To Asphyxiate Informality or to Grow the Local Economy? Of the Novel Coronavirus, Clean-up Campaigns and the Future of Urban Planning in Zimbabwe

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Abstract

In this study, we employ the prebendal theory to examine the rationality of the decision by the officials in Harare, Zimbabwe, to implement 'clean-up' campaigns aimed at reorganising public spaces harbouring informal markets during the country's COVID-19 lockdown. We argue that the decision to implement the clean-up during the lockdown has deeper roots beyond the COVID-19 pandemic as the authorities simply use the pandemic as a scapegoat to eradicate the informal sector that for long has been considered as a nuisance in the city of Harare. The purpose is to demonstrate how difficult it is to do 'backdoor urban planning' by taking advantage of an event like the lockdown. Using a document review and interviewing, the article brings in critical insights and foresights involving the state having to fix the broader fundamentals in industrialisation, creating new avenues in investment and employment.

Keywords: *developmentalism, spatial reorganisation, safety, health promotion, urban policy*

INTRODUCTION

Coronavirus (COVID-19) originated from the Wuhan Province of China in December 2019. COVID-19 is the fifth pandemic in the last 20 years and the

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ninth pandemic in the last century. The virus spread across the globe, cementing itself as the world's most serious form of a respiratory infection since the 1918 Spanish flu pandemic (European Centre for Disease and Prevention and Control, 2020). The spread of the coronavirus has led to more than one million deaths as of 22 November, 2020, around the globe and the most affected countries being Italy, The United States of America, China, Spain and England. Cases are growing rapidly, increasing over tenfold and fatalities are rising too, making it crucial to implement global action and solidarity (United Nations, 2020). African countries have also implemented various disaster management and mitigation policies to minimise the spread of the virus in the region.

The quickest and most effective way that governments have managed to slow down the spread of the virus is implementing social-distancing policies and lockdowns (Smith, 2020). This has limited movement and interactions between people. The outbreak of the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) as a global pandemic, has resulted in multiple socio-economic implications, especially among urban communities in cities of the Global South. The responses initiated by governments have resulted in some alterations in the use, access and right to certain urban spaces, a situation that has significant consequences on the daily lives of the citizens. Urban informality has outgrown urban spatial organisation largely because of more pressing and complex factors summarised in two phenomenal terms: unemployment-cum-poverty and political tolerance-cum-patronage and clientelism. Critical effort has to be made in developing the local economy, first and foremost, largely for self-sustenance and then export of the surplus. Spatial planning becomes the essential mapping instrument for siting and locating plants for producing goods and services through indicative planning.

Since the COVID-19 was first diagnosed, it has spread to over 190 countries and all U.S. states. The pandemic is having a noticeable impact on global economic growth. Estimates so far indicate that the virus could trim global economic growth by as much as 2.0% per month if current conditions persist (Jackson *et al*, 2020). Zimbabwe's economy remains in a fragile state, with an unsustainably high external debt and massive de-industrialisation. The past decade has also seen the informal sector growing rapidly. The average GDP

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growth rate of 7.5% has been recorded during the economic rebound of 2009-12 (Kaseke, 2015).

Looking at the cholera outbreak of 2008, it was absurd that the diseases originated from three main locations in Zimbabwe: Chitungwiza, a dormitory town southeast of the capital, Harare, and Mola, in the district of Kariba, as well as Chinhoyi, in Mashonaland West Province (Chirisa *et al*, 2015). Numbers and human interactions were the problem and are still the achilles heel in this COVID-19 pandemic. Thus, it is impossible to separate urban areas and public health in disaster management and mitigation. Public health is a crucial and contemporary aspect, considering the urban drift that defines modern societies nowadays. These risks represent a main concern for the National Health Systems and, in general, for public institutions because of the large fraction of population potentially involved, the population density that characterises urban area changes, public health perspectives in terms of both issues and possible solutions (D'Alessandro, Arletti and Azara, 2017).

Mitigation measures are important because if disasters are not properly planned for, they have devastating effects on the contemporary development of a nation (Carter, 2008). Disaster impacts greatly on the business hub of many regions as they are the revenue-producing areas and drivers for infrastructural development. The known solutions to slow transmission of the coronavirus are physical distancing, self-isolation, contact tracing and quarantine. Disaster management strategies automatically take to these known solutions. COVID-19 response by the Zimbabwean government has forced people to live with less income (AFP, 2020). In Southern Africa, these integrated and coordinated disaster management mechanisms focus on preventing and reducing the outbreak of this virus. However, they do not minimise the grave impact that the virus as inflicted on the economy as by affecting the global economy. The African economy is also affected through spill overs to constituent countries (UN-HABITAT, 2020a; 2020b). The lockdowns are being implemented as a way to flatten the curve of infection. This has delayed the course and rate of spread of the virus in the country.

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A total lockdown in Zimbabwe was implemented on the 27th of March and was scheduled to end after 21 days (Muronzi, 2020). However, lack of a cure has been pushing the government to extend the lockdown. The lockdown has moved to Level 2 where formal businesses have been permitted to open, following strict health guidelines. These services included clothing retailers, food outlets, health practitioners and the Zimbabwe United Passengers Company (ZUPCO), a parastatal that is responsible for public transport services in Zimbabwe. Mandated health guidelines implemented by the government include social distancing, hand sanitisation as well as mandates to wear masks (*ibid.*) It was a bold move for African countries to have taken quarantine and lockdown measures to control the spread of COVID-19. Although this has come at a cost, such as the collapse of health systems and a painful economic recession, the restrictions on the use of public space, confinement and social distancing have been key policy measures to reduce transmission of SAR-CoV-2 and protect public health (Honey-Roses *et al*, 2020). More so, in Zimbabwe, the formal economy is the one that is taking the greater part of the government's attention and concern as they have not been any policies implemented to assist the informal sector to get back to business.

