Communicating with the Citizens on Pertinent Urban Planning Issues in Zimbabwe: Problem and Prospects for Building Resilience

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Abstract

The article seeks to discuss the communication between the local authorities and the citizens on urban planning issues. These issues include demolition of illegal structures, building on wetlands and pollution. The article also explains the mechanismsthat are being used for the transmission of information. Lack of communication in urban planning issues has destroyed houses, breaking the laws and construction on wetlands, street vending and environmental destruction. Communication with citizens on relevant urban planning matters enablesurban areas to recover from difficult experiences. This is because, in the process of communication, citizens become increasingly aware of the positive and negative impact of their actions on the urban environment. Efficient communication with the symbols, signs and text that is understood by citizens is encouraged. Communication is the solution to the destruction of houses, pollution and wetland construction thatseems to be ignored by citizens. Despite many studies that were made on urban planning issues, there is a gap in understanding how proper ways of communicating with citizens on pertinent issues in urban planning enables resilience.

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INTRODUCTION

There are many problems that citizens appear not to be well-informed of in the urban planning fieldin Zimbabwe. Urban planning has a great impact on living conditions of the country's inhabitants. Urban areasare facing more problems everyday. These include demolition of houses, building on wetlands unknowingly, breaking the laws,residents losing large sums of money to land barons, street vending, floods and suffering from the impact of pollution. Some of the problems could be avoided if more knowledge is provided to the city inhabitants. Unfortunately, most of citizens are less informed of the problems, hence their actions to the environment that they live in have no rational thinking. This calls for proper communication with citizens on pertinent urban planning issues, such as building restriction, impact and penalties on building wetlands and pollution in Zimbabwe. There is need for proper methods to be deployed in the transmission of the information from local authorities to citizens. Many efforts were made in a bid to address problems faced by citizens,including the banning of housing cooperatives, prosecution of land barons and removal of corrupt members in councils. Despite all these efforts, much is required to create cities where all citizens are aware of relevant urban planning issues.

To address problems, such as demolition of houses, communication with the citizens informing them about where their suffering is emanating from is important. The information should be to reach all the groups despite their differences.Channels of communication must be accessible to everyone. There should be use of different languages to accommodate all the different groups. All public notices concerning urban planning issues should be simple and easy to understand. Variousforms of communication should be adopted to accommodate people of various financial statuses. By doing so, all the people will access information concerning urban issues, including the building regulations.

Communication is a process of transmitting information and common understanding from local authorities to the residents. It is the action by which councils convey meanings of relevant issues to citizens. This is done through the use of signs, symbols and semiotic rules (Fatimayin, 2018). Communication is the process by which people interactively create, sustain their lives within their communities. This means communication enables the council to create and manage the city's well-being. Information concerningbuilding restrictions, pollution and land barons should be passed from urban authorities to citizens effectively. Urban planning is the study of the built environment of a city, town or other urban areas (Graffikin, 2011). Its focal point is the physical arrangements, economic functions and social impacts of the urban environment and location of different activities within it. Resilience is the capacity to recover from difficult life events. Enhanced communication with citizens in the country's urban planning issues ensures resilience. Urban citiescan recover from the harm and costs experienced in past years. The cities will become better places to live if the inhabitants know how to minimise their ecological footprint on the environment.

This article seeks to explain communication with the citizens on urban planning issues and examine the mechanismsthat are used during the process. The study will be guided by theories around communication with people. Various sources were used to acquire data from studies that were already done onurban planning issues. Information in this article was derived from secondary sources and it is desktop research. Several measures are to be made towards efficient communication to citizens at different levels in Zimbabwe. It is crucial to understand that council-citizen communication is a way of sustainability promoting resilience. This means that problems addressed through communication with the current generation should recur in the future. Local powers need to appreciate that creating a relationship with citizens,reduces the cat and mouse relationship. This can only be achieved through interaction between stakeholders, mostly residents and urban local authorities. Mechanisms of communication should also be considered to create efficient use. Communication must be a two-way style, simple and clarified, often accessible to everyone, passed to the right people and at the right time. Therefore, there is need to understand the concept of

