

Plan Preparation and Review as Tools for Developing Urban Resilience in Zimbabwe: Conflicts and Possibilities

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Abstract

Plan preparation and review can be powerful tools for developing urban resilience as they are expert processes that have important citizen engagement processes. The plan preparation or review process is led by urban planners but involves numerous built environment professionals to provide data that feeds into the plan formulation. Residents are supposed to be involved in the plan preparation process, hence the process is expected to be inclusive as it engages the citizens. Using secondary data and reviewing existing master and local plans and key informant interviews, the article considers whether the process of plan preparation and review can be used as tools for developing urban resilience. Using four case studies, the article establishes that while the plan preparation and review processes present opportunities for developing urban resilience, in reality, this has not happened since most urban areas are using old plans, the plans have not been implemented, or plan preparation adopted flawed consultative processes. The article concludes that with most plans out of date, they no longer address contemporary challenges. Planning provisions and processes must be followed so that plan preparation can serve as a tool for developing urban resilience.

Keywords: *master plan, local plan, public interest, conflict, resilience*

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INTRODUCTION

The year 2008 marked a turning point in the global population structure when, for the first time, more people lived in cities than in rural areas (United Nations, 2014). Urban populations are also rising rapidly in much of Sub-Saharan Africa, leading to a plethora of urban challenges (Chirisa, 2008; Skinner and Watson, 2018; United Nations, 2020). Although the African region is currently the world's least urbanised compared to other parts of the world, the situation is changing fast. It is projected that by the year 2030, more than 50 percent of Africans will live in cities than in rural areas (United Nations, 2015). Planning for this projected growth is important to creating resilient settlements.

Urban planning seeks to bring order to spaces and provide a framework for governing settlements (Kamete, 2009). Planning is also about “all public policies that affect urban and regional development, zoning and land use, or what is often called public production of space” (Yiftachel, 1998:2). Planning seeks to create orderly environments that are progressive and is done to serve public interest (Faludi, 1973; Fainstein, 2000). Meanwhile, cities are regarded as complex environments due to the many land uses that constitute urban development, including the sociological and ecological dynamics at play (Liu *et al.*, 2007; Xiaoling and Huan, 2018).

Cities are considered to be vulnerable when parts of the ecosystem, such as vegetation or wetlands, are destroyed (Coaffé, 2010). Resilience is concerned about the many threats that confront cities, such as ecological, social, and even security shocks and the capacity to recover from them (Coaffé, 2010). Master and local plans can and should act as tools to build urban resilience as their preparation present opportunities to consider an urban settlement's aspects, such as the social, economic, and ecological. With sound planning, it is expected that urban areas can anticipate shocks and plan for them. This enables them to be better prepared and when disasters occur, survive them, or quickly recover.

This article examines the opportunities that the plan preparation and review process in Zimbabwean urban areas present as tools for developing urban resilience. It argues that while the planning processes present a

good opportunity, this has not been exploited by most urban areas due to their failure to genuinely consult, prioritise plan preparation and review, and seriously implement plan provisions.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Urban planning is comprehensive and considers many aspects of settlements, including helping build resilience. The global agenda on human settlements in terms of Sustainable Development Goal number 11 aims to "make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable" (UN, 2020). Most planning laws reflect this intention towards sustainable development. The preamble to Zimbabwe's planning law also embraces sustainable development as it helps develop resilient settlements:

“AN ACT to provide for the planning of regions, districts and local areas with the object of conserving and improving the physical environment and in particular promoting health, safety, order, amenity, convenience and general welfare, and efficiency and economy in the process of development (Government of Zimbabwe GoZ, 1996).

If sound planning is applied, there is an opportunity to create resilient and sustainable settlements. Planning, therefore, theoretically has the in-built capability to help build resilient settlements.

The notion of urban resilience is heterogeneous and multi-dimensional (Leichenko, 2011). It is about developing a city's capacity to bounce back or recover from aftershocks. Building resilience entails adopting an understanding of urban areas as complex environments with many 'interwoven' activities and processes (Beilin and Wilkinson, 2015). Meerow *et al.* (2016) argue that resilience must be unpacked in terms of, resilience for whom and what purpose. It is also about building adaptation to threats, such as climate change, so that cities can withstand and bounce back after disasters. They also argue that because cities now have the majority of populations, they are 'laboratories' of testing resilience.

