Chapter 14
The Political Economy of Urban Informal Settlements in Zimbabwe

Charles Chavunduka and Marilyn Chaonwa-Gaza

Abstract Research in the Global South reveals the limitations of sustainability frameworks for understanding urban informal settlements. These frameworks seek to address increasing informality. The narrow focus of these frameworks on informal settlements and their depoliticised definition of sustainability overlook the political dimensions of urban informality. Through an analytical lens of the political economy, this chapter seeks to explain the persistence of informal settlements in Zimbabwe. Using a case study approach, we draw upon academic literature, recent empirical studies, project experiences, and interviews in doing a critical analysis of urban informal settlements. We argue for a shift from a narrow to a broader view of urban informal settlements, such as the outcome of rapid urbanisation, poor economic performance, and the urbanisation of poverty. In that sense, informal settlements need to be understood in the broader context of changing urban politics and policies, economic and social forces that influence their development. Only through the political economy approach and its extensions, can we realise the limitations placed upon households' efforts to improve their shelter. This chapter illustrates how informal settlements are shaped by the interaction of economic interests and political considerations in a postcolonial state.

Keywords Informal settlements · Political economy · Sustainable development · Postcolonial state · Zimbabwe

14.1 Introduction

It is estimated that one billion or one third of the world's urban residents dwell in informal settlements (UN-Habitat 2008). The proliferation of informal settlements is the most alarming in the Global South, with 61.7% of the urban population in Africa living in informal settlements, a figure that has been on the rise (Dovey et al. 2020; UN-Habitat 2014). Increasingly, cities in developing countries are being developed

C. Chavunduka (✉) · M. Chaonwa-Gaza
Department of Architecture and Real Estate, University of Zimbabwe, Harare, Zimbabwe

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on the basis of informality rather than careful formal processes. This casts a dark cloud on the ability of African countries to achieve the desired cities status envisaged in the New Urban Agenda, Sustainable Development Goal 11, and the African Agenda 2063 (Parnell 2016).

In recent years, Zimbabwe has experienced a rapid growth in informal settlements, particularly in peri-urban areas. Available data on informal settlements does not cover the whole country and mostly relates to the capital city, Harare. It has been estimated that 10% of the population in Harare live in illegal settlements, while 93% of them have illegal outbuildings in the high-density residential areas (Kamete 2002). During Operation Murambatsvina (Clean the Filth), an estimated 700,000 people in cities across the country lost their homes that were deemed illegal development (Tibaijuka 2005). More recently, Mtomba (2015) found that there are approximately 6,000 illegal settlers in over 20 settlements in Harare. Countrywide, peri-urban informal settlements have been an issue because they lack basic infrastructure and services, are a potential health hazard, are contributing to premature urban sprawl, and have not offered much scope to the poor to develop decent shelters.

In contemporary times, the problem of urban informal settlements has been addressed using sustainability frameworks (Ericsson 2016; Golubchikov and Badyina 2012; Rogers 1997; UN-Habitat 2002). Yet this framework, even after governance has been added to the economy, social, and environmental dimensions, has proved inadequate to address the problem of urban informal settlements. In developing countries, urban development is indeed distorted by politics, resulting in sustainable cities being a deferred reality (Muchadenyika and Williams 2016). The narrow focus of sustainability frameworks on informal settlements and their depoliticised definition of sustainability disregard the political dimensions of urban informal settlements. Sustainability frameworks need to be complemented by a political economy analysis to better inform programmes aimed at delivering decent housing to the poor. This chapter makes use of a political economy approach for understanding the recent proliferation of informal settlements in urban Zimbabwe. As will be illustrated by informal settlements at Hopley and Caledonia, Harare, and Lot A at Victoria Ranch in Masvingo, some stakeholders have been benefiting from the settlements at the expense of the poor and as of late migrating citizens who fail to access formal housing. On their part, the poor have not been passive agents but have been exercising political agency and clientelism to access urban housing (McGregor and Chatiza 2019). This chapter contributes to postcolonial urban geography in Zimbabwe in that a political economy analysis is central to an understanding of the nature of urban transformation that has been taking place in recent years. In this respect, political and economic events of the past two decades mostly account for the malady, proliferation of urban informal settlements, and their lack of basic infrastructure and services.

We begin by conceptualising informal settlements and explaining the political economy theoretical framework that guided the analysis. The applied qualitative methodology underpinned by a case study design is explained and followed by a presentation of findings. This is followed by a discussion of cases of urban informal settlements. Finally, the conclusion reinforces the fact that urban informal settlements

are shaped by the interaction between economic interests and political considerations in postcolonial states.

