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Analysing the Urban Housing Challenge in Harare, Zimbabwe through the Wicked Policy Problems Framework

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Analysing the Urban Housing Challenge in Harare, Zimbabwe through the Wicked Policy Problems Framework

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ABSTRACT

This article analyses how urban housing challenges in Harare, Zimbabwe have transformed into a wicked policy problem and further proposes some measures for managing this problem. The article uses a qualitative research approach in which an explanatory case study research design and key informant interviews are used to investigate how the provision of urban housing facilities has become a demanding task for the City of Harare in Zimbabwe. The study reveals how rapid population growth in Harare has escalated the demand for, and subsequent shortage of housing facilities leading to housing access complexities and persistently depreciating housing conditions in this city. The article argues that housing challenges in Harare are symptoms of other social problems such as unemployment, poverty, social inequalities, misgovernance and institutional corruption. This article proposes context-specific measures for harnessing a holistic approach that can be used for managing urban population explosions and sustainable housing provision in developing countries with Harare in Zimbabwe used as the social laboratory for analysis. This article has a practical and theoretical orientation as it proposes the measures that can be adopted to manage the wicked urban housing policy problem in Zimbabwe.

Keywords: *Urban housing, policy problems, urban housing challenge, wicked policy problem, tame policy problem*

ABSTRAK

Artikel ini menganalisis bagaimana tantangan perumahan perkotaan di Harare, Zimbabwe telah berubah menjadi masalah kebijakan yang buruk dan selanjutnya mengusulkan beberapa langkah untuk mengatasi masalah ini. Artikel ini menggunakan pendekatan penelitian kualitatif yang menggunakan desain penelitian studi kasus eksplanatori dan wawancara informan kunci untuk menyelidiki bagaimana penyediaan fasilitas perumahan perkotaan telah menjadi tugas berat bagi Kota Harare di Zimbabwe. Studi ini mengungkapkan betapa pesatnya pertumbuhan penduduk di Harare telah meningkatkan permintaan, dan kekurangan fasilitas perumahan yang menyebabkan kompleksitas akses terhadap perumahan dan terus-menerus memperburuk kondisi perumahan di kota ini. Artikel tersebut berpendapat bahwa tantangan perumahan di Harare adalah gejala dari masalah sosial lainnya seperti pengangguran, kemiskinan, kesenjangan sosial, kesalahan dalam pemerintahan dan korupsi institusional. Artikel ini mengusulkan langkah-langkah spesifik konteks untuk memanfaatkan pendekatan holistik yang dapat digunakan untuk mengelola ledakan populasi perkotaan dan penyediaan perumahan berkelanjutan di negara-negara berkembang dengan Harare di Zimbabwe digunakan sebagai laboratorium sosial untuk analisis. Artikel ini memiliki orientasi praktis dan teoretis karena mengusulkan langkah-langkah yang dapat diambil untuk menangani masalah kebijakan perumahan perkotaan yang buruk di Zimbabwe.

Kata Kunci: *Perumahan perkotaan, permasalahan kebijakan, tantangan perumahan perkotaan, permasalahan kebijakan yang jahat, permasalahan kebijakan yang jinak*

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INTRODUCTION

Housing has been recognised as a basic global human right in the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the 1966 International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (Cardona-Trujillo, 2023; United Nations Human Settlements, 2016). Governments around the world have established housing institutions to administer policies and programmes that ensure citizens' access to decent shelter (Levin, Santiago & Arthurson, 2022; Marutlulle, 2021). Governments should develop resolutions for addressing community problems through public policies (Althaus et al., 2022; Bovaird & Löffler, 2023). Globally, common examples of public policy problems that occupy the agenda of governments include limited access to health facilities, food insecurity, high unemployment, climate change, hyperinflation, economic instability as well as housing shortages (Jones, Brown & Bradshaw, 2023).

Policy problems confronting governments can be categorised as tame or wicked. A tame policy problem has a well-defined problem statement and solutions can be developed and applied to address it (Head, 2022a). Tame problems have low levels of intricacy, disputation, complexity and uncertainty (Budi & Trein, 2022). However, there are scenarios where policy problems become defiant to proposed interventions, and in this case, they become wicked policy problems. The concept of wicked policy problems was propounded by Rittel and Webber in 1973 to characterise unique social issues that have multiple definitions and an array of options to resolve them because of the multiplicity of stakeholders who are affected by them (Head, 2022b). Extant literature presents the most prominent characteristic of wicked problems as being poorly defined with policymakers having high levels of ambiguity in designing resolutions to address them (Termeer & Dewulf, 2019). To underscore how tough wicked policy problems are Peters and Tarpey (2019) claim that wicked problems are social issues that are cumbersome, complex, intractable and unpredictable. Termeer and Dewulf (2019) also argue that wicked policy problems are not only distinctive but also ill-formulated because the information required to resolve them is scarce and confusing.

This article examines the empirical value of Rittel and Webber's wicked problem framework in Zimbabwe, with specific reference to the urban housing challenge in Harare. The study demonstrates that while housing is a fundamental human right stipulated under section 28 of the Constitution of Zimbabwe (Chigwenya, 2019), it is distressing that the majority of Zimbabwe's urban population continues to live in housing conditions that are unfit for human habitation despite initiatives by public authorities to address their housing plights.

As the article will demonstrate, in Harare, a plethora of measures have been adopted to deal with the mounting urban housing challenge, but experiences reflect an undesirable trend of severe shelter deprivations amongst the majority of the residents (Bhanye, 2023).