Some scholars also argue that there are trade-offs in the consideration of the questions of resilience to different aspects by different activities and land uses causing different outcomes (Meerow and Newell, 2019). This

article is built upon an understanding of resilience as multi-dimensional within a complex environment that constitute cities. An application of the above theoretical understanding of resilience was useful in interrogating whether planning can or is being used as a tool to build resilience in Zimbabwe.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In many cities and countries across Africa, planning laws and plans have not been reviewed as regularly as to remain responsive (Berrisford, 2011). This is more so in many former British colonies whose planning law uniformly reflects the old British town and country planning laws (McAuslan, 2003). Most Zimbabwean urban settlements have outdated statutory plans (Kadungure, 2021). According to Zimbabwe's planning law, master and local plans must be periodically reviewed after every 10 years for master plans and five years for local plans (Government of Zimbabwe, 1975, 1996). This has not happened as required by the law and planning standards. The Harare Combination Master Plan was prepared in the late 1980s and was approved only in 1993 but is still in use in 2021 (City of Harare, 1991 and 1993).

Some scholars see planners as all too powerful and abusing their power, particularly against the poor and the powerless in cities (Kamete, 2012). In many cities across the continent, poor people are not protected by planning professionals and their plans (Mpfu, 2010). Planning has also been criticised for not considering the 'stubborn realities' of life in poor settlements of the global South (Watson, 2013). It has been argued that the preparation of plans has not served the poor's interests as planned cities have been known to 'sweep' the poor away (Watson, 2009). Many livelihoods of the urban poor are not planned for in many cities (Skinner and Watson, 2018). As a result, 'planning as a discipline and as a profession has been increasingly challenged' (Yiftachel, 1988:24).

Where plans are prepared, there is oftentimes a detachment between plan proposals and implementation (Toriro and Chirisa, 2021). Planners in many developing countries are viewed as modernist and aspire for aesthetically beautiful cities that do reflect their socio-economic realities (Toriro, 2018). Kamete criticises planners who fail to plan with

consideration of the lived realities of high levels of poverty, informality and homelessness as ‘missing the point’ (Kamete, 2013). Another scholar describes the scenario where planners’ values differ from those of the beneficiaries of planning as ‘conflicting rationalities’ between the rationality of residents and that of planning officials (Watson, 2003).

Resilience is about cities preparing for and building capacity to withstand disasters (Leichenko, 2011). Resilience has been approached mainly from an ecological perspective (Beilin and Wilkinson, 2015). A literature search seemed to indicate a paucity of an urban planning perspective to urban resilience. Yet a perusal of planning law and several plans indicates aspects of sustainable development that help build resilience (GoZ, 1996; CoH, 1993; CoH, 2020). Some scholars argue that resilience must be contextualised in terms of whom it affects and the factors bringing the threats (Meerow *et al.*, 2016). It is also argued that getting certain aspects of resilience right means lesser attention on others, a sort of trade-off (Meerow and Newell, 2019).

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The data was collected mainly from secondary sources and key informant interviews. Planning laws, statutory plans, publications on planning and archived city reports were used to collect data on how plans have been used to achieve resilience and how they have performed in that regard. Key informant interviews were also conducted with different stakeholder groups, urban managers, planning officials, local government experts and policymakers. These were purposively selected for their interest and understanding of urban management and how plans help in achieving sustainable and resilient settlements. Ten planners were selected for their knowledge in plan preparation and the procedural and substantive issues involved in statutory planning.

Ten members of the public with specific interests linked to sustainable development and resilience-building were targeted to articulate their interests and whether plans gave them that opportunity to participate and share the results of such processes. They shared their experience in plan preparation and provided case study examples of master and local plans and how they were prepared. The four case studies were purposively

selected for showing elements of sustainability and capacity to help build resilience. They also showed different types of plans: a master plan, a local development plan, a local subject plan and a concept plan. These are all different types of plans in Zimbabwe.