In a developing country, such as Zimbabwe that has most of its population surviving on the informal sector businesses, there is need to thoroughly think and implement policies that are sustainable for both formal and informal sectors. Lack of employment has been the most contributing factor that has paved way for the growth of the informal economy which constitutes over 90% of the Zimbabwean economy (Kamete, 2013; Hove, Ndawana and Ndemera, 2020). The major challenge with urbanisation in Harare clearly manifests in housing. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, the vibrant streets of Harare were once characterised by illegal street vendors selling different products, such as food, fruits, phone accessories and clothing (Hove, Ndawana and Ndemera, 2020). Informal workers are unable to undertake informal sector work due to lockdowns, causing a sharp decrease in the population's livelihoods. This means that people live off hand to mouth in order to sustain themselves (Mukora, 2020). Urban areas are thus characterised by street vendors, informal stalls and market places.

While the scale of the crisis cannot be precisely estimated yet, there seems to be a consensus as to expect more drastic repercussions than those of the 2008 financial crisis. To minimise the spread of the virus, the Harare City Council's top priority has been to reorganise the city through clean-ups. They have been seen to be conducting clean-up campaigns of the informal and illegal market stalls while people were at home (*Herald*, 2020) The perception is that space has to be redefined and reconfigured because it is through interaction that the virus spreads. Harare City Council's response to clear up the informal sector came as a surprise as it went against the 2020 World Health Organisation (WHO) and 2020 United Nations (UN) guidelines. However, it is not uncommon as demolitions and clean-ups of the informal sector have always happened in the past. Informality in Zimbabwe has always been taken as an urban problem as the local authorities have failed to effectively infuse the informal sector into the already made urban systems. This has pushed many clean-ups and demolition campaigns by many local authorities in the area (Musoni, 2010).

Prebendalism has been the major influence in government decision for decades in Zimbabwe. It is a mode of the neo-patrimonial politics that is prevalent in postcolonial Africa. Personalisation of power is a key component in these demolitions as they are no public consultations. There are a number of implications of the clean-up campaigns during epidemics. Looking at the Ebola virus in West Africa, poor conditions and lack of government resources led to epidemics spreading fast at a greater scale, especially in Africa as the greater number of the population largely depend on the informal economy (Coltart *et al*, 2017). Demolitions in Zimbabwe in the past have also been linked to conflicts between two major political parties, namely the Zimbabwe African National Unity–Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF) and the Movement for Democratic Change-Tsvangirai (MDC-T), as the latter having control over the local government in Harare. According to Hove *et al (*2020), the informal activities in the city, particularly the illegal street vending, has been linked to political and economic interaction. Informality has been seen as a failure of the opposition MDC by the ruling ZANU-PF to manage local governance. This brings up a question of whether the clean-ups were meant to genuinely

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protect the health of the populace or the COVID-19 was used as smokescreen to implement politically motivated clean-ups.

The informal sector is the one that suffers in the end as its practitioners are already vulnerable because they feed of human interaction, a system that has been distracted by the virus. Informality is rampant in developing countries (Loayza, 2018). In low- and middle-income countries, between 50 to 90% of total employment consists of informal labour. Informal workers lack benets such as unemployment insurance, health insurance and paid leave (FAO, 2020). Reorganising spatial space in the CBD by cleaning up market stalls is more detrimental to the livelihoods of the populace in Harare than the COVID-19 itself. As people cannot survive without food, they would rather work in a risky environment so as to provide for their families than to stay at home. These socio-economic impacts are not new and demolitions that occurred during Operation Murambatsvina of 2005 and the cholera outbreak of 2008 are a testament to the risk of clean-up campaigns that are unplanned and unsanctioned (Horn, 2019). They cause re-growth of unorganised informality in numbers and people would suffer, leading to a downturn in the economy. The local authority wins at the expense of the livelihoods of 80% of the population in Harare.

During the Ebola crisis in West Africa in 2014 and the cholera outbreak of 2018 in Harare, population movements between urban and rural areas and transnational movements potentially increased, as people sought to return to their areas of origin, looking for an informal safety net and/or out of fear (United Nations, 2015). Fast-forward to 2020, nationalities are highly exposed, not only to the health impacts of COVID-19, but also to the containment and mitigation measures to reduce the spread of the disease.

