



## HRT Commentary on Urban Renewal in Harare

**Date:** 7 May 2019

**7 May 2019, Harare-** The Government's Urban Renewal program should not be about refurbishing and upgrading flats in Mbare only but should look at the renewal of all old building structures in the country. The Harare Residents Trust (HRT) commends the Government of Zimbabwe for moving in to renew blocks of flats in Mbare suburb which were constructed during the colonial times for men only who worked in the light and heavy industries. Women were not allowed to live in the flats, and the women largely lived in the rural areas with their children. In light of the latest developments where the Government has partnered a Singaporean company to refurbish the flats, the HRT calls on the Government to also quickly move in to also address the issues of outdated vehicle models and buildings in all urban centres in order to standardise urbanisation in Zimbabwe. A significant number of very old private and public transport vehicles have become a nuisance on urban routes thereby increasing air and environmental pollution contrary to the increased climate change programming, recognised even in the Sustainable Development Goals.

The HRT views the Mbare flats renewal as a major positive step taken by the Government in the provision of decent accommodation to the majority poor people who live in squalor. However, the urban renewal program should not be piecemeal in approach or reactionary in structure, but should reflect a careful consideration of land usage, environment management and appropriateness to the citizenry. By recognising that the flats dwellers needed their structures to be renewed, the Government should now consolidate the urban renewal programme. They should expedite the replacement of dilapidated water and sewer infrastructure in all the flats within a given specific time frame. This is so because from the time of the election promise made by the ruling party ahead of the July 2018 elections to the Mbare people, to the time the repainting started and to the present there is no clarity as to what needs to be done, for how long and when the works would be completed. There is also no clarification on who exactly will handle the temporary relocation of the tenants in the flats to ensure that the refurbishment works proceed unhindered. The full cost and the conditions of the renewal of the flats remain unknown. For the Government to gain the trust and confidence of its people it must appreciate the importance of providing justifications and explanations on all their programs in the public interest of transparency and accountability. Therefore, housing delivery must meet the basic needs and rights of the urban residents without compromising on standards and environmental management.

The history of the flats reveal that African married men and bachelors could not live with their wives and families in the flats during colonisation due to restrictive and discriminatory housing policies. The flats were built for bachelors, migrant and seasonal workers. The authorities used to conduct sporadic inspections in each flat to ensure that no women lived with the men. These men were supposed to work and earn money in order to be able to pay their taxes in their rural areas where their families lived. So the flats were built by the white minority administration under the Salisbury Municipality. The hostels back then were occupied through employers such as the Tobacco BAT, Coca Cola, and several others. Most of the men worked for tobacco and other companies where

they had seasonal jobs. At the end of their work contracts these men were expected to vacate the flats and pave way for other men while they went back to their rural areas. Some of the men workers worked for the Salisbury Municipality, now Harare City council. The condition of their accommodation was that at retirement, termination of work contract or at the end of the contracted period, the occupant of the flat had to vacate. There was no permanent personal possession or ownership of the flat occupied during ones' working duration. Accommodation in the flats was directly associated with one's working in one of the companies whose workers lived in the hostels. In all the flats there were community kitchen, bathrooms and toilets and one single room for the works' accommodation in each floor. At every block of flats the workers had single community electricity and water meters which served all the flat occupancy and tenants were not individually billed for their water and electricity consumption. The employers leased the blocks from Council and were responsible for the rentals. The rentals were a composite of rent, water and electricity. The water and electricity are on bulk metering and right now council has to pay money to the Zimbabwe Electricity Transmission and Distribution Company (ZETDC) for the electricity account from ratepayers coffers. This is despite the fact that the majority of the flat tenants do not pay their rentals to the City of Harare. The employers deducted the money from their workers' wages, and the employers paid without defaulting.

The above situation has persisted to the present, however with significantly changed accommodation conditions. There are 14 blocks in Matapi, 13 blocks at Nyenyere flats, 12 blocks at Shawasha and nine blocks at Mbare Hostels and 10 blocks at the Matererini flats. For example in Shawasha there are 28 housing units in each floor and has three floors which means one block was built to accommodate 84 people and in the 12 blocks there was supposed to be about 1 008 occupants. But since independence to the present, each housing unit now contains an average of seven occupants, which means that there are nearly 7056 individuals, men, women and children in the 12 Shawasha blocks of flats. Overpopulation by its very nature and character fuels anti-social behaviour and a lot of cultural beliefs, values and principles are eroded. This is the situation in all the other blocks of flats. They are overcrowded beyond their original intended use, thereby overburdening the existing infrastructure. The water and sewerage pipes are overwhelmed, obsolete and leaking through the bathrooms and toilets inside and outside.

The current ownership of the majority housing units in all the flats is contested because ZANU PF's vigilante group Chipangano and Mbare District leaderships largely took over the running of the flats forcing removal and replacement of tenants suspected of belonging to the opposition Movement for Democratic Change (MDC). Chipangano was for the larger part of its existence led by Jim Kunaka, a former City of Harare employee and a ZANU PF youths leader, who is currently associated with the Robert Mugabe-linked National Patriotic Front (NPF). The Harare City Council was relegated to a mere bystander without power, authority and influences to undertake any of its public mandates in terms of service provision. The said ZANU PF leadership took turns to receive rentals from the tenants without paying much to the City of Harare. This scenario must now be resolved within the context of urban renewal and provision of decent housing to the people. Ownership of the flats must be resolved once and for all within this programme. Those residents in the flats and in the Jourburg Lines who were evicted for political reasons and other unofficial reasons with the help of corrupt Housing and Community Services officials at Remembrance Drive council offices should have their occupancy restored. The question of tenancy should now be finalised.

The Government, in partnership with the City of Harare within this program of urban renewal, should have an agreed framework of accommodating the affected occupants. The President's attempts to create conflict with the City of Harare over who between the Government and the City of Harare should find alternative accommodation for the flats dwellers while the refurbishment works is being undertaken, is a desperate attempt to escape responsibility and being held accountable for Zanu PF's electoral promises. The HRT urges President Mnangagwa to demonstrate leadership by directing his Ministry of Local Government, Public Works and National Housing to work together with the City of Harare's Housing and Community Services Department to find a workable solution to accommodate the affected residents whose flats would be under refurbishment. The President's assertion that it is the City of Harare with the responsibility of finding alternative or temporary shelter for the affected tenants during the renewal works is promoting conflict between structures of government. The President must achieve social cohesion among the different stakeholders in housing delivery within the broader urban renewal agenda. His Vision 2030 can only be achieved if he stops apportioning blame on other structures of the government. The President has a national duty to promote Local Government in Zimbabwe within the parameters of devolution, as provided for in Constitution of Zimbabwe Amendment (Number 20) Act of 2013.

This means that once the refurbishment of the flats is completed, the City of Harare should then compile a new occupancy list and draft new conditions of occupation. This will enable them to control and regulate the duration one stays in the flats before they are relocated to new stands to be allocated through a council housing delivery system. This is an opportunity to reshape urbanisation in Harare and the Government should now look at other urban local authorities and see how they can partner the local authorities to create the necessary positive momentum in the industrialisation and modernisation agenda espoused in the Vision 2030 Agenda.

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