RESULTS

This article builds on the existing literature on resilience that takes a largely ecological perspective and links it to urban planning processes of comprehensive and consultation to review how it has worked in a few Zimbabwean urban areas.

THE MONAVALLE LOCAL PLAN

Monavale is a middle-income residential suburb in Harare City. It is situated approximately five kilometres west of the Harare central business district. Parts of this suburb are around a small hill, while the other part is low ground through which one of the city's river systems passes. It is an important environmental site because it has a wetland that has international significance. The Monavale wetland is a Ramsar site, one of the seven sites in Zimbabwe. Zimbabwe has seven sites acknowledged internationally under the Ramsar Convention on wetlands. Three Ramsar sites are in Harare while the other four are spread across the country, including Victoria Falls. Harare is home to three Ramsar sites, namely, Cleveland Dam, Lake Chivero and Monavale wetlands (Mpala and Davis, 2006). The Monavale community is one of the most organised in Harare around their environment. The Conservation Society of Monavale (COSMO) is a well-organised body that has mobilised the community to ensure that their environment is protected. Despite their high level of organisation and documented efforts at conservation, their environment remains threatened by land developers and other residents who cultivate on the wetlands.

Faced with the above threats, among others, the community approached with Harare City Council intending to use statutory planning as a tool to protect their environment in the year 2011. The local authority accepted their proposal and they were granted permission to engage a town planning consultant to help them prepare an environmental local subject plan for Monavale. In line with the planning procedures and laws of

Zimbabwe, a study was conducted to collect data of the area's socio-economic status, geography, flora and fauna, hydrology, soils, drainage and other similar data that is required to inform a plan preparation process. The collected data was useful in designing the draft Monavale Environmental Local Subject Plan that recommended better management of the general Monavale area and preservation of the Ramsar site in particular.

While the draft plan addresses most of the ecological challenges faced by the Monavale community in terms of its environment and its resilience, the plan has not been approved and has hit some bottlenecks. Unresolved conflicts among some landowners in the proposed conservation area have stalled the planning process. For almost four years now, there has been no movement in the plan preparation process as the land owners' objections to the plan remain unresolved. In terms of Zimbabwe's planning regulations, objections must be resolved or formally withdrawn for a plan to proceed to the approval stage. With the landowners refusing to accede to intentions to preserve the wetlands, including the Ramsar site, a stalemate has been reached with stakeholders failing to agree. The potential to use planning to achieve resilience has been lost.

SEKE-CHITUNGWIZA CONCEPT PLAN

The data in this section were collected mostly from the Chitungwiza-Seke Concept Plan, a spatial plan that was prepared to cover the town of Chitungwiza and adjacent areas of Seke. In the year 2014, authorities observed a deterioration of planning standards around the Chitungwiza and Seke communal lands area. A Commission of Inquiry was set up to investigate the conversion of land from rural to urban. The investigation revealed that land was being illegally sold and converted to different uses in Chitungwiza town. The land was also being illegally sold and converted from rural to urban without following planning procedures. In the rural areas, grazing land and wetlands were being sold to homeless people from nearby Chitungwiza town. In Chitungwiza town, most of the areas that were being occupied and sold were very fragile ecological areas, such as land left for road expansion, wetlands, land under electricity servitudes and land that was earmarked for other future uses, such as schools and

recreational areas. On all the identified sites, sound planning, including planning standards, was not being followed.

On all the sites visited, the Audit Team noted illegal land sales, allocations and developments on wetlands, Zimbabwe Electricity Supply Authority power-line servitudes, cemetery land, open spaces and institutional stands. In all these illicit land deals, the chief actor Dr Mabamba's United We Stand Cooperative has illegally allocated and developed more than 5 000 stands. Dr Mabamba is involved in all illicit land deals. His cooperative is the only one that issues out agreements of sale to other cooperatives. Councillors, council employees at all levels and land barons were the chief perpetrators of these illicit land deals (Chimowa, 2015:4).