This is reflected by a matrix of urban housing problems ranging from soaring housing shortages and overcrowding (Bandauko & Arku, 2023; Zimunya, 2022). These problems have culminated in the illegal possession of urban land and the subsequent sprouting of informal settlements within the city and on its peripheries (Ndawana, 2022). The illegal settlements in different parts of Harare have transformed the once 'Sunshine City' into an eyesore (Dande & Mwatwara, 2023). Since the year 2000, urban populations in Zimbabwe have increased rapidly due to higher rural-to-urban migration which is attributed to the worsening living conditions in most rural areas in the country (Kurebwa, 2020). Subsequently, the demand for urban housing in Harare continues to rise, as reflected by the housing waiting list for the City of Harare (CoH) which has soared since the turn of the second millennium (Poshai, 2021).

It is worth noting that efforts have been made by the local government authorities to address the urban housing challenge. For example, programmes such as the servicing of new residential stands and densification have been implemented by the Harare City Council to reduce housing shortages in the city (City of Harare Housing Policy, 2015). However, what is worrisome is that most of these efforts have been fruitless as the urban housing challenge in Zimbabwe continues to be a menace to the majority of urbanites. For example, sporadic urban housing delivery projects and programmes spearheaded by the government through local authorities have been futile in their bid to ameliorate the urban housing challenge. Efforts to meet housing demands have been marred by the persistently growing population of Harare because the city is the main hub for economic activities and industrial growth in Zimbabwe (Gambe, Geyer & Horn, 2022). The City of Harare has become a labour magnet for citizens from different rural areas and small towns, a situation that has increased pressure on the already inadequate housing facilities in the city (Poshai & Vyas-Doorgapersad, 2023). To this end, the housing challenge in Harare has become not only confusing but also very complicated for the governing authorities to decimate. This explains why the challenge qualifies as a wicked policy problem.

This article contributes to the expansion of extant literature on housing policy-making challenges and to practical housing policymaking processes in Zimbabwe and other countries. The article contributes to the literature by merging theory and practice as it analyses how the wicked problems conceptual framework that was developed by Rittel and Webber (1973) can be used to analyse contemporary public policy problems. The researchers observe that there is a gap in current research on the contextual application of the characteristics of the wicked policy problems framework to the urban housing challenge. The article also provides practical policy advice by recommending the need for policymakers to collaborate with affected communities and stakeholders towards dealing with a wicked policy problem. In addition to its contribution to housing policy literature and practice, the article can also be used as a reference point for future studies on analysing

the wickedness that characterised other policy problems in Zimbabwe. For example, future researchers can apply the same framework used in this article to analyse persistent policy problems such as inflation, health delivery deficits and high unemployment.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study used a qualitative research approach. This approach enabled the researchers to develop an in-depth understanding of the 'wickedness' that characterises the urban housing challenge in Zimbabwe. A case study research design was employed in Harare, the capital and largest city in Zimbabwe. The city of Harare is surrounded by other small satellite areas such as Chitungwiza, Norton, Epworth, Ruwa, Goromonzi, Domboshava and Melfort. The reason for selecting Harare is because it has the highest population in Zimbabwe which triggers housing shortages in the city. In addition, since Harare is the capital city, it attracts a lot of people from different parts of the country in search of social and economic opportunities.

The total sample of the participants was thirty-four (34) key informants comprising twenty (20) residents, four (4) Council Housing officers, two (2) Members of Parliament in Harare, two (2) ward councillors from Harare, two (2) Residents Association representatives, a former Mayor of Harare (1), an international housing expert (1), an international urban planner (1), a member of an international NGO and a member of a local NGO dealing with housing issues (1). Quota sampling was used to select four residents from the five targeted residential areas in Harare which are Southlea Park, Budiro, Caledonia Park, Hatcliffe Extension and Mbare.

The five residential areas were selected because of their common feature of high population densities, which has led to the high demand for housing, shortage of housing and subsequent sprouting of informal settlements on their peripheries. Two (2) male participants and two (2) female participants were purposefully selected from each of these residential areas with the view to have a gender-balanced overview of the housing challenges faced by these residents. The residents of these areas were selected because they are the primary victims of housing shortages as some of them own illegal dwellings in their backyards while some of them own informal dwellings on the peripheries of these residential areas. Council housing officers were selected as part of the sample because of their knowledge of council housing developments and programmes to alleviate the housing challenges in the City of Harare. The ward councillors and Members of Parliament were selected because of their knowledge and experience in the formulation of local and national housing policies to address housing dilemmas in their wards and constituencies respectively. The residents association representatives were selected as part of the sample because of their experience in advocating for housing access for the residents. The former Mayor provided useful insights on the role of the Minister of Local Government in dealing

with Mayors and how this affects decisions on housing policy making. An international housing expert, an international urban planner, a member of an international NGO and a member of a local NGO dealing with housing issues were all selected because of the need to have perspectives from non-state actors with an interest in urban housing developments.

Face-to-face semi-structured interviews were conducted with the thirty-three (33) participants except for the former mayor who preferred a telephone interview. For example, face-to-face in-depth interviews with housing officers focused on exploring the various strategies that housing institutions in Harare have embarked on to provide redress to the housing challenge currently facing residents. Face-to-face interviews with residents enabled an understanding of the housing challenges they face due to the increasing population of Harare. A telephone interview with the former mayor provided some historical insights into the housing challenge and housing policy-making experiences since the mayor was actively engaged in the development of housing policies, programmes and projects in the study area. The researchers also reviewed secondary material such as housing policy documents and national census reports. Secondary sources were selected because they contained a rich vein of data on the current population statistics as well as the policy strategies that are being pursued by the Harare City Council to combat the housing challenge.