Most informal workers, especially the self-employed, depend on daily work to pay for their basic household necessities: if they cannot work for extended periods of time, their family's subsistence is at risk (Groenewald *et al*, 2013). This means that radical suppression policies, such as lengthy lockdowns, are unlikely to be enforceable in many developing countries, as people would rather work illegally than starve. Moreover, extensive informality labour

implies that relief and recovery policies aimed at formal labour (such as increasing unemployment insurance, reducing payroll and income taxes and extending paid sick leave) have very limited effects(Mhlanga and Ndhlovu, 2020). It cannot be denied that the strong relationship between the informal and formal economy often remains misunderstood and mitigation measures are often limited only to the formal sector (UN-HABITAT, 2020a). Therefore, the main aim of this article is to evaluate the grave impact of COVID-19 on the informal sector in Zimbabwe. The article aims to assess the rationality behind the clean-up campaigns conducted by the Harare City Council during the lockdown period. The article serves to highlight the difficulties and effects that back-door urban planning, without consultation with the public, has on the economy. It also questions the root intent and reasons for conducting clean-ups during the lockdown. The study questions whether the pandemic was used as a scapegoat to eradicate the informal sector that has been viewed for a long time as an unwanted nuisance in the city or whether it was a legitimate measure. Moreso, the article aims to explore binary perceptions between the formal and informal economy and their associated misconceptions in Zimbabwe. The article is structured as follows: introduction, literature review, methodology, results and analysis, discussion and conclusion.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Developmentalism is an economic theory that states that the easiest way for less developed economies to develop is through fostering a strong and varied internal market and imposing high tariffs on imported goods (Doucette and Park, 2018). One cannot begin to study the role of developmentalism without infusing the urban systems and urban processes hypothesis (Cypher, 2014). The core idea behind developmentalism is that the productive structure of a nation may be sub-optimal and may be improved with the help of active economic policy. Whether explicit or not, the concept is based on a notion that some economic activities are more conducive to growth and generalised welfare than others (Reinert, 2010). The main aim of developmentalism is increasing national wealth by building a diversified industrial structure where economic activities, with large potentials for technological upgrading, are subject to increasing returns (falling unit costs) and important synergies (linkages) between a large variety of economic activities play an important role

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(Doucette and Park, 2018). For instance, in Zimbabwe, after the industrial decline, the government started recognising the importance of small to medium enterprises (SMEs) as an economy booster. Small or medium enterprises are the non-subsidiary and self-governing firms that have a few employees. Despite all initiatives by many organisations, SMEs still lag behind in development and growth with many (85%) failing to survive beyond five years (Kaseke, 2015).

The economic policies that the Government of Zimbabwe has implemented over the years since independence have led to rapid urbanisation in the central business district (CBD) of Harare. These policies include the removal of some laws, such as the Urban Areas Registration Act of 1946, that had effectively racialised urban areas and the Vagrancy Act of 1960 that regulated the movement of Africans to cities (Hove, Ndawana and Ndemera, 2020). The Economic Structural Adjustment Programme (ESAP) and the Land Apportionment Act in the 1990s led to devastating effects to the country's economy, causing industrial decline. Thus, poverty crept in and affected mostly the informal settlers as in Harare's peripherals. This trail of events led to the birth of the informal sector in the city of Harare, leading to new spatial orders of the city. The philosophy of spatial reorganisation provides a new lens of looking into urban redevelopment within a developed area, planning being a central tool through which government manages spatially defined territories and populations (Song, 2016).

Spatial re-organisation can be identified as a process by which places adapt. The locational structure and the characteristics of their social, economic and political activities change in time-space connectivity, that is, the time required to travel between desired origins and destinations. This process leads to the centralisation and specialisation of secondary and tertiary economic activities in specific places and, as is frequently the case, to the specialisation of primary economic activities in the resource-oriented hinterlands of these places (Janelle, 1969). According to Song (2016), urban and planning literature has challenged dominant conceptions of urban informality as spatial categorisations and organisational forms associated with the urban poor and absence of capitalist development and state planning. The restructuring to overcome underdevelopment is based on a more comprehensive ordering than

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that afforded by markets and, such an ordering is possible only through planning (Cypher, 2014). There is need for the use of the mixed scanning and planning model in organising disaster management and spatial reorganisation in urban areas. This is because a mixed scanning-planning model tries to involve the strengths of the comprehensive rationality model and the incremental planning model (Dunn, 2017). Planning is important in spatial reorganisation as it assists in tackling existing and current problems by choosing the best sustainable course of action.

The COVID-19 crisis has clearly demonstrated the need for the achievement of universal health coverage (European Centre for Disease and Prevention and Control, 2020; Cassim, 2020; Mhlanga and Ndhlovu, 2020). In the face of the current pandemic, there has been numerous health policies implemented to minimise the spread of the virus. This has seen countries such as China, Italy, Spain and the United States of America utilising every available resource, including the use of security and military forces (Pisano, Sadun and Zanini, 2020; Jones and Kassam, 2020; Bouey, 2020). Increasingly, the world's ability to meet its health goals will depend on our success in improving the well-being of people living in cities. For the past 200 years, urbanisation, the concentration of people and resources in cities, has been a dominant influence on health (WHO, 1999; Leviton, Snell and McGinnis, 2000; D'Alessandro, Arletti and Azara, 2017; Chimusoro *et al*, 2018). The COVID-19 pandemic has also proved that numbers and concentrations are sometimes a threat to health. More recently, the urban sprawl approach has been developed to focus on the consequences of the diffusion of urban populations outside of central cities (Freudenberg, Galea and Vlahov 2005; Groenewald *et al*, 2013). To protect public health in the current pandemic, governments have implemented national lockdowns. National lockdowns, such as those in Rwanda, South Africa and Zimbabwe, and city lockdowns in Benin, Cote d'Ivoire, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ghana, Nigeria and Uganda, could prove disastrous, since informal traders provide the majority of food to Africa's urban poor. How food traders are managed could have substantial ripple effects on the nutrition and income prospects of many people across Africa.