The Commission of Inquiry recommended that the area be re-planned, including preparing a statutory planning framework for the area. The Ministry of Local Government appointed an agency to prepare a concept plan for the area so that development in the area could be coordinated and consider important issues, such as resilience. The appointed state planning agency came up with what was called the Chitungwiza-Seke Concept Plan that planned and re-planned all areas covered by Chitungwiza town, including new farms incorporated into municipal boundaries and the urbanising parts of Seke rural area.

The Chitungwiza-Seke Concept Plan further identified areas that were prone to hazards, such as flooding and recommended that such spaces be vacated. Although the concept plan was adopted by both the Chitungwiza Town Council and the Manyame Rural District Council for the rural area, very few fragile areas were vacated. Most occupiers remained on the ground even where it was recommended that they be relocated. An interview with a Town Planning officer working in the government planning office conducted in Harare on 24 February 2021 revealed that these areas were flooded during the above-average rainfall season of 2020-2021.

THE ENTERPRISE CORRIDOR LOCAL DEVELOPMENT PLAN

The Enterprise Corridor Local Development Plan Number 60 covers an area approximately two kilometres from the Enterprise Road along the

whole stretch of the Enterprise Road from Eastlea, through Highlands up to the north-eastern end of Harare City (City of Harare, 2020). The local plan was prepared to supersede portions of land that were covered by the old Phases 2-4 Town Planning Schemes, part of the Newlands Local Development Plan and the old 1970s East and North-East Town Planning Schemes. The general intention of the Enterprise Local Development Plan Number 60 is to introduce several non-residential uses along this corridor that was largely residential in character. The plan introduces offices and other commercial uses along the whole corridor.

The plan also introduces development in areas that were previously zoned as Open Spaces and are essentially wetlands. As part of the plan preparation process, the Harare City Council, as the Local Planning Authority, was supposed to follow certain procedures by the Regional Town and Country Planning Act and the Master and Local Plan Regulations. One requirement of a local plan preparation process is that there should be widespread consultation with the public, meaning people who eventually get affected by the plan provisions. In pursuance of the public consultation processes regarding the Enterprise Corridor Local Plan, advertisements were placed in the newspapers and the plan was put on public display for residents to submit objections and/or representations to the different proposals made in the plan.

In response to the plan advertising processes, the Harare Wetlands Trust (HWT) submitted both objections and representations concerning specific aspects of the plan. The objections were made with regards to wetlands on that development was being proposed and inappropriate zoning with potential to destroy the wetlands in different parts of the plan. The representations were submitted to make certain environmental recommendations that could improve the plan's sensitivities to the environment. In terms of Zimbabwe's planning law and the attendant regulations of preparing master and local plans, any officially submitted objection or representation was recorded and had to be considered in finalising the plan. According to the HWT, this was not done.

Although the Trust's town planning consultant was invited by city planning officials to explain the submitted objections and representations, they were not advised on how these objections were resolved as required by the law. According to planning law and regulations, where an objection has been made, it must be resolved, or the objector must be convinced to withdraw their objection in writing. The HWT objection was not withdrawn. The plan could, therefore, not have been approved lawfully without resolving the objection. Despite this, the Enterprise Corridor Plan was approved in September 2020. The approval was *ultra-vires* planning law and Master and Local Plan Regulations.

As an objector to the Enterprise Corridor Local Development Plan, the HWT was not shown the final draft of the plan. Upon approval of the Enterprise Corridor Local Plan, the Trust was not informed of the decision. As with any Town Planning decision taken in terms of the Regional Town and Country Planning Act, interested parties were supposed to be formally advised in writing once a decision has been made. This was not done. Again, this is *ultra-vires* the law. The Harare Wetlands Trust got to know of the approval of the plan only through the *Government Gazette* in September 2020. The Trust then wrote to the City of Harare raising these anomalies and indicating that the Trust reserved its right to appeal against the unprocedural approval of the Enterprise Corridor Local Development Plan.

The Harare Wetlands Trust further requested a copy of the local plan so that the Trust could check if the submitted objections and representations had been addressed. The city planning official handling the plan approval process indicated that they could not give out a copy of the plan at that stage as it was awaiting the Mayor and the Town Clerk's signatures. While approved plans are supposed to become official documents upon signing by the Mayor and Town Clerk, this was not necessary since the Trust only wanted a copy showing the contents/provisions as recommended for approval. The rights of the Harare Wetlands Trust as an objector to the plan, are separate from the request for an approved plan by any member of the public who is interested in buying a signed copy.