communication. This a way that reduces the urban miseries. Recommendations are that the councils should improvetheir ways of communication with citizens.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Communication is transferring information from councils to the citizens and vice versa. The information concerns urban planning matters. These include preservation of wetlands, pollution and its impact, land acquisition procedures and effects of building on unpermitted land. Communication between council and citizens is significant in reducing problems, such as floods, informality and homelessness. Effective communication is a two-way process. That is, the council can pass information to citizens whilst citizens are also able to communicate back. Communication allows a process of transmitting information and common understanding from local authorities to residents (Fatimayin, 2018). The channels used for communication are different but must be, clear and simple and every citizen can access them. The information is passed on in different languages to accommodate different groups. Lack of effective communication results in problems within Zimbabwean urban areas.

Urban resilience is the ability of urban systems and their inhabitants to recover from human-made hazards and return to acceptable performance. Resilient cities can handle this human-made disaster (Jorge *et al,* 2019). Cities can protect the life of their inhabitants by promoting inclusiveness and well-being. Urban resilience is enhanced through interaction between councils and their citizens. The councils can educate and create public awareness through communication with citizens. Residents become aware of the consequences of constructing on wetlands, pollution and construction of structures without permission from the council. Improving communication with citizens enables the residents to be aware of the effects of their actions on the environment. As a result, all their activities in the environment will be backed by rational reasoning. Mechanisms that enable information to reach the targeted group from councils without barriers which include language, poverty and geographical location, enables citizens to become more resilient.

Communication between councils and citizens enables cities and their inhabitants to recover back from human-made disasters (*ibid.*).

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Communicative Action Theory which was propounded by Habermas (1981), emphasises that planning is widespread sharing of information with the public and reaching consensus. This is done through public dialogue, rather than imposition. The theory avoids the privileging of experts and bureaucrats, replacing itwith one of reflective planning. Communicative action is an individual activitydesigned to promote common understanding and cooperation in a group (Habermas, 1987). Most of urban planning issues, such as the stand acquisition process, legal settlements and wetlands preservation, are not well-known to the public. Communicating with the citizens on these issues will enhance understanding and cooperation. This will enablefinding solutions to the problems ofhomelessness, wetlands occupation, land barons, informality and infrastructure dilapidation faced by the country and build resilience in urban cities in Zimbabwe.

The theory states that language is a medium of communication within cities. The council should take into consideration the use of different languages in Zimbabwe, including all the 16 languages used in Zimbabwe. This enables all the citizens to view notices and proposals that pertain to development affecting them .Citizens exercise their right to speak their minds In the process, they air their grievances to the local authorities and how they would want the problems to be solved. The solutions given become sustainable and enablethe city to recover from damages since there is a common understanding and cooperation on both sides.

Visions of the cities are shared and discussed by all citizens. For instance, the vision of Harare City Council is "to achieve a world-class city status by the year 2025" (*New Zimbabwe*, 2019). It should be shared and discussed with the citizens,and not imposed. This promotes public participation in a goal to achieve world-class city status. Citizens have the right to air their views on the visions proposed. The communication should take note of