In disaster management and mitigation, rational decisions are important in policy-making, thus irrational decisions are often nothing more than the rational application of unreasonable decision (Andrews, 2006). The desire to apply rationality to public decision-making is a modern desire, bundled with other tenets of modernity. A balanced perspective is of great value as an orderly, and logical process that assists in decision-making. It is perceived as a problem-solving process that adds value to policy-wqmaking (Carley, 1980). In disaster management, there is need for urban developers to explore indicative planning. Indicative planning is a form of economic planning implemented by a state in an effort to solve the role of imperfect information in market economies by coordination of public and private investment through forecasts and output targets (Alexander, 2010). It is a process where a target is set for growth of national output over a series of years. It is seen to improve the functionality of the market system. Unlike a centrally planned economy, indicative planning works through the market price system rather than replacing it (Klaus, 2020). Indicative planning is well suited for managing informality, especially in countries in the Global South.

The Global South is characterised by the hum and shouts of street vendors which is a vital part of the economic and social life of many cities and towns. Millions of households depend on the informal economy that unfolds in the public space (Honey-Roses et al, 2020). Zimbabwe has also experienced curtailments in dealing with the informal economy, especially in the provision of suitable housing (Chirisa et al, 2015). In managing informality strategic urban planning, urban regeneration has widened its approach, not only to give to cities a new and more competitive look, but also to boost cultural, economic and social aspects, taking into account environmental and spatial needs (D'Alessandro, Arletti and Azara, 2017). However, in many ways, urban planning and management systems in many countries in sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) betray a fixation with the quest for order (Kamete 2013), leading to the shunning of the informal sector, demolitions and clean-up campaigns. There are a number of forms of urban planning models that can be undertaken during times of pandemics. Some cities have already started

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closing roads so as to pave way for people to walk one metre apart. There is going to be real need for huge funding to invest in social housing so as to minimise the spread of the disease. Pandemics are cities' chances to reshape their environments (Ellis, 2020). However, is spatial reorganisation in the midst of life-threatening pandemic a good idea in developing countries who are already struggling economically?

PRE-BENDALISM AS A THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Pre-bendalism refers to political systems where elected officials and government workers feel that they have a right to a share of government revenues and use them to benefit their supporters, co-religionists and members of their ethnic groups (Suberu, 2013). In most African countries, pre-bendalism has been the core structure of many political and government systems. Pre-bendalism has also led to the infiltration of political patronage in government systems. Political patronage is the hiring of a person to a government post on the basis of partisan loyalty. Clientelism is a social order that depends on the relations of patronage. Clientelism has, nonetheless, been associated with a weak civil society. Patronage practices, thus, have long been important components of the politics of both developed and developing countries (Gordin, 2002). The hallmarks of neo-patrimonial politics in African states are the extreme personalisation of political power in the national head of government, the widespread use of state resources for patronage and clientelistic practices and systematic political corruption, all of which "coexist with and suffuse" the rational-legal institutions bequeathed to these countries by Western colonial [powers]'(Suberu, 2013).

The willingness to extend basic rights and civil liberties to persons and groups whose viewpoints differ from one's own (political patronage) is very limited in many countries on the African continent. This is the basis of weak government systems as political patronage is a central tenet of a liberal democracy (Gordin, 2002; McGregor and Chatiza, 2019). There appears to be the existence of income and wealth inequalities in Zimbabwe due to pre-bandalism. This could have caused a decline of the economy and livelihoods of 90% of the population and might have fuelled the increase of the informal economy in the state

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RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The article is a qualitative research, based on the review of primary and secondary data (cf. Bashir, Afzal and Azeem, 2008) in order to explore the informal and formal economy in Zimbabwe and to understand the Harare City's mitigation strategies in minimising the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic. The study made use of the case study research design, which is a research strategy that is based on an in-depth analysis of a case or an investigation of a specific phenomenon within its real life context (Creswell, 2014). The article chose Harare as a case as it is where demolitions and clean-ups of informal market stalls took place. The information presented in this article was obtained from key informant interviews and documentary review. Interviews were conducted with the current and former officials of the Harare City Council (coded in the results as HCO1-5), to get information on the reasons behind the demolitions of the informal market stalls and the local authority's strategies in minimising the spread of COVID-19 in the city. Respondents were asked two main questions: "What are your views on the current efforts by the local authorities cleaning up the cities and lockdowns during this lockdown?" and "How best should the process be done?" There were four ethical considerations that were considered during interviews. These include informed consent, voluntary participation, confidentiality and anonymity. The interview data were analysed using thematic analysis. Thematic analysis is the examination of data in order to identify common themes, topic or ideas. Collected data was organised and arranged into different themes that gave reasons for advantages or disadvantages and possible effects of the demolitions in Harare. To increase reliability and validity of the research, academic documents, including journals, books, newspapers and websites, were thoroughly reviewed.