14.2 Conceptualising Informal Settlements

The broad concept of informality was developed in the 1970s as part of the endeavour to explain the emergence of the informal sector and informal economy (Jones 2017). This was as an attempt to understand the processes and consequences of large flows of rural–urban migrants to cities in search of jobs and housing outside the formal regulated systems. Even then, there was no global consensus on what informality is, as different disciplines viewed it differently. For example, it has been viewed as a spatial category—slum; an organisational form—characterised by spontaneity and tacit knowledge, rather than explicit rules and negotiability of value, shaped through shifting social relations (McFarlane and Waibel 2012). In this chapter, informality is conceptualised to be territorialised within slum settlements on the legal, political, economic, social, and environmental margins of the city.

Like informality, there is no single definition of what informal settlements are. Various scholars have used different definitions and parameters to define informal settlements. These parameters include nature of land tenure, degree of compliance with planning and building regulations, standards of housing and basic facilities, quality of the physical environment, and the socio-economic status of the residents (Zhang 2011). The use of parameters in defining informal settlements has resulted in them being usually defined by what they lack rather than by what they are (Durand-Lasserve 2006). Notwithstanding their variations across cities and nations, informal settlements are generally characterised by a chronic lack of basic infrastructure services, inferior housing, illegal dwellings, illegal or insecure land tenure, high construction density, poor sanitary conditions, poverty, social exclusion, self-production, and incremental development (Dovey et al. 2020; Huchzermeyer 2003; UN 2015).

Variations to the general conception of informal settlements have focused on the tenure aspect of the settlement or the housing delivery process. From a tenure perspective, informal settlements have been defined as unplanned residential areas "where housing, shelter and services have been constructed on land to which the occupants have no legal claim or which they occupy illegally" (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees 2014: 16). From the perspective of a housing delivery process, informal settlements are areas developed without formal spatial planning procedures of land acquisition, preparation and approval of layout, design and emplacement of services, land allocation, and superstructure development (Dialogue on Shelter and Zimbabwe Homeless People's Federation 2014).

The various definitions of informal settlements provided above give a multidimensional concept, with physical, socio-economic, and legal aspects to it (Fernandes

2011). The informal settlements discussed in this chapter are characterised by unauthorised land use, unauthorised settlements often at high density, unauthorised buildings that do not comply with prescribed standards, and occupation that originates from a land invasion (Huchzermeyer 2003). Their origin has been attributed to state-sanctioned arbitrary evictions, politicised urban land access, land invasions, and political party contestations for the control of urban areas in a context in which land has been used as a political resource (Matamanda 2020; Muchadenyika 2015, 2020; United States Agency for International Development 2019).

14.3 Theoretical Framework

Political economy is the study of social relations, particularly power relations that mutually constitute the production, distribution, and consumption of resources (Mosco 1996). One of the premises of political economy is that the actions of any government can be understood only as consequences of political forces that enable governments to acquire and maintain power (Merlo 2005). Thus, governments can and do use land resources to acquire and maintain power leading to the creation of informal settlements. This power-based model operates through stakeholder incentives whereby institutions are created in favour of powerful interests. Decision-making is affected by power and authority. Politicians and other elites usually have the power and ability to define the norms and have authority to sanction or incentivise the implementation of certain laws (Collinson 2003; Foucault 1981; Serrat 2017). This ruling class also uses power to advance specific agendas that perpetuate their dominance on the working class and this in turn helps to maintain the status quo (Lefebvre 2008). Because of increasing informality, the working class can be equated with those engaged in the informal economy. The agenda of the ruling class includes corporate interests, pursuit of profit, and vote-buying.

Recent interests in political economy analysis have focused on a concern with the role of formal and informal rules of the game, an analysis of power and the processes of contestation and bargaining between economic and political elites, a focus on the interests of different groups, and an analysis of how these interests impact development outcomes, at times to the detriment of broader development objectives (Department for International Development 2009; Menocal et al. 2018).

Rules of the game refer to formal and informal institutions (rules and norms) that shape the quality of governance and influence actor behaviour, relationships, power dynamics, and capacity for collective action (Menocal et al. 2018). Formal institutions are the codified laws and officially sanctioned rules (constitutional and legal frameworks), while informal institutions are rules created, communicated, and enforced outside of officially sanctioned channels through personal, social, and ethnic ties (Helmke and Levitsky 2004). Formal and informal institutions have a role to play in allocating scarce resources such as land. The wheels of the political economy have been identified as power and authority, formal and informal institutions, and values and interests. It is therefore important to identify the haves and have nots of power

and authority and this contributes to an understanding of the proliferation of informal settlements (Serrat 2017). Society and urban development, in particular, is shaped by power and authority groups with interests and incentives that motivate them, while human relations and interactions are influenced by values and ideas, including culture, ideologies, and religion (Serrat 2017).