The collected data was analysed using thematic analysis and content analysis. After the interviews were completed, the researchers interpreted the transcribed data to familiarise themselves with the major issue areas captured in the transcript and in the process extracting the data responding to the research problem. This process was followed by theme development, wherein themes were created from the transcribed data in light of the research objectives.

The thematic analysis technique allowed the identification and interpretation of recurring patterns within the data collected from the interviews. The thematic analysis process was done in five stages which are the familiarisation with the transcribed data, initial coding of the extracts from the data, generation of code categories, resolution of discrepancies from the codes and developing final themes from the generated codes. The first stage was the familiarisation of the data which involved an inspection of the interview transcripts to relate with the narratives shared by the participants in light of the research aim. This process enabled a nuanced understanding of the extent to which participants concurred that the housing challenge in Harare has become a wicked problem. The second step was the initial coding process which involved the development of labels to fit in the different sets of transcribed data for easier interpretation. The third step in the process was the generation of code categories which involved the identification of the similarities and discrepancies in the narratives shared by the different participants, allowing the

creation of preliminary codes and labels linked to understanding the attributes that make the housing challenge in Harare to qualify as a wicked policy problem.

The fourth step was the resolution of discrepancies from the codes which involved checking for the possibilities of irregularities in the coded data. This helped to ensure that all the data was categorised in the correct codes. Few discrepancies were identified in the narratives shared by the residents and those shared by the council officials. These discrepancies were reconciled in the discussion as part of a critical analysis of the housing challenge and its implications for different stakeholders in the housing sector. After the resolution of the discrepancies, the codes were refined and these helped in developing the final themes.

The final step was the development of the final themes from the generated codes. In developing the themes, the coded data was scrutinised to determine the meaning of each code and to compare it to other codes to determine any similarities, contrasts, and relevance to the research aim. This five-step process permitted data quality checks and elimination of data without relevant meaning to the research. The thematic analysis technique enabled the researchers to ensure that the findings were grounded in the lived experiences of the participants. The approach allowed various stages of engaging the data, thus providing rigour and trustworthiness of the data.

In terms of research ethics, the researchers sought the consent of all participants before the interview. Voluntary participation was upheld and no participant was coerced into participating. The researchers did not deceive the participants as the objectives of the research were clearly explained to them before the interviews were conducted. The research interviews were conducted in an environment safe from harming both the participant and the researcher. The researchers ensured the physical and psychological safety of all participants throughout the research process. The names of the participants have been anonymised using pseudonyms to ensure that the information shared remains confidential. The principle of reflexivity guided the researchers in avoiding biased analysis of the research findings. Reflexivity entails the measure of reducing biased analysis and interpretation of research findings (Neuman, 2014). In this regard, the researchers remained objective in their analysis, ensuring that their preconceptions would neither cloud the data analysis process nor distort an accurate portrayal of the data.

RESULTS, DISCUSSION, AND ANALYSIS

This section presents and discusses the results of the study as obtained from primary data collected through semi-structured interviews with thirty-four participants. The ensuing section presents some of the main features that assist in determining the extent to which the housing challenge in Harare can qualify as a wicked policy problem.

The Lack of Definitional Consensus for the Housing Challenge in Harare

The main characteristic of wicked problems according to Rittel and Webber (1973) is that they do not have a clear definition. This means that wicked problems can be defined in various ways. The study revealed that true to this characteristic, the urban housing challenge in Harare has a multiplicity of definitions such as acute housing shortages, overcrowding, sprouting of informal settlements and absolute homelessness. Thus, the definition of the urban housing challenge in Harare is vague as there is a lack of consensus on what the actual problem is. The study established that the urban housing challenge in Harare has been defined in different ways by plural stakeholders such as urban planners, Members of Parliament, Councillors, Mayors and their deputies, Residents Associations representatives and civil society organisations, local government administrators, International Organisations with interest in housing, political parties, interest groups and residents (Williams & Poshai, 2023). Each of these stakeholders has its version and understanding of what the housing problem is, who caused it and how it can be resolved. This was stated in an interview with a ward councillor in Budiro who stated that: *“the way we see the housing challenge differs from person to person. As a ward councillor, I may see housing challenges in the city as manifesting through housing shortages, yet someone else sees politically connected land barons as breeding informal settlements which is also another housing challenge. Someone else may see the exorbitant rental housing and a dysfunctional mortgage system as the defining features of the housing challenge in Harare”* (Ward Councillor in Harare).

Supporting the same view, a housing expert and urban planner interviewed in Harare indicated that: *“from time immemorial, there has never been an agreement on what the housing problem in Harare is. A critical analysis of the housing challenge indicates that this problem has different faces to it. For example, to me, the housing challenge in Harare is a planning problem as it emerges from the weak enforcement of council laws on housing land occupation. Building consensus among stakeholders on the definition of the housing challenge can help interested groups in developing a sustainable resolution to this challenge.”*

In the City of Harare for example, whereas the local government administrators view and define the urban challenge as being epitomised by the sprouting of illegal settlements, residents without decent housing facilities view the problem as being that of the local government’s inability to provide them with affordable housing options. On the other hand, Residents’ Associations view the urban housing challenge as being symbolic of poor urban planning strategies by the governing authorities, leaving residents with no options but to ‘house themselves’ in shanties and other informal housing facilities. This was emphasised in an interview with a resident association representative in Harare who lamented that: *“Everyone has the right to decent housing, but the reality that prevails in Zimbabwe is that most urbanites have limited to non-existent basic housing options. The reason why many people are living in informal settlements is because the government and responsible*

authorities have not properly addressed their housing plights. That many urbanites are living in illegal structures is a clear sign of housing desperation in the country” (Resident Association representative).