RESULTS

It is of utmost importance to ensure that emergency economic policies adopted to keep the economy functioning are consistent with massive testing, physical distancing, isolation, health measures and caring for the isolated (Pisano, Sadun and Zanini, 2020). The Zimbabwean government has tried, to a larger extent, to minimise the spread of COVID-19 in the country through the implementation of lockdown measures, quarantines, monitored transport systems and business restrictions. These measures are, however, biased against

the informal sector. The informal sector has not yet been included in the economic policies towards the operation of the country in the middle of the pandemic. This has resulted in the informal sector feeling ignored as it is leading its practitioners into suffering and driving them into a chronic poverty trap. The Zimbabwean government appears to have taken a negative response to the informal sector in disaster management. They undertook demolitions of informal market stalls, as the destructions commenced in Mbare on Independence Day and spread to Highfield, Chitungwiza, Glen Norah, Glen View and Kambuzuma (Chekai, 2020). The Constitution of Zimbabwe has a number of provisions against arbitrary eviction and provision of adequate shelter and the standards against that administrative decision or conduct is to be censured (Chinopfukutwa, 2017). This might have made demolitions in the past to be difficult to implement. Now that a virus has emerged, Harare City Council's response is to demolish informal market stalls. Mukora (2020) states that the impact of the COVID-19 inspired five-week lockdown on the livelihoods of the vendors and informal traders is dire and that the demolitions of their workspaces will worsen it.

The first COVID-19 case in Harare was recorded on the 20 March 2020. As of 29 May 2020, there were 160 confirmed cases, 29 recoveries and four deaths. When the pandemic hit Zimbabwe, government took measures to implement disaster management policies through banning public gathering and closing schools. Restrictions on the use of public space, confinement and social distancing have been key policy measures to reduce transmission of SAR-CoV-2 and protect public health. Half of the population has been asked to stay at home or restrict movement in public (AFP, 2020). Most people complied with public health recommendations as evident in the striking images of empty city streets and parks, in the CBD of Harare. The informal sector was, however, restricted in operating due to health precautions, as most of them could not afford protective gear to wear so as to protect public health. The Government of Zimbabwe first declared COVID-19 as a national disaster on Friday 27 March 2020 (Muronzi, 2020). The nationwide lockdown was implemented on the 30 March for three weeks. The lockdown was then extended for another two weeks. On the 16 May the lockdown was slightly eased and extended indefinitely. However, it was eased for the formal sector while the rest of the population was ordered to stay at home. This was

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enforced with the help of the army and the police. The government also instituted screening checks based on WHO regulations, including thermal scans and review of travel history within the previous 14 days (*ibid.*)

Informal workers lacked benefits such as unemployment insurance, health insurance and paid leave. They were highly exposed, not only to the health impact of COVID-19, but also to the containment and mitigation measures to reduce the spread of the disease. Already, the informal sector was at a disadvantage and they needed help. The first demolitions were undertaken by Ruwa Local Board when the government announced the 21 days of national lockdown. In this case, the local board took the chance to demolish illegal buildings and stalls that were previously occupied by vendors before the lockdown (Ndoro, 2020). This initiative did not go well with the citizens and victims as indicated from the following messages posted on social media:

> This is so wrong. Why wait when there is such a crisis? Inhumane. Some people must be charged for excessive human rights abuses. Cruel cruel cruel. The board must pay for these sins against humanity. Witchcraft! *Kutowana* diesel *rekunopwanya zvinhu zvevanhu variku* suffer instead *dai ratobatsira # COVID19 zvimwe zvoda kufunga amana* (The City council found diesel to go and demolition market stalls in different areas in Harare instead of using the funds to assist the fight against COVID-19, some issues need people to evaluate first before they act).[4]

Likewise, the City of Harare went on to demolish stalls in Mbare and other suburbs in Harare. Ironically, these demolitions were undertaken on 18 April, that happens to be the country's Independence Day (Mukora, 2020). The demolitions were identified as a clean-up exercise meant to sanitise the areas where vendors operate from, especially Mbare. However, vendors affected by this move lamented that this initiative was not just about containing COVID-19, but was a way of sanctioning the informal sector (Matendere and Chikandiwa, 2020). Therefore, the vendors and other citizens have gone on to criticise the authorities for their lack of sympathy for the urban poor as some have described the council as having 'shown a high level of insensitivity to the

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[4] https://iharare.com/ruwa-takes-advantage-of-lockdown-to-demolish-illegal-buildings/

plight of the informal traders' (Matendere and Chakandiwa, 2020:2). The Zimbabwe Human Rights Association lamented that the state has shown indifferent leadership by kicking out the vendors when they are supposed to give them a helping hand. The statement from the association read: "At a time when Zimbabwe expects compassionate leadership in the face of the devastating effect of COVID-19 measures on suffering Zimbabweans, the Zimbabwean state has decided to inflict injury on its people."

These measures by policy-makers do not help the informal sector during a pandemic. Zimbabwe cannot afford to give out grants or incentives to their citizens and that makes disaster management planning more crucial for the economy. This is supported by Muronzi (2020) when he states that Zimbabwe is already facing economic challenges, such as low financial backups to pay doctors and acute water shortages in areas such as Chitungwiza.

Most informal workers, especially the self-employed, depend on daily work to pay for their basic household necessities. If they cannot work for extended periods of time, their family's subsistence is at risk. According to Matenderere and Chikandiwa (2020), a vendor whose stall was destroyed stated that life will increasingly become difficult for the informal traders after the lockdown. This means that radical suppression policies, such as lengthy lockdowns are unlikely to be enforceable in many developing countries, as people would rather work illegally than starve. Moreover, extensive labour informality implies that relief and recovery policies aimed at formal labour (such as increasing unemployment insurance, reducing payroll and income taxes and extending paid sick leave) have very limited effects (Honey-Roses *et al,* 2020).