According to Bah et al. (2018), the political economy of informal settlements is about reconciling the divergent interests from different stakeholders, while ensuring that their expected political and economic benefits are secured. The informal provision of land to the poor in exchange for political support, known as clientelism, leads to the proliferation of informal settlements given the lack of resources to develop decent housing (Deuskar 2019). Thus, in understanding urban informal settlements, it is important to take into consideration the sociopolitical dynamics that shape them, a matter that is usually sidelined (Satterthwaite and Mitlin 2014). Hence, we turn to the political and economic events that have been driving the growth of Zimbabwe's informal settlements.

14.4 Political Economy Context of Urban Informal Settlements

We motivate our political economy analysis by tracing how some key postcolonial developments—the Economic Structural Adjustment Programme (ESAP),[1] the Fast Track Land Reform Programme (FTLRP),[2] Operation Murambatsvina,[3] and housing cooperatives and regularisation—led to the proliferation of urban informal settlements in Zimbabwe. In the first decade of independence (1980–1989), Zimbabwe adopted socialism, a policy that saw the central government playing an important role in service delivery, including housing. By 1989, socialist policies were no longer sustainable and financial negotiations with the International Monetary Fund culminated in the adoption of ESAP in 1991. The main features of ESAP were the rollback of the state, trade liberalisation, deregulation, currency devaluation, subsidy withdrawal, and an increase in user fees, particularly for education and health services (Kawewe and Dibie 2000). Through the adoption of ESAP, the government agreed to a policy that contradicted its socialist agenda of trying to close the gap between

[1]Neoliberal market-driven policy measures which were adopted as prescriptive solutions of the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank to the economic crises of the 1980s (Zhou and Zvoushe 2012).

[2]A programme implemented in 2000–2003 which aimed at resettling people on large-scale farms acquired by government, with the promise that provision of infrastructure and services would follow later.

[3]Operation Murambatsvina, a programme of the Government of Zimbabwe, launched on 18 May 2005, meant to deal with crime, squalor, and lawlessness, rebuilding and organising urban settlements and small and medium enterprises to bring dignity, order, and prosperity to stakeholders and the nation at large (Government of Zimbabwe 2005: 2).

the rich and the poor so that it could benefit from funding by the International Monetary Fund, which was mainly captured by the elite. Thus, the government may have unconsciously acted in the interest of political elites who never cared to invest in social housing.

Government, and the failure of the private sector to invest in social housing, led to increases in rentals and the cost of building materials. This was due to the mismatch between supply and demand of housing, with the latter outstripping the former. Given the scarcity of affordable housing, people were pushed into informal settlements where rentals were relatively low and the use of substandard building materials was common (Auret 1995). It was not long before these neoliberal policies began to harm the economy because massive labour retrenchments set in and by 1993, the level of unemployment had risen to 44% (Matamanda 2020). The loss of jobs had such devastating effects that some commentators questioned whether it really had been necessary to embark on ESAP (Brett 2005; Potts and Mutambirwa 1998). The crisis has worsened with mounting foreign debts, declining exports, an increase in food prices, and falling per capita income, further affecting the affordability of housing (Kawewe and Dibie 2000; Potts and Mutambirwa 1998). Homeowners responded to the rising demand for housing and their declining incomes by resorting to renting out rooms and backyard shacks to lodgers. Dorman (2016) noted that councils grudgingly tolerated these developments as they issued permits for some of the outbuildings.

By the late 1990s, negative consequences of the ESAP to the workforce quality and increased unemployment in a wrecked economy were bound to result in political crisis, social unrest, and violence. In that period, Zimbabwe witnessed a series of strikes and food riots which brought the country into its worst political crisis since 1980. This political and economic crisis gave rise to the formation of a formidable opposition party—the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) in 1999 (Brett 2005). When the local government elections took place in 2000, the MDC got control of urban areas which had been dominated by the Zimbabwe African National Union–Patriotic Front (ZANU–PF) since 1980. This led to the contest for urban control between the ZANU–PF and MDC, especially in Harare. For example, in Harare two parallel housing delivery systems emerged, with the City of Harare allocating land to cooperatives that were registered in its Department of Housing and Community Services and also to those linked to the MDC, and the Ministry of Local Government allocating land to cooperatives aligned with ZANU–PF (Muchadenyika 2020). ZANU–PF exerted its power through the Ministry of Local Government which had leverage because it received, from the government, peri-urban farms acquired for urban development. In the prevailing political dynamics, housing cooperatives became amorphous with some formed by opportunists and entrepreneurs who did not derive power from any political party. ZANU–PF used peri-urban farms that were acquired through the FTLRP to gain political support in urban constituencies through urban resettlement, while the MDC was trying to use its majority control of urban areas to allocate land to its supporters (Muchadenyika 2015). However, the MDC had limited success as it was incapacitated with most of the urban land being under a de facto ZANU–PF administration. The growth of informal settlements post-2000 has

been directly linked to ZANU–PF's shift into patronage politics following the emergence of the MDC and transformation of cities into MDC strongholds (McGregor and Chatiza 2019).