In an interview, a resident in an informal settlement on the periphery of Hatcliffe Extension revealed that: *“The housing problem to me means the lack of decent shelter to accommodate my family. The shortage of affordable rental housing in the city made me want to live here as I do not have any other option. I came here in 2017 because I realised the larger part of my salary was for rentals. I have other expenses, and I can meet them by staying here where there are no rentals. However, this place is not comfortable but there is nothing I can do at the moment.”*

These divergent views demonstrate how the definition of the urban housing challenge in Zimbabwe has largely depended on the perception and subjective judgement of the people defining the problems, which is consonant with one of the characteristics of wicked problems.

The Housing Challenge in Harare has Multiple Causes and Causality Explanations

In their wicked problems framework, Rittel and Webber (1973) argued that wicked problems have many causes. This is the case with the urban housing challenge in Zimbabwe has multiple causal explanations. Stakeholders such as residents, Residents Associations, human rights organisations, the central and local government, local councillors, land developers, housing cooperatives and constituency leaders all have different interpretations of what is causing the urban housing challenge in Zimbabwe. The causality explanation of these problems differs from one stakeholder to another. For example, residents as housing seekers see the urban housing challenge as being caused by the incapacity of the government through local councils to avail affordable and accessible housing development schemes to make housing available to them. In this regard, residents blame the government for failing to deliver housing, a situation that has triggered housing shortages and subsequent sprouting of both bogus housing cooperatives and illegal settlements in and around Harare.

The study revealed that the City of Harare experiences an influx of people from rural areas and its surrounding areas daily and this is causing a strain on existing housing facilities. The majority of these people become permanent residents of Harare and this has resulted in higher demand for housing facilities and an increase in the number of households in the Harare Metropolitan province compared to the other nine provinces in Zimbabwe. The Zimbabwe National 2022 Census report showed that Harare has a total resident population of 2 427 209 which constitute 16% of the national population (Zimbabwe Statistical Agency, 2022), as shown in Figure 1 below.

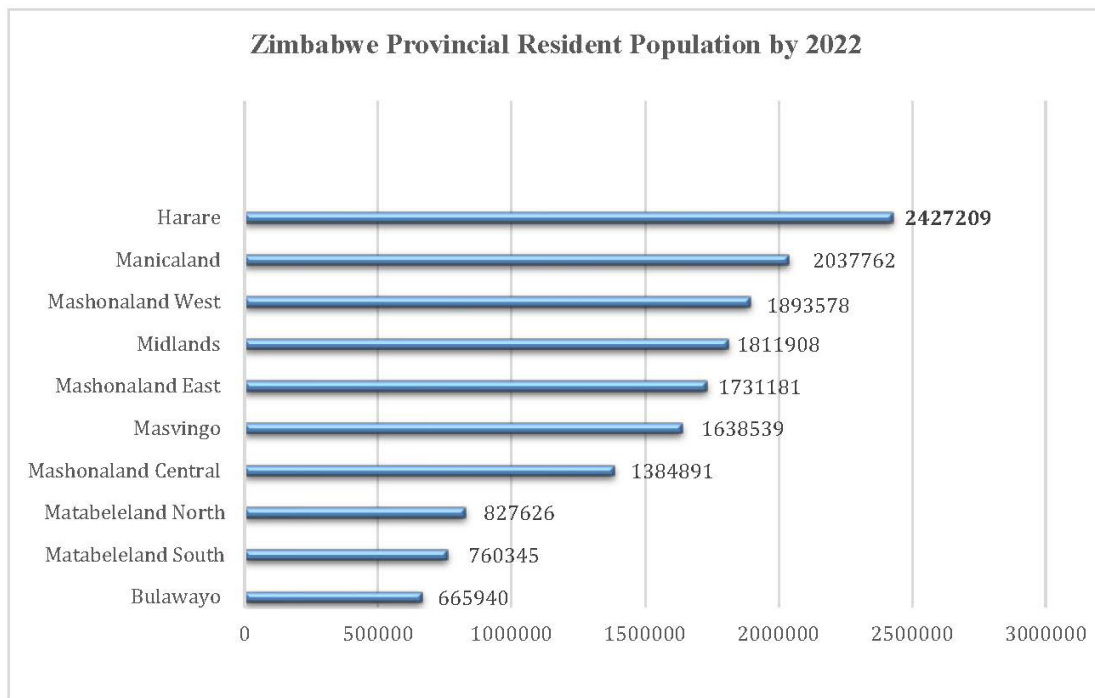


Figure 1. Number of households and average household size by Province in Zimbabwe