Both the COVID-19 crisis and the already unfolding effects of climate change, demonstrate the fragility of our current economic and social arrangements. Our systems cannot cope under the strain of these events, from climate to pandemics and experts predict that these events will become more frequent and severe. And when these events unfold, our economic and social systems appear to protect the adequate living conditions, mainly of the elite, while the majority of people are pushed into more precarious living conditions, from

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increased poverty, poorer health, precarious livelihoods and actual destitution, all of which make people much more vulnerable to mortality when disaster strikes.

Planning for the informal sector has been difficult in many African countries such as Zimbabwe due to the fact that there has not been any extension of this infrastructure to cater for the rapid increase in population (Chirisa *et al*, 2015). The pandemic is likely to push street vendors and other informal workers into a long-term economic recession. Those tasked with governing SSA's growing cities are obsessed with ideals of order, orderliness and conformity that are characteristic of modernity. Having modelled their urban planning systems and practices on those of the former colonial masters, many authorities have sought to impose them post-independence (Kamete, 2013). Harare City Council has implemented clean-up campaigns under lockdown because they would not face any resistance due to people being stuck at home.

Many vendors have questioned why their structures were deemed illegal, yet the city council has been collecting rents from them for the last 10 years (Kulkarni, 2020). It shows that the management and planning system is disorganised and chaotic. This brings into question whether policy-makers were responsible for decisions to demolish houses or whether there was a hidden political agenda. However, Kulkarni (*ibid.*) further explains that vendors were told that space barons and slum landlords were the ones collecting money from them as rents and duping them. This highlights the lack of attention that the informal sector has been getting from the local authority. Unlawful systems have flourished and have been present for years. Some of these activities were unknown by local planners and authorities. Demolitions by the Harare City Council still goes against the 2020 World Health Organisation (WHO) mandates. WHO mandated governments to protect the minorities and disadvantaged communities in the face of the pandemic, as they are the most vulnerable group. Demolition of people's only source of income is tantamount to making them more vulnerable to aggravating poverty. The opening up of the formal sector over the informal sector has also caused huge uncertainties for the latter. The formal sector may

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sustain the country for a short while, but the economy is likely to go into a much worse recession than the 2008 crisis as it sustains most income from the informal sector.

RATIONALITY AND REGULATIONS BEHIND THE CLEAN-UP CAMPAIGN

The COVID-19 dilemma is complex and poorly documented, with little information to understand its true dimensions. As a result, it may be impossible to regulate or improve the economic situation for such vulnerable informal workers, even after the pandemic mandates have been lifted (Honey-Roses *et al*, 2020), especially in cities in the Global South such as Harare. The Harare City Council has conducted demolitions and clean-up campaigns of the informal sector as a solution for the city during the COVID-19 pandemic. The respondents from Harare Town Planning Office will be referred to as HCO to maintain privacy and anonymity and numbered to differentiate their views.

According to HCO4, the main reason for this clean-up was that "cities and towns have not received such thorough attention for a very long time". This view is supported by the Food Agriculture Organisation (FAO, 2020), when it states that there has been a neglect of infrastructure assets in recent years, coupled with changes in technology and the regulatory environment. Therefore, the view is that the City of Harare has been neglected for a while, causing many problems that were brought mainly by the informal sector. On the other hand, a planning expert stated that:

> Cleaning of cities and towns is an ongoing process that local authorities are mandated to do every time through laws, such as the Urban Councils Act, Rural District Councils Act and the RTCP Act. Hence, the cleaning of cities during the COVID-19 lockdown is essentially a critical service being offered by local authorities just as in any other day.

This shows that clean-ups, demolitions and evictions are regulated in Zimbabwe. The evictions and demolitions of houses and market stalls are set under Zimbabwe's national laws, including section 32 of the Regional, Town Country Planning Act (RTCPA). Regularisations of the informal settlements have been done under section 8 of the RTCPA. This is further supported by Mukora (2020:1) who states that:

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It is not clear whether the demolitions are an enforcement of Section 8 (1) (l) of Statutory Instrument 77 of 2020, gazetted on 23rd March, empowering government to authorise the evacuation, closing, alteration or demolition of any premises whose occupation or use is deemed likely to aid the spread or render more difficult the eradication of COVID-19. Nor has it been clarified if this is compliance with the Ministry of Local Government and National Housing's 8 April directive to local authorities to implement a Cabinet resolution to clean up and renovate work spaces used by SMEs and informal traders during the lockdown period.

The city planner from Harare argued that, "There is need for cities to restore sanity and the rule that if we are to achieve world-class city status like Dubai and London, we have to take action now." This shows that for a long time, the informal sector had infiltrated the streets of Harare, ignoring the rules and regulations that guide the operations of the city. The city planner further stated that:

"the infiltration of the informal sector has been a major cause for deterioration of the city to levels where infectious diseases, such as cholera, typhoid and dysentery are now an annual occurrence. These diseases are associated with overcrowding and uncleanliness which is the main characteristic of the legal and illegal informal markets."

The rationality towards city clean-ups amidst the Coronavirus has been seen as the only way that the city council could conduct this exercise without disturbances. This is supported by the planning expert when he states that;

"taking advantage of the lockdown to clean the city is a good endeavour to clear accumulated refuse in public spaces and setting up a city or town standard for cleanliness. This is because empty streets are an opportune condition to focus on the CBD and if the city council can maintain the level of cleanliness achieved during this lockdown."