When the FTLRP came to peri-urban areas in 2000, farm invasions by war veterans,[4] political elites, and some members of parliament were originally for agricultural purposes but morphed into urban informal settlements under the control of housing cooperatives (Uchena 2019). Historically, the growth of cities in Zimbabwe was managed through the incorporation of neighbouring farms, most of which were owned by white farmers. The incorporation process involved lengthy administrative steps: purchase and conversion of rural land to urban government land, conversion of urban government land to urban council land by means of a grant, and government proclamation of land incorporation. It was only after the incorporated land had been proclaimed municipal land that it would become available for management by the urban council. Since 2000, rather than transferring ownership of acquired peri-urban farms to city councils for planned urban development; the government has been giving it to ZANU–PF-aligned cooperatives, trusts, and land developers for housing delivery. In turn, these parallel housing delivery institutions, by performing this function, undermined the MDC-controlled urban authorities. However, most of the new settlements were informal in the sense that they lacked services such as roads, water supply, sewerage reticulation, and amenities. No wonder, an urban state land audit found the creation of new urban settlements by aspiring or sitting members of parliament being used as a way of mobilising political support (Uchena 2019).

Following the failure of ESAP, the implementation of the FTLRP in 2000 led to a protracted economic crisis in subsequent years, pushing more people into the informal economy (Marongwe 2003; Moyo and Yeros 2005; Muchadenyika 2015). In the face of rising informality in 2005, the government launched Operation Murambatsvina (Clean the Filth); an operation that demolished informal structures, initially in Harare, which later spread to all ten provinces of Zimbabwe. It is estimated that Operation Murambatsvina left 700,000 people homeless (Tibaijuka 2005). Although the Government of Zimbabwe (2005) gave the rationale for Operation Murambitsvina, the operation was also found to have various political motives. For example, it has been highlighted that it was meant to effect retribution against urban dwellers who voted for the MDC in the 2000 elections (Bratton and Masunungure 2006). It has been a way of dispersing selected urban populations to rural areas where ZANU–PF could more easily control them (Paradza 2010). Moreover, it has been a way of stifling the independent economic and political activity in the country's urban areas, especially the foreign black market currency and of preventing an uprising in light of the deepening food insecurity (Bratton and Masunungure 2006; Paradza 2010). This shows that urban housing for the poor was entangled in larger national political struggles and dynamics (Muchadenyika 2015). There is thus a sense that Operation Murambatsvina was implemented not to get rid of informal settlements, but rather

[4]Peri-urban areas and invaded farms were to be used for agricultural smallholdings but because of the chaos that prevailed, the land was quickly put to peri-urban informal settlements mostly by ZANU-PF aligned housing cooperatives.

an attempt at regaining control of urban areas by making them more apparent in the political arena (Matamanda 2020; Scott 1998). Here, we see urban planning being used as a tool for social and political control.

The issue of control and the legibility of urban space manifests itself in several ways. First, rather than transferring acquired peri-urban farms to urban councils for planning and urban development, the government allocated them as state land to ZANU–PF-aligned cooperatives, trusts, and land developers. Individuals accessed land in the created unserviced peri-urban settlements through ZANU–PF structures with the party's district coordinating committees playing a key role. Second, shortly after the large-scale demolitions, the government resettled the victims through Operation Garikai (Live Well). Under Operation Garikai, beneficiaries were allocated a two-room core house; however, the project quickly ran out of funds and government began allocating unserviced land to cooperatives, developers, and employers to facilitate the building of houses (Marongwe et al. 2011). This resulted in the mushrooming of informal settlements. Operation Garikai also reflects power contestations between central and local government, as central government subverted planning processes to score political points after Operation Murambatsvina. This was due to the conflation of the ruling party and central government and the use of power to gain the loyalty of Operation Murambatsvina victims by providing them access to housing. And third, from 2013, when ZANU–PF took sole control of the state, policy towards informal settlements shifted towards regularisation and introduction of bureaucratic control.

In large informal settlements around Harare, the ruling ZANU–PF casts access to land and security as a gift contingent on the display of political loyalty. This loyalty is, however, questionable as to whether informal settlers were actually victims or manipulated political developments to secure land informally. Many beneficiaries of cooperative housing obtained ruling party cards, not only as a means to access housing but as an assurance of protection against violence (McGregor and Chatiza 2019). Local party committees acted as de facto territorial authorities who policed the public sphere, prescribing rights talk and working with members of parliament to win votes through threats of eviction and promises of land, development, and tenure security (McGregor and Chatiza 2020). This brings up political parties as the main actors in shaping cities and informal settlements, with the settlements being ruled directly by the ruling party rather than by state institutions. ZANU–PF rewarded supporters at all levels and at the top these included military figures, war veterans, members of parliament, and land barons, also at the bottom in informal settlements themselves, local party committees, cooperative leaders, and youths. MDC politicians tried to reward grassroots votes by leading their invasions, especially during the Government of National Unity period (2008–2013) but could not do so as they controlled neither land nor state security institutions (McGregor and Chatiza 2020). To gain insights into the political economy dimensions of informal settlements, the study mostly relied on case studies.