Source: Zimbabwe Statistical Agency 2022 National Census Report

Figure 1 above shows that the City of Harare as the capital city of Zimbabwe, has the highest number of urban dwellers in the country. Due to rapid urban in-migration into the city, Harare experiences higher cases of housing shortages and related housing problems emanating from its ever-growing population that outmatches the available housing stock. Commenting on this issue in an interview, an international housing expert based in Harare indicated that: *“Harare is arguably one of the world’s worst unique urban landscapes with a plethora of obstacles to the survival of humanity, but the main challenge faced by the majority of low-income earners in this city is housing. Everyone in the city is thinking about buying a stand or owning a house and this is against the finiteness of the land reserved for housing. This situation has fuelled the sprouting of fake cooperatives that disguise themselves to be linked to the council and continue to dupe newcomers in the city who want to be landlords.”*

In addition, residents’ associations argue that the government and local authorities have failed to prioritise housing delivery. On the other hand, the government attributes the urban housing challenge to the prevailing economic hardships that the country is experiencing, together with the economic sanctions as having crippled its financial incapacity to deliver housing facilities in urban areas. Furthermore, there is no consensus amongst political parties on the causes of urban housing challenges. On one hand, opposition political parties such as the Citizens Coalition for Change (CCC) argue that

the urban housing challenge in Zimbabwe is figurative of poor governance by the incumbent government. An interviewed international urban planner who is originally from Harare but is now based in New York indicated that: *“The urban housing challenge in Harare is difficult to resolve because of the lack of consensus amongst senior officials in the councils. In particular, the lack of a working relationship between the Minister of Local Government, Public Works and National Housing and the Harare Mayor(s) has created tensions that mar the development of functional models to address housing challenges in Harare. This situation can improve if there is working tolerance between the mayor and the Minister.”*

For example, an interviewed opposition Member of Parliament in Harare, Urban argued that the ruling government has failed dismally to adequately provide for the right to housing and shelter such that people are left with no option but to live in unorthodox settlements. He unequivocally blamed the central government for poor housing delivery by stating that: *“Urban councils in Zimbabwe are supervised by the central government through the Ministry of Local Government. As such, the minister of Local Government monitors the activities of these local authorities, and such activities include housing provision. Sadly, the minister has not lobbied the central government to provide sufficient financial resources to councils for them to develop housing facilities for ever-growing urban populations. The blame is on the central government for not providing sufficient financial resources for urban councils to provide housing”* (Member of Parliament in Harare).

On the other hand, an interviewed resident who is also a ZANU-PF supporter who resides in Mbare, Harare held that the urban housing challenge in Zimbabwe is a symptom of maladministration by opposition councillors who are failing to develop pragmatic strategies to deliver adequate housing facilities making the following remarks: *“The opposition is in control of the administration of most urban councils in Zimbabwe. As such, the poor housing delivery and shortage of housing facilities in their areas of jurisdiction are reflective of their glaring incapacity to govern. The opposition has failed to prioritise available financial resources for housing delivery and the provision of other basic services such as water and refuse collection. Their potential as an alternative government is questionable if they cannot manage contemporary urban affairs in the local areas of jurisdiction”* (Resident of Mbare, Harare).

The Persistence and Resistance of the Urban Housing Challenge in Harare

In their wicked policy problems framework, Rittel and Webber (1973) stated a policy problem that is persistent and resistant to all government resolutions becomes wicked. This characteristic is evident in Harare, where the urban housing challenge has been resistant to the different measures that authorities have formulated and implemented to address it. A telephone interview with a former mayor of Harare revealed that *“there has not been a permanent solution to the urban housing challenge as it keeps on resurfacing in*

different forms. For the government and local government administrations, the task of addressing the urban housing challenge has become a difficult problem."

The study revealed that the housing challenge is worsening regardless of a series of central and local government interventions towards ameliorating this problem. The study found that the City of Harare has adopted measures such as urban renewal, site and service schemes, pay schemes, the cooperative model, and the land developer's approach, but housing challenges continue to persist. In an interview, with a member of a local non-governmental organisation specialising in housing development in Harare, it was revealed that *"the provision of public housing in Harare is currently at a standstill. There is currently no functional housing delivery model in Harare other than private land developers and cooperatives. It seems that the authorities have surrendered on their initial drive towards housing for all as they are financially incapable of providing low-cost housing for the needy residents of Zimbabwe's capital. The incapacity to provide affordable public housing facilities has placed the majority of Harare residents into a precarious condition as they live in conditions of persistent jeopardy to their families."*

Residents from Caledonia Park, a high-density suburb and former informal settlement located in the north-eastern part of Harare confirmed that housing problems like the sprouting of illegal settlements and overcrowding have become eyesores in their areas which is evidence of the tenacity of the urban housing challenge in Zimbabwe. In addition, an interviewed resident in Southlea Park echoed the sentiments of other residents interviewed in Budiro by stating: *"Informal settlements are nothing new to us. We are used to staying in them and as long as the authorities do not meet our housing needs, we will continue to expand them because this is our only housing alternative. I am sure that the government knows our housing desperations but they deliberately ignore us"* (Resident of Budiro, Harare).

The number of residential housing land applicants on the housing waiting lists for many urban areas in Zimbabwe continues to increase, a situation that confirms the urgent need for sufficient urban housing facilities. For example, in an interview with a housing officer for the Harare City Council, it was revealed that the city's housing waiting list has over 1 million applicants, with these statistics showing the housing delivery backlog in this city. To confirm this position, an interviewed housing officer in the Harare City Council stated: *"The urban housing challenge in Zimbabwe has been continuously mutating and difficult for the council to contain. The city's social goal to promote majority access to adequate, decent, affordable and quality housing by the year 2015 has already been defeated, and the agenda to make Harare a world-class city by the year 2025 seems to be a foregone ambition"* (Housing officer in Harare).