the differences that exist between the stakeholders. The differences may be in language, location, knowledge and financial status. Communication takes place when everyone participates in the discussion. Every citizen in the country can problematise and introduce new affirmations, express their needs, desires and convictions (Habermas, 1987). Councils should do more communicative planning that is a better approach to urban planning. The councils meet the public and engage them in a process of making decisions together concerningeveryone. The council could meet and communicate with citizens through different channels, such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, online news, WhatsApp, webpages, newspapers, community meetings, radio and television. The use of various mechanisms in communication ensures that the information reaches every citizen despite their differences.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Globally, inhabitants of urban areas are exposed to great danger. Thedangers include the demolition of houses,disturbance of wetlands, land barons, losing huge sums of money, natural disasters and pollution. In this era where internet access is increasing, resources are devoted to new technologies in the search for meaningful citizen engagement in urban issues. This is through the use of social media and mobile communication technologies that has grown rapidly over the past 10 years and has facilitated a constant increase in the number of virtual networks (Brooks, 2018). The popularity of Facebook, Twitter, Google, Instagram, YouTube, BlogSpot and other social media, has spurred a demand for new forms of participatory planning and self governance by citizens. Citizenshave been interestedin using social media tools to engage with city planners. Well known social media platforms are easily accessible from smartphones than from traditional desktops as many people have 24/7 access to smartphones. These includeWhatsApp, Facebook andTwitter. This portability is a major advantage as it removes barriers of access whenever anything new from the local authority is released.

In California, citizens in Monterey are encouraged to collaborate with the councils in decision-making and bringing new ideas to city management.

The participation enables efficient delivery of the exact required services, such as the efficient distribution of land, road maintenance, garbage collection and water supply (City of Monterey, 2021). The citizens are encouraged to make useofexisting communication ways. The council provides the citizens with a toll-free number. This is the free number they can use to communicate with council. The citizens are allowed to report any incident relating to council. Reactions from the inhabitants, on the council proposals are given through the neighbourhood emails. For instance, when council proposed the renovations of Monterey Park (Taylor, 2020). Some of the city council programmes are broadcast on Monterey TV channels and city websites. On the programmes, there is the provision of a comment section where the citizens air their views concerning city issues. This promotes inclusive, balanced and fairness to all the people within the city.

In Spain, Barcelona City Council makes use of various communication channels available to city residents. The communication channels include Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube and telephone. Through these channels residents can consult, report incidents or complaints to the council and receive information on the city. In these pages, different communication channels are found (Barcelona City Council, 2017). This provides residents with a chance to choose the channel they prefer for communication. The council assists city residents mostly through the free telephone helpline. This interaction process creates a friendly relationship between councils and their residents.

Riihimaki is a municipality located in the North of Helsinki in Finland. The municipality adopted a virtual assistant known as Municipality Kate. It helps citizens with most of the municipality's service portfolio. It covers more than 1200 topics through an omnichannel experience, using natural language processing to understand the questions of the citizens (Wejnold, 2019). This enables the Town Council to interact with the citizens as at all times. The virtual assistant assists the residents to engage and conduct business with the municipality in a quicker way, providing convenience (*ibid.*). Finnish municipalities havewebsites.In addition to that, there are several regional and neighbourhood digital networks, such as Facebook and Twitter. The creation of Facebook, websites and, online applications

enablespeople to log in to check on the notices passed from the municipalities. This has significantly contributed to the participation of people in the city planning programmes.Responses from citizens enable them to participate in the planning issues. The creation of a digital neighbourhood forum called the Home Street has been of great importance. The neighbourhood forum is multidimensional internet-based in the sense that it enables local communication, learning and planning. It provides newopportunities for dialogue and action between residents, business people and authorities. The digital forum aims to strengthen the identity of the neighbourhood, andunderpin the existing social and economic capacity in the communities.

African urban councils at times communicate with the citizens during town meetings in small communities. This is where some notices are given to society. The notices include the restrictions of informal settlement. In Masindi District in Uganda, urban planning issues, such as information concerning the developments of roads and issuing of land,are communicated through newspapers. Dickson (2018) observes thatadverts and notices to the public are passed through newspapers. Information communicated in this way, not to reach most of the citizens. As a result,they face problems of land barons (Masindi District Local Government Communication Strategy, 2013). The Municipal Council of Windhoek and the Rundu Town Council in Namibia use the Facebook platform in communicating with their citizens. These councils post planning issues affecting the area.Citizens are given the chance to comment on the page. This enables citizens to be aware of what is taking place within the area.