14.5 Methodology

The study made use of a combination of literature and documentary review, case studies, evidence from seminar series, and key informant interviews. There has been an increase in literature, including dissertations on informal settlements in recent years. The literature and documentary evidence based on urban state land audits commissioned by the government and reports based on nationwide surveys of urban informal settlements by Dialogue on Shelter and the Zimbabwe Homeless People's Federation, in partnership with urban local authorities, greatly informed the findings of the study. Primary evidence was drawn from the authors' participation in a bi-monthly urban informality series that was hosted by the University of Zimbabwe in 2019. More empirical evidence was drawn from a one-day workshop on 'Migrants on the Margins' that was organised by the Development Governance Institute in 2017. The workshop brought together representatives from the Ministry of Local Government and Public Works, the Urban Development Corporation, Dialogue on Shelter, the Zimbabwe Homeless People's Federation, and the University of Zimbabwe.

Case studies were done on urban informal settlements of Hopley and Caledonia in Harare, and the Victoria Ranch in Masvingo. Evidence from these was verified using key informant interviews of the Harare mayor, and one senior official each from the Ministry of Local Government and Public Works, Urban Development Corporation, Dialogue on Shelter, the Zimbabwe Homeless People's Federation, Development Governance Institute, and the University of Zimbabwe. These stakeholders were selected on the basis of their involvement in some way in the development of the three informal settlements. Content and thematic analyses were applied to the secondary and primary data, respectively. Cases were analysed from various perspectives that looked into a particular case or what it was a case of (Ragin and Becker 1992). Such analysis eluded the political economy dimensions of each case. It is the findings from the case studies to which we now turn.

14.6 Findings and Discussion

The evidence presented on the three case studies of Hopley, Caledonia, and Lot A of Victoria Ranch were mostly drawn from the Development Governance Institute (2017), Migrants on the Margins Project, the Ministry of Local Government, Public Works and National Housing (2015), the Inter-Ministerial Team Investigation Report, and Takuva's (2017) master's degree dissertation, respectively.

14.6.1 Hopley Urban Informal Settlement

Hopley, an informal settlement of 17,000 people is located just outside the south-east city boundary on land owned by the City of Harare. It was established in 2005 as a holding camp as part of Operation Garikai, which was a cover-up by the government following the visit by the UN special envoy whose team condemned Operation Murambatsvina. The settlement serves the interests of the government and much less the victims who were not provided with any housing, infrastructure, and services. Efforts by non-governmental organisations such as UNICEF to bring services to the community, were frustrated as ZANU–PF's control of the area that provided them limited access.

Most residents of Hopley entered lease agreements with the Ministry of Local Government but the City of Harare has been the planning authority with responsibility for the provision of infrastructure and services. After 2005, housing cooperatives carried out development on institutional stands in planned areas as well as on unplanned areas. The subsequent period witnessed an influx of land occupiers, and families which had been left out of initial land allocations by the Ministry, moved out of the holding camp to settle in open spaces. As self-allocation of stands continued, orphans, widows, and those without identity documents occupied vacant stands that had already been allocated to other people (Development Governance Institute 2017). The sidelining of the City of Harare provided ZANU–PF youth the opportunity to allocate open spaces to homeless and desperate individuals. The youth used political power to benefit from the sale of land (Uchena 2019).

The nature of the houses varied, with permanent and well-built structures in the planned areas and temporary houses built of timber, plastic, and bricks in unplanned areas. The settlement has been characterised by informality within formality, ineffective development control, illegal buildings, lack of access roads, and dependence on private sources for water supply. In the circumstances, housing delivery was done outside the framework of the City of Harare with housing cooperatives playing a central role. Commenting on the role of cooperatives, a senior government official remarked that the development in Hopley was not as informal as it looked like (Key informant interview, May 2020). Since 2008, political structures dominated the area when the settlement became part of a ZANU–PF-controlled constituency. It would seem the government found the opportunity of keeping families and individuals in a dependent situation so that they remain loyal to ZANU–PF. They risked eviction if they did not reciprocate the protection from the political party with their votes. ZANU–PF thus ensured that it had an area in Harare where it could win parliamentary seats in a city where the majority of the members of parliament came from the MDC.

Competing interests and incentives of political parties marginalised the role of the City of Harare and the central government in the development of the settlement. Many households have not been receiving Council bills, suggesting weak interaction between the city and its residents. Despite the establishment of a City of Harare District Office tasked, among other duties, with the rationalisation of development

in Harare South, residents of Hopley retained stronger links with their cooperatives. The government responded to informality in Hopley by tasking Urban Development Corporation, a state enterprise responsible for urban development, to undertake regularisation of the settlement. Such response exacerbated informality as people rushed to stake claims to land when the corporation came to Hopley.