She was also in support of this notion as she claiming that "the burden of cleaning up empty streets would not be too much as compared to tidying up packed streets".   However, scholars such as Kamete (2013) argue that Zimbabwe is an extreme case in terms of the scale, pace and viciousness of

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some of the campaigns, such as Operation *Murambatsvina*/Restore Order. The equating of informality with illegality is an unfortunate issue.

The other reasons that the City of Harare considered to undertake the clean-ups were clearly articulated by the City Planner, when she depicted that clean-up exercises are essential as cities were no longer able to get revenue from their land and social facilities had deteriorated to a state of disorderliness. She stated that the city council has not been receiving about 90% of the funds it is supposed to get as the informal sector had not been paying taxes to the local authority. She also expressed that the reasons for low revenues in the city council were caused by illegal structures. Unlawful informal activities have invaded frontages of official businesses and this has affected their market performance as they can no longer pay for rates and services. Thus city councils were no longer in control. She went on to say that:

> The chaos and disorderliness are just a breeding ground for corruption, kickbacks and crimes as space barons and thugs have taken over all lucrative city markets and home industries, for instance in Glen View Complex. These areas were no go areas for Council because of Chipangano thugs. The clean-up is helping cities with the assistance of government to take back their operations and be in control. City council wants to clean up and construct state of the art markets that enable the cities to be in control. Hence this brings orderliness and causes informal traders to contribute for infrastructure development, thereby eliminating corruption and increasing revenue collection. Our informal sector, in my view, always shoots itself in the foot. They are not capable of organising themselves and they are not able to collectively invest in developing their trading areas to develop good state of the art structures. They use all types of junk materials to construct their structures.

One cannot dispute that these sentiments by the respondent are valid and justified. However, they are many small informal traders who sustain themselves only through hand to mouth. Informality is especially widespread in the agriculture and rural sectors, where more than 80% of people are self-employed. The majority of wage workers and the totality of contributing family workers (most among them women) represent the informal sector

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(FAO, 2020). The main question that arises from this philosophy, however, is how are they going to sustain their livelihoods as Kamete (2013) estimates that at least 80% of the Zimbabwean economy is made up of the informal sector? HCO5 exclaimed that "there is a big problem with cleaning up in this country as it is synonymous with destroying. I'd support a clean-up if only it doesn't destroy livelihoods without replacement". The disadvantages of this clean-up are seen to gravely affect the socio-economic lives of the majority living in the city. The planning official went on to fully elaborate on the informal sector's concerns when revealing that:

> City cleaning involves demolishing all illegal developments. The major concern from this is that some demolitions greatly affect residents, especially during this trauma of COVID-19. I am of the view that it was supposed to be done under circumstances where people will be able to find other alternatives and establish new livelihoods. At the moment, several sources of income have been crippled. Therefore, the cleaning process painted an evil face of the council to the general public. They are assuming that council does not care at all and its officials are taking advantage of the pandemic. However, this was the only option council was left with. It has been trying to deal with informality for a long time, but to no avail due to the general resistance of the public and political interference. Right now, whilst everyone is afraid of going out, this was the best time to take these drastic measures. Later on, the council should ensure that there are proper ways of blending informality and the formal business in the towns and cities. Order and sanity must be the norm from now onwards, even after the lockdown.

These sentiments were also supported by the city planner when she postulated that, "There seems to be no national consensus on these issues, mainly because we are all politically polarised." Therefore, it cannot be disputed that political issues also play a role in the demolitions of the informal market stalls. HCO2 also highlighted that demolition of the informal sector may also have detrimental effects on workers, such as those that work with sweeping trucks as it will mean to say many workers are going to be laid down.

Zimbabwe is one of the countries whose household-level food system is sustained by the activities of subsistence smallholders (Mhlanga and Ndhlovu,

2020). These smallholder farmers often find their markets from the informal sector. If demolitions are causing livelihoods to diminish, especially in the middle of the ongoing pandemic, it is important to create mitigating policies. HCO3 suggested that, "Cleaning of cities and towns should be an ongoing process. It is an effective and efficient way to be implemented always, regardless of conditions in the city," adding that clean-up campaigns, as a cyclical process, will involve citizen participation and consultation and it might give the citizens time to prepare and adjust.

During an interview, an urban planning expert, practising in Harare opined that,

> "there is need to consider livelihoods. The Smith Government maintained a very clean Harare but the majority (blacks) were not part of the set up, so we would not appreciate it. This then calls for cities to be inclusive and our aspirations should take into consideration our socioeconomic reality. So, when we cannot provide decent shelters for low-income traders, let's not celebrate the destruction of shelters they have constructed for themselves."

According to HCO1, the Harare City Council has been conducting mitigation measures for this clean-up through "the acceleration and completion of sites being developed in areas such as Coca Cola and Shawasha Grounds, in Mbare. HCO1 added that it was scheduled in time for informal traders to occupy these sites when the economy became fully opened, also stating that "if the informal sector agrees to be regulated and agrees to pay small amounts for proper development and orderliness of their trading, it will go a long way in bringing better aesthetics to our cities". However, the informal sector has a history of multiplying in numbers after clean-up campaigns. This might pose a danger for that this clean-up as the informal sector in the past has refused to relocate to designated informal market stalls. The article thus questions whether clean-up campaigns were a good strategy for the Harare City Council's resources.