Iringa Municipal Council in Tanzania discovered that communication with the citizens is very important. The interaction between the council and its residents resolves the conflicts that exist between the local authorities and the people. This encourages urban local authorities to interact with the inhabitants. In South Africa, effective communication between the government and the citizens is a key component of democracy (Chingwete, 2016). Different communication channels address the diversity of populations in the country. The main concern in South Africa is to ensure that government reaches the citizens concerning

city planning subjects. The South African government provides a broad range of channels and technologies through which citizens can access information. For instance, (municipal offices, *imbizos,* mass media, television and radio). Chingwete (*ibid.*) observes that urban communications are at times accessed through social media platforms, like Twitter to mobile applications, such as the product launched in 2014 by Johannesburg Road Agency for trafficnotices and alerts. Most of the people in Gauteng accessed information through television and radios.

In Zimbabwe, urban areas have been facing various challenges concerning planning issues. The citizens are suffering from problems which could have been avoided had the planning issues been communicated to them. Some of the restrictions and penalties, such as the demolition of houses, become known to the citizens only at the last minute and yet they are the ones affected. Lack of government-to-citizen communication has resulted in many problems in the city. Most of citizens are not able to access information on important urban planning issues. Council of Gweru communicated with its residents through newspapers. Gweru City Council (2020) staff report stated that the Gweru Residents Forum (GRF) created a digital engagement platform. The mobile G-City application to enhances communication and service delivery. The channels of communication, to some extent, accessible by the citizens, are radio and newspapers.

The world is faced with numerous problems, such as pollution, floods, informality and destruction of wetlands. These urban problems are a result of a lack of communication between councils and citizens. Some of these problems include demolition of houses, pollution, environmental destruction, land barons, street vending and informality. This is because some of the citizens become aware of the relevant urban issues only when they are affecting them. They appear not to be aware of the urban planning by-laws.

The City of Austin, located in Texas, faced challenges of the proliferation of informality. Citizens appeared not to know the building laws. The use of the internet allowed urban local authorities to engage with citizensand inform them on the building laws (Firmstone, 2015). The City of Austin

developed a website known as SpeakUpAustin to strengthen communication with the citizens. The platform enables communication between the citizens and the city staff members. Urban planning authorities make information more accessible, increasing the convenience of participation and improving government's transparency.In the process of council-citizen communication, citizens became aware of the building laws and the penalties given if the laws are broken. The updates on the developments that occur within Austin are accessible on the website. Communication with the citizensincreased through the uses of Facebook pages. The councils created Facebook accounts where they post updates concerning urban planning issues (Yoko, 2019). This Facebook channel enabled two-way communication. The city council shares all the local events on the Facebook page and the citizens provide feedback. This promoted public participation. Some of the urban local authoritiesuse Twitteras a tool to inform residents on road work and infrastructure projects. This avoids the inconvenience to the citizens as they will be well-informed about what is taking place in the urban area.

In England, the local authority has experienced digital change. The Councils developed models that they use to communicate with their citizens. Familiarising with the audience becomes the heart of communication in England (Steel, 2020). The messages aredelivered through mixed channels to update citizens on the developments taking place within cities. The councils noticed that good communication is a two-way process. The platform was designed in a way that citizens can give feedback to the councils. East Riding of Yorkshire Council used the Granicus platform to communicate with citizens on developments and restriction taking place. Oxford City Council communicates with the citizens through the website (Brooks, 2018).

Communication with citizens in the United Kingdom occurs through aplatform known as the City Dashboard (Steel, 2020). These are online dashboards that benefit both citizens and local government. The cities occasionally publishes information concerning urban planning events. These community and city dashboards offer a platform for local government to share the progress of their strategic plans with citizens and other stakeholders. Citizens respond to the information communicated to

them by the city councils. The information communicated through dashboards is simplified for easy understanding. In other words, citiesuses these dashboards to show transparency, progress and weaknessof councils. The citizens are updated on issues, like the expansion of cities, ongoing road construction and changing of uses. Communication causesa reduction of problems in urban areas.