The losers from ZANU–PF and central government policy of marginalising urban councils have been the majority poor. Monthly, the poor have lost money to housing cooperatives in return for non-delivery of urban infrastructure and services. It is doubtful whether they could ever get into a position to make savings for the development of their shelters. In a seminar presentation, the director of technical services of the Urban Development Corporation lamented that the power of cooperatives needed to fall away to protect housing beneficiaries (University of Zimbabwe 2019).

14.6.2 Caledonia

Caledonia is an informal settlement of 23,000 residential stands located on Harare's north-east boundary with the Goromonzi Rural District Council. Formerly farmland, it was invaded in 2000 and some individuals began forming housing cooperatives to obtain state land which they later sold (Government of Zimbabwe 2015). The farm was acquired by the government and incorporated into the Harare municipal boundary in 2012. Thus, administratively it falls under the Harare City Council but lies in the Goromonzi South Constituency. Since the land is owned by the state, the Urban State Land Office would be responsible for allocating land in the area, but on the ground, housing cooperative leaders would register a cooperative with the Ministry of Small, Medium Enterprises, and Cooperative Development, which would then approach the district administrator for allocation of state land. Upon receiving an offer letter from the district administrator, the cooperative leader would allocate stands to beneficiaries in the provided area.

Although layout plans were made available through a planning firm commissioned by the government, only three out of twenty such plans had been approved in terms of the Regional, Town, and Country Planning Act. This set-up, and the fact that cooperative leaders instructed a land survey, rendered all development on 17 unapproved layout plans illegal. Beneficiaries deposited an amount of money for the stands and paid monthly instalments towards a fund for infrastructure and service provision, but no insignificant infrastructure was ever developed in the area (Government of Zimbabwe 2015). By selling state land and facilitating development, multiple institutions, including district administrators, a consortium, cooperative, union and trust chairpersons, exercised authority beyond their powers (Government of Zimbabwe 2015).

Before instructing the land survey, cooperative leaders would sometimes give layout preparation instructions to town planning consultants, and at other times to land surveyors, reflecting their effort at creating a formal settlement. Cooperative leaders went as far as mooting the idea of forming a Caledonia–Harare Eastview

Consortium for the coordinated development of the area, but the idea was abandoned for lack of trust by residents.

14.6.3 Lot a of Victoria Ranch, Masvingo

Lot A of Victoria Ranch is located 8 km to the south of Masvingo city centre. The informal settlement was originally a cattle ranch on the city boundary and was compulsorily acquired by the government in 2002 for urban development. The settlement has been said to be a product of the 2003 National Housing Development Programme but also a response to the housing crisis of the late 1990s hence, politically motivated (Takuva 2017). In 2003, the government came up with the National Housing Development Programme to clear the urban housing backlog of 1.25 million housing units by 2008 (Government of Zimbabwe 2003). Through this programme, the state would acquire 310,406.4 ha of peri-urban land in a bid to attain the planned target of housing delivery (Government of Zimbabwe 2003; Marongwe et al. 2011). Thus, Lot A of Victoria Ranch is state land and has an estimated population of 465 residents, consisting of about 93 households with an average family size of five (United States Agency for International Development 2019).

Building plans get approved by the Masvingo City Council under a memorandum of agreement with the Masvingo Rural District Council where the settlement is located; yet the site has no certificate of compliance in the absence of basic roads, water, and sewerage infrastructure. Houses are mainly made of temporary bricks and mortar and there is lack of services such as schools and clinics (Chikomwe 2014). To qualify for stand allocation, one had to join the Vashandi Housing Cooperative that was formed by a politician (Takuva 2017). Through the National Housing Development Programme of 2000, the government had the intention to clear the urban housing backlog of 1.25 million housing units by 2008 (Government of Zimbabwe 2003). To ensure the success of the programme, the government adopted incremental/parallel development in 2006 (Munyoro et al. 2016). Because of its ability to increase housing delivery, a parallel development was integrated into the National Housing Policy of 2012. Lot A of the Victoria Ranch housing project was implemented using the national housing policy's 'parallel development' approach, that is, instead of beginning development with the installation of infrastructure, people were allowed to occupy stands and begin construction of their houses, while infrastructure provision would take place concurrently.

Negligible infrastructure was developed as beneficiary monthly contributions were eroded by high rates of inflation, while part of the money went towards funding political party activities. One distraught resident would say: "I have wasted my money to buy a stand here; this is a typical state-planned informal settlement" (Takuva 2017: 61). The housing project lost 50% of the initial beneficiaries because of failure to pay monthly instalments, and their properties were bought by the middle and upper class. Countrywide, there had been an outcry about the lack of transparency and accountability in the manner in which housing cooperatives managed project funds,

and with the 2013 harmonised election in sight, the government banned the allocation of state land to housing cooperatives.