DISCUSSION

Cities well-known for their active street life, such as New York, Rome or Barcelona, now appear ghostly as inhabitants stay home for the collective public good (Honey-Roses *et al*, 2020). This is the same with the streets in

Harare's CBD. The lockdown regulations imposed by government, with guidelines from WHO, has forced the greater fraction of the city's population to stay at home. The only sectors allowed to go to work were the formal sectors as they constituted most of the essential service sectors. The COVID-19 pandemic hit almost all African countries and appeared poised to worsen dramatically. In Zimbabwe, the main sector greatly hit was the informal sector. The disruption of the world economy through broken global value chains, the abrupt falling commodity prices and fiscal revenues and the enforcement of travel and social restrictions in many African countries, were the main causes of negative growth (African Union, 2020).

The COVID-19 pandemic is a shock calling to rethink the economic, financial and social system as people seek to reduce inequalities among and within countries, and between men and women (Loayza and Pennings, 2020; cf. African Development Bank, 2011). The pandemic has reduced the ability of people to work and the capacity of firms to produce as it lowered the incentives and possibility for people to consume and for firms to invest (*ibid.*). There is need for the City of Harare to undertake indicative planning that would help boost the economy in the midst of this disaster. Evidence showed that the city was partaking spatial re-organisation by removing of the informal sector through demolitions. It is evident that workers in the informal sector survived from hand to mouth, thus demolitions were disrupting their source of livelihood. This questions the intentions of the city council. If the demolitions were not benefiting the greater part of the city's population, then what was the key reason of implementing the clean-up campaign?

The pre-bendal theory suggests that reasons behind certain decisions in government are for political advantages. According to Hove, Ndawana and Ndemera (2020), political parties have been courting street vendors' support so that in turn, they influenced the vendors to participate in unique and threatening protests. COVID-19 might be a smokescreen to minimise political interference, suppress protests and subdue resistance in the CBD of Harare. Despite illegal street vendors being a high risk of causing an alarming spread of COVID-19 and other diseases like cholera, there is need to take the opportunity that is presented by the Coronavirus to find ways to incorporate the informal economy into the urban system, rather than trying to get rid of

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them as this leads the poor to be disadvantaged since they are the ones who suffer the most. Moreso, the actions conducted by the city council have reflected the existence and prevalence of pre-bendalism, clientielism and corruption in Zimbabwe's economy. As mentioned before, pre-bendalism appears to be the major influence in government decisions for decades in Zimbabwe. Personalisation of power is a key component in these demolitions, as there were no public consultations conducted by authorities. Even organisations that stand for human rights were never consulted about the decision to demolition informal infrastructure. Despite validity of the reasons justifying the need for demolitions of illegal and informal market stalls in the city of Harare, this can be regarded as a violation of human rights (Chirisa *et al*, 2015). It undermined the country's liberal democracy. If vendors were affiliated to the ruling party, the government would have undoubtedly protected their rights as they stand for their interests. However, the fact that most vendors in the streets were affiliated to the MDC opposition party as shown by urban voting patterns since 2000, demolitions of their market stalls becomes a controversial political issue (Hove, Ndawana and Ndemera, 2020).

To add on, most women were engaged in the informal sector and were hardest hit economically by COVID-19 (UN-HABITAT, 2020b). Therefore, woman-headed families were more vulnerable to economic hardships. Destruction of the only source of livelihood in the informal sector by the Local Authorities may also lead to higher levels of poverty, prostitution, crime and deaths. It could result in political unrest, civil wars and stagnant development growth. There is need to look into the social impacts of a decision before policies are implemented. This is supported by Chirisa *et al,* (2015) when they state that there should be continued efforts to fight pandemics from a human rights based approach, mitigating the consequences of any potential lockdowns and restrictions that are put in place to combat the pandemic as this causes adverse human rights violation. Countries need to come up with measures to help sustain informal workers. Making rational decisions about the informal sector is prerogative, due to it being the bigger fraction of the economy. This evidence shows that there is an urgent need to plan for the informal sector and infuse them in the mainstream local economy.

CONCLUSION

The situation in Zimbabwe resembles that of many countries in SSA which are experiencing increasing conflict and instability after rising debt levels and introduction of structural adjustment and governance conditions. Stringent conditions have weakened the national economy and narrowed state capacities and political freedoms. This has resulted in the lack of preparedness for a disaster that has hit the world on a global scale. The COVID-19 pandemic has caused a huge recession on the global economy. Even though African countries were relatively less affected in terms of infections and mortality as compared to other regions, the spillover economic effects from global developments or broken supply chain networks, have led to faltering economic activity. There is a need to come up with rational decisions that support and maintain the livelihoods of the people. However, demolitions of informal market stalls go against human development. Taking an example of the 2008 cholera outbreak, demolitions worsened the spread of the disease. This weakened public health as poor municipal services made the provision of safe water, sanitation and waste disposal difficult. There is a need for a coordinated and bold response by African authorities (Honey-Roses *et al*, 2020). Good governance and multi-stakeholder resource planning are vital in order to promote cross-sectoral and cross-departmental approaches to planning and working with stakeholders at different levels so as to improve public sector-led governance, planning and efficient information flows.

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