Notably, most of the adopted resolutions to the urban housing challenge in Zimbabwe have been misaligned, and even contradictory or irrelevant. For example, in May 2005, the Government of Zimbabwe launched a massive urban clean-up campaign called Operation *Murambatsvina*, a programme that was justified by the government as being implemented to eradicate illegal dwellings in urban centres. Despite the demolition of over 5000 informal housing structures in Harare through the OM programme, further informal settlements have multiplied in urban environments (Matamanda, 2019). In the same year, the government launched Operation *Garikai/Hlalani Kuhle*, as a measure to resettle the victims of demolitions in decent alternative housing. However, the programme was quickly abandoned because the government had no fiscal space to accommodate it at that time. Commenting on Operation *Garikai/Hlalani Kuhle*, an international housing development expert in Harare indicated that “*Operation Garikai/Hlalani Kuhle was a makeshift arrangement out of shame for the desperate housing conditions created by Operation Murambatsvina. The Ministry of Local Government, Public Works and National Housing wanted to project a façade of a caring government, but this was simply a gimmick to cover up the blunders created by Operation Murambatsvina. The programme was implemented in time to reduce the criticisms made by the international community.*”

In January 2016, the government of Zimbabwe through local authorities also unleashed another ‘clean-up campaign’ where settlements regarded as illegal were demolished. These launch-and-stop measures resonate with Rittel and Webber’s argument that in attempting to solve a wicked problem, the policymakers stop when they run out of time or resources.

Perennial Contestations on Proper Resolutions to the Urban Housing Challenge in Harare

Rittel and Webber (1973) argue that another dimension of wicked problems is that when faced with an issue, stakeholders judge the cogency of proposed solutions to wicked policy problems differently based on their interests, values and ideological predilections. This feature is applicable in Harare where the various initiatives adopted by local authorities in resolving the housing challenge have been met with varying interpretations by a polarised stakeholder base. In this highly contested policy matrix, some stakeholders have regarded governmental policy strategies as useful while others view them as useless. For example, Operation *Murambatsvina* (OM) which was one of the measures adopted by the Government of Zimbabwe in 2005 to restore order in the cities through demolition of informal settlements was judged differently by local and international urban housing stakeholders. Bratton and Masunungure (2007) argue that Operation *Murambatsvina* was implemented in major cities such as Harare, Bulawayo, Mutare, Masvingo and Gweru. Whereas the city councils considered OM as being the most viable alternative to address the persistent urban housing challenge, some stakeholders aptly rejected the measures as

inhumane since there was no alternative for the victims. In an interview, a member of a local housing NGO based in Harare stated that *“Operation Murambatsvina represents a dark spot in the history of housing development in Zimbabwe. It was both an ill-planned and poorly executed programme that had no basis and was largely an act of injustice on desperate home seekers. The government could have done better. Perhaps, it was noble to relocate people to other areas with decent facilities”*

In addition, interviewed opposition Member of Parliament in Harare retrospectively argued that OM was never an attempt to restore housing sanity in the city of Harare, but an injustice act perpetrated to punish urban residents for voting resoundingly for the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) in the 31 March 2005 Parliamentary elections in Zimbabwe. In rebuking the OM, the interviewed MP stated that: *“Operation Murambatsvina was nothing more than an unjustified retribution for the urban electorate’s resounding show of approval for the opposition in the 2005 elections. It was like a vengeful and punitive cleansing exercise by the ruling party (ZANU-PF) to teach the urban electorate a lesson not to vote for the opposition again in future elections. Ironically, the opposition’s urban support base increased after the OM programme”* (Member of Parliament in Harare).

The OM was also described by the United Nations envoy as a disastrous venture that provoked a ‘humanitarian crisis of immense proportion’ (Tibaijuka, 2005). Contrary to these admonitions on OM, local government authorities had considered the same OM as the most viable course of action to ameliorate the problem of sprouting illegal settlements in urban areas. These diverse interpretations of the same problem demonstrate that proposed solutions to wicked problems are judged differently due to divergent stakeholders with different motivations, perceptions and interests.

Resolutions to the Housing Challenge in Harare have Generated Worse Scenarios

Rittel and Webber (1973) also argued that another characteristic of wicked problems is that adopted solutions can generate worse-off scenarios that could be more difficult to resolve than the original problem. This implies that attempts to resolve wicked policy problems generate an upsurge of other social problems. This situation has occurred in Harare, where a series of illegal structure demolitions such as the infamous OM has left several people vulnerable and without proper shelter. In the case of OM, for example, the study found that a large majority of displaced residents were subjected to homelessness, with some living in slums that sprawled on the outskirts of the leafy Harare suburbs. Some OM victims were subjected to living in worse conditions such as the shanties that sprawled in some thickets and land portions in undeveloped urban areas such as peripheries of Borrowdale, Mt Pleasant, Epworth, Chitungwiza and Hatcliffe Extension. All these areas subjected the dwellers to extremely poor health as confirmed by an interviewed resident in an informal settlement in Epworth who indicated that *“the livelihoods of informal*

settlement dwellers are always subjected to risks such as the spread of diseases. This is largely because these areas are unsafe for human habitation as they do not have proper ablution facilities and clean sources of water”.