The Trust reported that despite repeated visits to municipal offices, and having clear rights to information as an official objector to the Enterprise Corridor Local Development Plan, they were not been given nor shown a copy of the plan. The Trust has been denied an opportunity to participate in the plan preparation process to contribute towards a plan that prioritises environmental resilience. The plan preparation process did not provide an opportunity to become a tool to build urban resilience.

THE HARARE MASTER PLAN

The Harare Master Plan is an example of a statutory plan that was comprehensive and inclusive with in-built measures to address sustainability and resilience in terms of processes and content. The plan was prepared as a combination master plan. This means the Harare City Council jointly prepared the master plan with eleven other local authorities around and adjacent to Harare City. These included local authorities governing the adjacent areas of Mazowe, Zvimba, Goromonzi, Chitungwiza, Seke and Beatrice. The plan considered future development options for Harare and all the adjacent areas, thereby creating linkages and ensuring that development in the whole area took place in a harmonious and coordinated manner (City of Harare, 1993).

Numerous environmental and infrastructure projects considered the interconnections within the larger Harare Metropolitan region. Examples of measures taken to protect the environment included the large undeveloped ecological buffers that were imposed along the Manyame Catchment in Harare, Chitungwiza, Norton and areas similarly affected by rivers and wetlands. Other identified areas with significant vegetation were also preserved as measures to build environmental resilience.

There were also proposals to build water infrastructure that would benefit all the towns in the master plan. These urban areas are Harare, Chitungwiza, Ruwa, Epworth and Norton. Two major dams were proposed to augment water supplies in the Manyame Catchment that were projected to be inadequate by the year 2000. Proposals were made to build Musami, Kunzvi and Muda Dams, all proposed sites being away from the highly polluted Manyame Catchment. Unfortunately, none of

the three proposed dam projects was implemented. These three projects would have given urban areas some climate-proofing as Harare is affected by climate change, like many other parts of the world.

Although the Harare Master Plan was a progressive and futuristic project addressing many challenges prevailing at the time it was prepared, it has not been reviewed almost 30 years later. Many significant events have taken place that has challenged and changed many assumptions that informed the master plan and a few examples of the changes that took place in Harare and the country are given in this section. First, at the time the master plan was prepared, the country had a strong and protected economy. This changed in the early nineties when the country adopted and implemented an IMF-inspired Economic Structural adjustment programme (ESAP). One of the unintended consequences of ESAP was the shift in the structure of the economy from a large-scale formal economy to an informal economy driven by informality. As informality blossomed beyond projected levels, whatever measures had been proposed in the plan fell short and managing Harare became a nightmare for planners and policy-makers. Second, there was a fast-track land reform programme that significantly shifted land occupation systems by introducing new land radicalism driven by land reform-induced justifications. This rendered some of the resilience measures in the master plan unsustainable as they were challenged.

Although the Harare Master Plan had been prepared with several measures to develop resilience, the plan was not reviewed way after it had outlived its lifespan. That the plan was not reviewed as per requirement and there were events, such as ESAP and the fast-track land reform programme, that significantly challenged all assumptions that had informed the plan proposals, meant that most measures that would have worked to develop resilience are now ineffective. This was a good plan that was not timeously reviewed to respond to emerging challenges, thereby losing its usefulness to assist in building resilience.

DISCUSSION

The four cases show that plans have the potential to be tools for developing urban resilience. This has, however, not always been effective for different reasons. An examination of each case study helps in revealing whether the plan provided an opportunity to use it as a tool to build resilience and assess the effectiveness of the plan in doing so. The Monavale Environmental Local Plan presented an opportunity to use the authority of a statutory plan to protect an important environment. Protecting the Monavale wetland, a Ramsar site, contributes to building resilience in Harare. The plan, however, remains unapproved due to conflicts between the community of Monavale and some land owners who want to develop on the important Ramsar site. Since the issue remains unresolved, the plan cannot be approved. Meanwhile, the Monavale site, which is important as a habitat, a water storage area, and a flood control measure, remains under threat and unable to guarantee contribution to building urban resilience in Harare.