Based on the findings from the three case studies, some pertinent questions are as follows: Who makes decisions in the City Council area? Who implements decisions and for whose benefit? Resource distribution was found to be defined by political forces and decisions were made by parties with certain interests (Key informant interview, January 2020). Since 2000, local elected leaders in the main urban areas, including the mayor, members of parliament and councillors, were mainly MDC candidates, a situation that meant urban policy would be shaped by the opposition party; yet the national government was controlled by ZANU–PF.

The ruling party countered this through central government interference and control of local government issues, which included housing delivery (Matamanda 2020). Contestation between ZANU–PF and urban local authorities has been ensconced in exclusive ZANU–PF politics, resulting in the latter losing control over some urban spaces (Key informant interview, January 2020). ZANU–PF exercised control through direct interference by the central government in MDC-run urban council affairs. The interference entailed not only direct action by the central government, the ruling party, but the use of state power to alter the norm (Muchadenyika 2020). It would seem that Hopley, Caledonia, and Victoria Ranch informal settlements were a creation of ZANU–PF and central government. High-profile politicians, particularly land barons, have been implicated in this saga and these were identified in all three case studies. As a seemingly puzzled key informant would rhetorically ask: Who is a land baron? Why would a peri-urban farm be offered to one individual and not to the city council? The commission of inquiry into the matter of sale of state land in and around urban areas since 2005, defined a land baron as a politically connected, powerful, and self-proclaimed state land 'authority' who illegally sold state land in and around urban areas without accounting for the proceeds (Uchena 2019). Moreover, a land baron could take on various forms, such as that of an impersonator or opportunist taking advantage of the administrative void in peri-urban areas to further own business interests (Government of Zimbabwe 2015). The same commission questioned the allocation of unserviced peri-urban and urban land to cooperatives, trusts, land developers, and individuals and not to the local authority.

The main institutions in urban housing delivery were ZANU–PF structures that applied the cooperative model. In 2006, the Ministry of Local Government introduced a parallel development policy to facilitate housing cooperatives and other low-income housing projects. Through this policy, stand owners were allowed to build where there was no requisite infrastructure. The policy meant that infrastructure would be provided together with the construction of houses or after the construction of houses. The outcome of the policy was that houses were constructed without the infrastructure in the project areas. In essence, the policy contributed to the development of urban informal settlements (Takuva 2017). We see here that the political elite can subvert town planning in their contestation with the opposition for control of people. Partly because of neighbourhood health problems emanating from the lack of water and sanitation infrastructure, the government has since rescinded the

parallel development policy. Its legacy has been the continued construction of houses in the absence of infrastructure, even in some medium-income residential areas.

Decisions about marginalising and/or subverting the role of urban councils in housing delivery have benefitted the elite and to a small extent the poor. The creation of new urban informal settlements by aspiring or sitting members of parliament has been used for mobilising political support (Uchena 2019). At a broader scale, elites were found to have made political gains in the form of votes as well as those of an economic nature through elite accumulation (Matamanda et al. 2020: 703):

> Instead of being a survival strategy, the proliferation of informality emerges as a cartel that is operated by senior government officials who make large sums of money from this sector that are not taxed, and they find ways to avoid regulating to continue benefiting from the informality.

At a workshop on ‘Migrants on the Margins’, participants observed that politicians were happy with the set-up in Harare’s informal settlements of Hopley, Hatcliffe Extension, and Epworth Ward 7 because they manipulate it for political benefit (Development Governance Institute 2017). This as it may, the political elite had no final say, as the poor have been deploying human agency in ways that have helped them access land and mobilise for regularisation of their informal settlements, while evading payment of taxes and migrating in the city in the exercise of their power of entry and exit.

The weakening of state institutions such as urban councils through the introduction of parallel authority structures such as cooperatives, political parties, and land barons in housing delivery, aggravates the conditions of the urban poor. This weakening of urban councils has also been achieved through not making land available to them for urban development.

14.7 Lessons from the Study

The case of Hopley has shown that de facto ZANU–PF structures were in charge of the informal settlement. The ruling party effectively used its structures to marginalise the opposition-run City Council in urban development. Addressing a seminar organised by the Development Governance Institute (2017), the Mayor of Harare acknowledged that informal settlements were expanding because housing delivery was being done outside the City Council framework: “If it was Harare City Council, it would have been infrastructure development first before settling people”.

Party structures used cooperatives in housing delivery whereby access to housing entailed paying allegiance to the ruling party. When the government decided to regularise the informal settlement, this was done through a state corporation that again marginalised the City Council. The aim has been to give advantage to a ZANU–PF government at the expense of an MDC-led council. At the end of the day, the beneficiaries of the regularisation process would be grateful to ZANU–PF and see a reason to vote for them at the next elections.