For example, residents interviewed in Caledonia Park revealed that in the aftermath of OM, they became desperate for housing and started living in slums that were a threat to their health. Confirming this, an interviewed resident in Hatcliffe Extension in Harare lamented: *“The living conditions we were subjected to after the OM were dreadful. For instance, after our abrupt displacement in Budiro, I remember sharing a tent with my two teenage daughters and my wife for two weeks because we did not have an alternative. We would sleep in the same tent and there were no ablution facilities and no water sources in the areas where we were temporarily residing. This was a life-threatening health scare that I will never forget”* (Hatcliffe Extension resident).

Interviewed residents in Southlea Park also confirmed that some of their family members were forced to migrate to other places around the country, leaving their jobs, a situation that also disturbed the education progress of their children. These worse-off housing scenarios emerged from what was considered a solution to the problem and this confirms the claim that there are no obvious or apparent solution pathways when confronted with wicked policy problems.

The Uniqueness of the Housing Challenge in Harare

Wicked policy problems are essentially unique, argued Rittel and Webber (1973). True to this wicked problem characteristic, the urban housing challenges in Harare are essentially unique. This is so because resolutions applied in other countries in dealing with a similar problem have not worked in the context of Zimbabwe. For example, the demolition of illegal settlements and follow-up resettlement of the victims has improved housing access and ownership in some parts of countries such as South Africa. However, the outcome of a similar approach has produced disastrous outcomes in Harare, Zimbabwe where a series of illegal settlement demolitions by the government left most citizens without a proper sanctuary. Efforts to resettle the affected residents and improve housing ownership and access have been daunted by limited financial resources. Commenting on this, an interviewed housing officer in the Harare City Council stated: *“Dealing with the housing challenge in the Zimbabwean context is a daunting task. Most urban local authorities in Zimbabwe have the will to resettle informal settlers and move them to better housing facilities, but they lack the requisite financial resources to do so. This is unlike in developed countries where there are viable funding options to improve the stock of housing facilities”* (Housing Officer in Harare).

The above exposition demonstrates how wicked policy problems are exclusive to their setting and also consonant with the observation that there are no immediately transferable solutions to wicked policy problems (Althaus et al., 2022). Thus, when faced with wicked problems, policymakers cannot apply a resolution used to deal with a similar issue in a different context. This observation is consistent with Rittel and Webber's argument that potential solutions to problems in other contexts cannot be transplanted or transferred to other wicked problems because they will be dysfunctional (Rittel and Webber, 1973).

The Urban Housing Challenge in Harare is a Symptom of Other Social Problems

To Rittel and Webber (1973), wicked problems can be a symptom of other social problems because policy issues are interconnected. The study revealed that the urban housing challenge in Zimbabwe is not isolated from other societal problems. They are a symptom of other multi-sectoral problems that the government is grappling with. The study found that there is a connection between the urban housing challenge and other socio-political and economic problems in the country. For example, in an interview with a resident in an informal settlement on the periphery of Hatcliffe Extension, it was revealed that *"the housing challenges in Harare are a reflection of a dysfunctional economy and a collapsed social security system in the country. The fact that most people are struggling to afford decent housing signifies that there are deep-rooted problems in the economy. The majority of the dwellers of informal settlements are unemployed and this is a reflection of a major national economic problem."*

The shortage of housing in urban areas is a symptom of the economic downfall that Zimbabwe has been experiencing since the late 1990s. For example, the collapse of the Zimbabwean economy is a wicked problem on its own, and this has triggered some other problems such as budgetary deficits to fund housing delivery in urban areas. The economic downturns have seriously crippled the capacity of the government to provide housing facilities as it has also hamstrung the capacity of citizens to afford housing facilities. Kurebwa (2020) also argues that the bad state of the Zimbabwean economy has also resulted in high unemployment leaving the majority of the urban population without sufficient income to spend on housing. This argument was affirmed by an interviewed housing officer in the Harare City Council who stated: *"The country is in deep economic woes and councils are broke! The economic problem in Zimbabwe has had spill-over effects on the ability of councils to provide social services such as housing. Until the country has a revamped economy to sufficiently support the housing provision institutions, the housing challenge in urban areas will persist"* (Housing Officer in Harare).

Comparative Analysis of Housing Problems in Harare with Other International Urban Contexts

This section provides an analysis of how urban housing challenges in cities such as Cape Town in South Africa, Kigali in Rwanda and Medellín Colombia have been addressed. These cities have made notable strides towards navigating housing problems. This comparative analysis helps in identifying potentially adaptable and innovative solutions to the housing challenges faced in Harare, drawing experiences from other developing world contexts.

In Cape Town South Africa, housing shortages and overcrowding on the periphery of already dense neighbourhoods are prevalent in areas such as Delft, Khayelitsha, Kalkfontein, Gugulethu and Nyanga (Scheba, Turok & Visagie, 2021). The epitome of housing shortages in Cape Town has been the proliferation of informal settlements such as Siyakhana near Mandela Park as well as Wallcedene which is located on the eastern outskirts of Kraaifontein. These two informal settlements are home to millions of desperate home seekers in Cape Town (Millstein, 2020). The City of Cape Town has adopted several innovative strategies towards addressing the sprouting of informal settlements and housing shortages in its municipalities. For example, the implementation of the temporal relocation facility under the informal settlement upgrading programme. In this initiative, dwellers of informal settlements are temporarily relocated to a safer environment whilst their informal settlements are being upgraded so that they can have basic utilities such as roads, sewer and water (Millstein, 2020).