The concept of the "Smart City" emerged as a major response to urban challenges to achieve sustainability in Nottingham. The city noticed that the local communities and citizens are often an untapped source of potential to help local authorities deliver smart city innovations(Preston, 2020). Nottingham City makes use of newspapers and television to communicate with the people on how to achieve a smart city. It then goes further to indulge in community meetings and focus group. This enabled the public to participate in achieving the smart city. Finland has often taken pride in being one of the leading countries in ICT and in the building of an information society. They use the "broadcast"-approach to communicate with the citizens. An interactive approach is the "from many to many" approve way of communicating also helping in passing on the information on urban issues (Horelli and Kaaja, 2015). This then increased the knowledge concerning pertinent urban issues. The communities are enabled to bounce back to shape through taking actions that help to achieve a smart city.

Lack of knowledge on the city planning issues has been one of the reasons for the suffering of African cities.Public participation would be triggered through government-citizen communication (Municipal Development Partnership for Eastern and Southern Africa, 2015; Chingwete, 2016).

In Zimbabwe, the City of Mutare was perceived as having unbeatable challenges that had greatly compromised its capacity to deliver services to itsresidents. The challenges led to performance gaps resulting in the City providing inadequate services or no services at all(Marange, 2017). Mutare residents suffered because they werenot aware of the urban issues. They were not informed about the situation in the city. The people are also losinga huge amount of money to corrupt and illegal housing cooperatives. This is because they are not informed of the proper way of

stand purchase in the city. Most of the communication to the citizens is done when it already too late as in the case of house demolitions. The City of Mutare makes use of online news and newspapers to publish the events taking place. However, not everyone can access the information due to financial constraints, such as failure to purchase data and newspapers. Information in Mutare is at times passed on to the residents through SMS hotline to other residents though not everyone owns a mobile cell phone. Kadoma City Council makesuse various communication channels. The communication between residents and council officials is a way of enhancing service delivery and promotes innovation. Zimbabwean Government Gazette (2020) observes that the City of Kadoma makes use Facebook pages and online news to inform the residents of the ongoing events pertaining the urban planning issues.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The data in this article were derived from secondary sources.It is desktop research. Different sources were used to acquire data from studies that were done oncommunication channels in urban councils of different countries. Some secondary sources used included books and online newspapers. Some urban planning documents on communication mechanism were used. Information on communication channels used were obtained from urban councils' websites, like City of Gweru Council, Harare City Council, Kadoma Town Council and Mutare City Council. Documents used to gather information on urban issues and communication with the citizens in African countries and European countries were obtained online. The materials were used on obtaining information concerning the causes of urban problems and solutions in different countries.

RESULTS

Results indicate that informing citizens on the pertinent urban planning issues has reduced problems in the cities. Communication with citizens has contributed to the lessening of urban challenges in Harare. The way that messages are passed to the citizens enables the residents to become aware of urban issues. The citizens are informed that it is illegal to build on wetlands and public spaces. Harare residents have become aware of the dangers that come with the construction of illegal structures and littering

the environment. Efficient communication with citizens has enabled urban local authorities to address the exact problems faced by the people. The use of channels that do not allow two-way communication discourages citizen participation. Use of newspapers as a method of communication with citizens has limitations because some residents of the cities cannot afford to purchase a newspaper.

Currently, most of the information communicated by urban local authorities are posted on online platforms (UCAZ, 2021). These platforms are not accessible to all citizens. For instance, the message passed to the Harare residents on the removal of illegal structures was posted on the Harare City Council website and in newspapers. Those who could access the websites and newspapers were caught unawares, hence become homeless. This information was communicated in section 24 of the RTCPA.Unfortunately, these documents are not accessible to everyone on time. Even if they become available, they are written in a language that not everyone understands. The sections are not easy to apprehend without being explained. The information was already available but not well communicated to the citizens. This resulted in a lack of knowledge for citizens on development issues in urban areas. This is creating problems in urban areas as some end up constructing on wetlands, causing floods as some of the buildings block waterways.

