council proposes in its revised housing policy.

The solution is not to stop the functioning of housing cooperatives but should be to strengthen transparency and accountability mechanisms so that unsuspecting home seekers are safeguarded from fund abuses, currently prevalent. This system would have to ring fence housing cooperative accounts with banks against manipulation and abuse by cooperative leaders who fail to develop allocated land; instead they focus on accumulating personal wealth. These should be pursued and prosecuted, but to totally ban housing cooperatives is a poorly thought out decision, influenced more by partisan consideration than on actual housing delivery challenges. The root causes must be thoroughly addressed, and not rush to cosmetic and ill-advised decisions by individuals disguised as housing policies.

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