The Chitungwiza-Seke Combination Concept Plan was developed to respond to unplanned settlement on fragile ecological sites such as wetlands, areas prone to floods and to curb illegal land occupations. The plan also considered areas that could constitute a hazard to residents if they were settled. Such areas were left vacant and where they were occupied, the plan recommended that people be relocated to safer sites. If all the proposals in the plan on sustainable development had been implemented, the plan would have introduced resilience in Chitungwiza. Residents could continue with their lives even in the event of flooding during above-average seasons.

The resilience that could have been introduced by the new plan failed to take place because the plan was not fully implemented. This exposed the residents of Chitungwiza. The 2020-2021 rainfall season was above average. An interview with an official from the Zimbabwe National Water Authority conducted on 2 March 2021 revealed that the season is considered one of the wettest in history. The official indicated that dam levels across the country had risen 56 percent of their capacity, a development that last happened in 1974. This, however came with problems of flooding. Many low-lying areas of Chitungwiza were affected

by flooding leading to damage to houses and household goods like furniture. Many residents suffered and have not recovered from the shocks. They are unlikely to recover and will live in fear of future flooding. The developments attracted government attention. The Government of Zimbabwe has since directed that all residents in areas prone to flooding and within reservations for different types of infrastructure, be moved to other areas.

The Enterprise Corridor Local Development Plan also presented an opportunity to better manage Harare's threatened wetlands. It was, however, financed and driven by private interests, hence public interest was lost as the main objective of private developers funding the plan was to optimise on land use and get a return on their investment in the plan preparation process. Rather than sustainably plan the remaining wetlands and protect them, developers identified additional land for development. As a result of that approach, the Chisipite and Lewisam wetlands, some of the largest remaining wetlands in Harare, were proposed for partial development, rather than protect them as remaining ecological treasures.

Plan preparation procedures were violated as private capital and elitist interests were prioritised over public environmental interests. Public consultation processes were short-circuited and stakeholder groups were denied an opportunity to contribute to the plan. Where stakeholders were listened to, it was merely to fulfil procedures and not to genuinely engage, as some views did not find their way into the plan. Where public views were considered, they were oftentimes a token consideration where objections to developing wetlands would result in portions of the wetlands converted to other uses. An opportunity to develop a resilient city has also been lost. Planning as a tool to develop resilience has failed to do so, in this instance, because of private capital interests.

The Harare Master Plan was good. Its proposals on building ecological resilience were sound. It protected river corridors, particularly the Manyame Catchment, that leads to the Greater Harare water supply dams. The plan was, however, prepared way back in 1993 and its provisions have been superseded by new environmental global concerns, such as wetlands, global warming and climate change. The failure to implement

major infrastructure projects has also led to the failure to densify and curb urban sprawl. That the plan has not been reviewed in almost 30 years is not only against Zimbabwe's planning laws and regulations, but against sound planning principles. So again, while there are opportunities presented by planning tools, such opportunities are lost if this is not followed through.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Although master and local plans are a result of a comprehensive process that examines many aspects, including physical geography elements, such as the environment and climate, their potential to act as a tool to build resilience has not been fully realised. The problem is not with the plans. It is with the planning processes, the implementation and periodically reviewing plans. Plans are living documents and if they are allowed to die, that is, forgotten for too long, they cease to be relevant. Master and local planning processes must remain genuinely consultative and done in the public interest so that they can be an opportunity to broaden citizen participation. Evidence from the four planning case studies in Harare and Chitungwiza showed that the huge potential in planning remains untapped.

RECOMMENDATIONS

If plans are going to be effective as tools for building resilience, they must satisfy three requirements:

- They must be genuinely consultative and accommodate all stakeholder voices.
- Plans must be fully implemented so that useful proposals are done.
- Plans must be periodically reviewed in line with the law and sound planning. This way, they remain relevant to contemporary challenges. Once there is sufficient consultations, full implementation and periodic reviews, plans can perhaps then serve to help build resilience in communities.

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