The delay in the use of digital platforms for communicating with citizens has resulted in problems in the cities. A case in point is the Gweru City Council that lagged in using digital platforms. A paragraph in the Gweru online news on July 27 in 2020 states that the Gweru Residents Forum (GRF) created a digital engagement platform, the G-City application, to enhance communication and service delivery. The method of communication used before then by the Gweru City Council was inefficient as the information could not reach some of the residents. The pronounced use of smartphone enables the installation of the G-City application for most of the residents. The citizens were frustrated with being informed of important city issues on the council notice boards and at meetings, some of which could not be attended. The City of Gweru Town Clerk was quoted as saying that the digital communication platform was the beginning of a new relationship with the residents

association. In other words, it shows that before then, there was no efficient council-residents communication.

Soome urban councils use SMS hotlines as a channel of communication with citizens cause gaps in information in the community. This kind of communication does not allow every citizen to be aware of what is going on in the city. It is noted that not everyone in Mutare owns a mobile cell phone. The Manica Post (2019) reports that the City of Mutare established an SMS hotline to communicate with the residents. This communication has some rip-offs when it comes to efficient communication. It does not allow citizens to communicate back and give instant feedback. The sms hotline type of communication does not always communicate the exact relevant information on urban issues. This causes citizens to engage in actions that will be detrimental to them in the future. Some of the actions include construction on wetlands and public places.

CASE STUDIES

Masvingo City Council uses different channels communicating with the residents. The City informed citizens the water supply schedule. This information was posted on Twitter on the 5th of February 2021. The handle that was used has less than 1000 followers. The chances of these 1000 people passing on the information to others and makingan impact are low. The Zimbabwe Population Census (2012) argues that Masvingo urbanhas a population of 87,886. This surpasses the number of people who access social media council updates.

This then left the rest of the population uninformed of when the water supply schedule and therefore not storing water for when the water is cut off, hence moving around fetching unsafe water. This will then result in outbreaks of water-borne diseases. On the 9th of February, Masvingo City Council posted on Twitter updating residents on the rehabilitation of Calvin Majange Road that was underway. This was to warn citizens not to use the road to avoid inconvincing themselves. The citizens were able to comment back on this post, complaining, questioning the action taken by council. Though it was a dialogue, not everyone could afford data bundle to log in to the online platform. Not forgetting that some of the residents do not have smartphones. The Town Clerk spoke on the 8th of the same

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month on the refuse collection schedule. The information did not reach all residents. As a result, as was in the caase of the water schedule, they were not aware of when the refuse will be collected. So they disposedof their refuse in undesignated areas, littering the environment.

In another case, the City of Harare (CoH) communicated with its residents early in the month of February 2021. The public notice advised owners of illegal structures, such as tuck-shops to remove them before the 18th of February 2021. The notice warned the owners to remove the structures or risk them having them demolished by bulldozers. This notice was posted on its social media channels. This operation was planned to start with Mbare high-density suburb and then move to other areas. Mbare is the oldest high-density residential area in Zimbabwe. It is located on the southern side of the city about 5km from the central business district of Harare. It is home to thousands of inhabitants who engage in various activities in the suburb everyday. City council officials estimated that Mbare has a population of about 800 000 which makes it the mostdens suburb in the country (*Herald*, 2018). Most of the people in Mbare operate informal business and because of the high rate of unemployment. Mbare is known for the vegetable market, Mupedzanhamo, Siyaso in Magaba area,which is the industrial hub of Mbare.