Caledonia had more complex dimensions of an informal settlement in that two district administrators' offices, one in Mabvuku-Tafara and the other in Goromonzi district outside Harare, were used to marginalise the City of Harare in housing delivery. Cooperative leaders had powerful patrons based at the national level and, in essence, the informal settlement was managed through a shadow state that has maintained informality for electoral purposes. Enterprising cooperative leaders spearheaded the on-site establishment of informal settlements through the sale of state land. Fraudulent activities such as the sale of land by housing cooperative leaders and non-accountability for money paid by beneficiaries towards infrastructure and service provision, was tolerated as a way of incentivising party supporters (McGregor and Chatiza 2020). Thus, the informal settlements became a way of rewarding local political elites, such as cooperative leaders, through the collection of money from desperate home seekers, but the settlements were not recognised by the City of Harare. Hence, Caledonia was incorporated into Harare simply to create urban votes, but it had been part of the Goromonzi district.

Lot A of Victoria Ranch showed that political economy issues of informal settlements are not only confined to Harare. It added other dimensions in that for economic and political benefits the state could adopt policies such as parallel development that enabled informal settlement development. To this extent, the ruling party received donations drawn from monthly payments by beneficiaries towards the development of infrastructure (Takuva 2017).

From the three case studies, it is clear that the state in developing countries can be heterogeneous, contested, conflictual, and at cross-purposes with itself to an extent that can paralyse urban infrastructure and service delivery, leading to the development and persistence of informal settlements. At the bottom of the political contestations in Zimbabwe, has been the practice of exclusive politics. Contestation has existed between the central government and urban local authorities who were in most instances under MDC leadership. There has been contestation over urban votes and lucrative rentals arising from the sale of state land.

14.8 Conclusion

In recent years, Zimbabwe's informal settlements have been shaped by economic interests and political considerations of the ruling class but also by the government's failure to provide housing in urban areas. Political considerations have included the creation of urban informal settlements as a means of mobilising voters and regaining control of urban areas that, since 2000, had become opposition strongholds. This was achieved through practices of the radical elite who captured state institutions but also operated through parallel institutions such as ruling party structures and cooperatives and created anarchy in urban and peri-urban spaces to achieve their purposes. Power was used to deny MDC-controlled urban areas access to acquired peri-urban land, thereby contributing to the incapacitation of their operations.

The case studies have shown how financial contributions by beneficiaries were not channelled to the provision of infrastructure as intended but were diverted through political party structures and for private benefit. With the main economic beneficiaries being land barons and other elites, urban local authorities were denied an important source of revenue leading to the proliferation of informal settlements. The provision of housing through the ruling party-aligned cooperatives, made urban councils redundant in the delivery of the service. The crisis wrought by the Economic Structural Adjustment Programme left the government poorer and weakened with a much-reduced capacity to intervene in housing delivery. State institutions became more amenable to be captured by the ruling party. Capacity constraints explained the emergence of urban informal settlements and non-enforcement of regulations by the state. Tolerated lawlessness became a characteristic feature of the settlements.

What then emerges from this political economy analysis is that the government can use state land as a political resource in times of a political crisis. This can lead to the creation of informal settlements, given that such political challenges tend to be accompanied by economic crises that dry up resources of urban infrastructural development. In Asian, Latin American, and African countries, informal settlements persist because powerful actors, including the state, have over the years learnt to benefit financially through rent-seeking and politically through vote-buying. This has led some scholars and key informants to question whether the concerned governments have any motivation to eradicate urban informality (Deuskar 2019; Key informant, May 2000). When the government and the ruling party become the same thing, conflicts of interest arise. Instead of serving the people regardless of party affiliation, the government begins to serve the interests of the ruling party. State capture by the ruling political parties and elites therefore seems to fuel the emergence and proliferation of informal settlements. State and political structures thus need to be kept separate and independent if any permanent solution to informal settlements is to be found. Furthermore, part of the solution to informal settlements lies in addressing the political crises as history has shown that the economy has political foundations.

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Charles Chavunduka is a senior lecturer in the Department of Architecture and Real Estate, University of Zimbabwe. Dr Chavunduka holds the following qualifications: A doctorate in Development Planning from the University of Wisconsin-Madison, USA, a master's degree in Business Administration, an MSc in Regional and Urban Planning, and a BScHons in Geography, all from the University of Zimbabwe. He is a corporate member of both the Zimbabwe Institute of Regional and Urban Planners and the Royal Town Planning Institute. Before he joined the academia in 2016, he served as a planner in the public sector in Zimbabwe. His research interests are land reform, urban land management and policy, and decentralisation.

Marilyn Chaonwa-Gaza is currently a teaching assistant in the Department of Architecture and Real Estate at the University of Zimbabwe. She holds a Bachelor of Science and Master of Science in Rural and Urban Planning from the University of Zimbabwe. Her research interests include housing, informality, and land issues.