Council has noted the re-emergence of vending stalls and tuck-shops on road verges, open spaces and residential stands within Harare. Illegal construction of structures contravenes section 24 of the RTCPA. The section observes that no development should be carried out without being approved by a development order. The notice of the removal of illegal structures though it was passed to the citizens, they were given a short period to make changes. Considering the residents of Mbare are mostly informal, the information could face barriers to reach them. Most of them do not care much about the public notices delivered in newspapers and online platforms. Although they cannot afford to purchase bundles and newspapers, they cannot even understand the meaning of the notices. Much of their concern is on how to survive everyday. They happen to careless about the government notices. Residents are urged to get all their building stages approved and to commence construction work when their

building plans have been passed. This recommendation existed already and it was not being applied.

DISCUSSION

Problems, such as pollution, construction on wetlands and other illegal structures and natural disasters within urban areas are increasing day by day, hence necessary action must be taken to address these them. Understanding the contribution of lack of information to the citizens in urban areas is very crucial whilst giving solutions to urban problems. Urban areas of Zimbabwe have been suffering from pollution, the proliferation of informality, wetland destruction, corruption, homelessness and penalties for breaking the laws. Many countries have struggled to provide ways in which information of pertinent urban issues can be communicated in a way that all the citizens will become fully informed and participate positively towards urban issues. Because lack of information to citizens causes problems in cities, there is need for sustainable development of the channels of communication. These include mobile applications, WhatsApp, YouTube, Instagram, Twitter, Facebook, newspapers, TV and radio. The facilities developed should ensure long-term use and should serve both current and future generations.Changes made to communication channels should be strictly monitored for sustainable results. More assistance from the private sector, telecommunications companies and non-governmental organisations is needed for the development of communication mechanisms. Ideas should be created to enable efficient and reliable communication with citizens on pertinent urban planning issues, including ways of making the information on urban planning issues understood by every citizen.

Communication with citizens reduces problems within urban areas. This is through the creation of communication paths that are accessible to everyone. The information passed on through different channels must be received and understood by every citizen. Language barriers should not affect the targeted communities. There is need to provide platforms that enable two-way communication, like WhatsApp, Facebook and community meetings. This willenablecitizens to air their views, report their complaints and enable councils to clarify certain urban planning issues to their citizens.

The use of SMS hotlines that reach the citizens and do not allow them to provide feedback should be discouraged. The messages that are sent to the people concerning urban planning issues should be structured clearly. They must provide what people need to know, do and feel. This means the messages that are sent through social media platforms, television and radio should be concise and clear. Councils should inform the communities of key council decisions, services and programmes. This promotes transparency. Urban local authorities should consider the use of the most preferable mechanisms to communicate. Though the council websites are key communication tools, there is need to consider those channels that are accessible to everyone.

Urban local authorities should also consider the use of monthly print magazines, updating stakeholders on the events taking place. Most of the communication made should be in languages that all citizens understand. Councils should consider other categories of their residents like the old age, who may not feel comfortable with using new technologies, hence place other channels in their favour. The creation of digital engagement for councils in Zimbabwe should be speeded up. Councils should make use offree mobile applications that can pass information to citizens. Citizens need to be informed continuously on the impact of their actions that are detrimental to the environment.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In all efforts to create habitable places in urban areas,there is a need to communicate more often to all the citizens concerning the urban planning issues. These issues include wetlands destruction, informality, pollution and illegal construction of structures. By having this information, residents of urban areas are well informed, thus creating confusion-free cities. Communication with the citizens on pertinent urban issues plays a crucial role in reducing problems within urban areas. Great effort is made to solve urban challenges in different countries, but some of these measures were not effective and long-lasting. This article will help councilson the development that should occur within their communication mechanism. It must be understood that communication between councils and their citizens on urban matters will contribute to the reduction of urban problems. The developments in the communication

channels should encourage two-way communication. This will enable the citizens to be aware of their impact on the environment they are living in. Private sector partners are also encouraged to invest in terms of technology and innovations.

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