With the demand for housing land and space, the City of Cape Town has adopted the densification model of housing provision. This model involves the increased use of the available space both vertically and horizontally to increase occupancy. Densification increases the number of housing units such that an area which used to accommodate 100 households can accommodate over 100 households. In areas such as Kraaifontein and Brackenfell in Cape Town, the units developed under the densification models take the form of single and detached tower blocks, consolidated tower blocks with an open space in the middle (Scheba, Turok & Visagie, 2021). The urban densification policy has helped to ease the pressure on housing shortages in the City of Cape Town (Mbandlwa, 2021).

In Kigali, Rwanda, the demand for housing surpasses the available facilities due to the growing pressures of urbanisation (Ibarinda, 2022). Housing affordability has become a critical issue in Kigali as the city has been experiencing a very high rate of population and urban growth leading to huge housing supply deficits, dilapidated housing conditions and subsequent high cost of the available housing facilities (Niedenhoff, 2023). Models such as in-situ upgrading (informal settlement upgrading) have been adopted to improve affordable housing. Through innovative initiatives such as the Participatory Slum Upgrading Programme (PSUP), consultations with home seekers and the community

have been conducted to obtain information on the kind of housing facilities they want to live in (Malonza, Kibwami & Lawal, 2021). The Government of Rwanda has also partnered with non-state actors to overcome the housing financing constraints (Mugisha et al., 2024). An escalating deficit in housing or dwelling units, resulting in overcrowding, high rent and the proliferation of informal settlements (Uwayezu & Vries, 2020).

The first approach that has been adopted to address housing woes in the city of Kigali is the incremental construction model (Harelimana, 2017). The incremental housing provision model is an initiative in which unfinished houses on serviced plots are provided to beneficiaries at an affordable rate and they will improve them over time. The beneficiaries are allowed to extend and upgrade their housing facilities, adapting them to their own needs. The volatile nature of housing finance availability in Rwanda triggered housing city authorities in Kigali to explore creating financing initiatives, and this includes engaging international lenders and Development Finance Institutions (Harelimana, 2017). The creative housing finance approach has helped the city of Kigali authorities to secure housing development investments from financiers such as the Cities Investment Facility, the World Bank, the UN-HABITAT as well as SKAT consulting limited. In addition, Kigali city authorities have also introduced subsidised housing facilities through commercial banks, incentives like tax holidays for construction companies, mortgage plans and housing loans and tax exemption on construction materials especially for big housing construction projects (Harelimana, 2017).

In Medellín, Colombia, urban planning strategies have been vital to tackling housing challenges. One such approach is the development of social housing projects in previously marginalised areas (Smith et al., 2023; Rivera-Flórez et al., 2024). The implementation of the Metrocable, which combines cable cars with the city's public transportation system, has significantly improved access to transportation, healthcare, education, and job opportunities for residents living in hilly and underserved neighbourhoods (Álvarez et al., 2023; Hofer et al., 2024). Moreover, the city has made investments in architectural and urban design interventions, including the construction of public spaces and cultural centres (Harboe & Hoelscher, 2023). These interventions not only enhance the living environment but also promote a sense of community pride and social cohesion. As a result, these initiatives have not only provided affordable housing solutions but have also transformed once-neglected areas into thriving, vibrant neighbourhoods.

Adapting these strategies in Harare, Zimbabwe could bring about significant advantages in tackling its housing crisis. Similarly to Medellín, Harare is grappling with housing challenges intensified by rapid urbanisation and scarce resources. Implementing innovative methods such as integrating informal settlements into the formal urban framework, investing in eco-friendly transportation infrastructure, and prioritising community-driven development projects could help reduce housing shortages and enhance living conditions. To illustrate, deploying cable cars or other cutting-edge transportation

methods could improve accessibility to housing in hilly or remote areas while rejuvenating public spaces and cultural hubs could contribute to the creation of unified and durable neighbourhoods.

By learning from the cases of Cape Town, Kigali and Medellín, policymakers in Harare have the potential to address the intricate housing challenges and develop more inclusive and sustainable urban spaces for its inhabitants. The City of Harare can customise the innovative resolutions implemented in these cities to fit its local circumstances. The next section presents the policy and practice recommendations made in this paper.

POLICY AND PRACTICE IMPLICATIONS

Given the intractable nature of the housing challenge in Harare, as has been demonstrated in the foregoing discussion, the following recommendations are proposed to improve urban housing policy formulation and implementation.

Recommendations to Urban Housing Policymakers

- **Developing an integrated urban planning framework for Harare:** There is need for urban housing policymakers to devise and execute a thorough urban planning framework that specifically caters to the unique housing provision requirements and obstacles faced in Harare. This framework ought to emphasise the development of affordable housing while simultaneously considering variables such as population growth, urbanisation patterns, and the availability of land within the city's boundaries.
- **Fostering collaborative problem definition among urban housing stakeholders:** There is need to promote collaboration among housing stakeholders in Harare to thoroughly understand the urban housing problem. For example, ward councillors as the main housing policymakers in Harare must engage residents, community leaders, housing experts, and central government officials to gather diverse perspectives and insights into the root causes of housing challenges in various neighbourhoods across the city.
- **Building consensus-based solutions for Harare's housing challenge:** There is need to promote collaboration and agreement among stakeholders when making choices about addressing the housing problem in Harare. This can help to ensure that the proposed strategies are in line with the desires and objectives of the local population and also meet the standards set by the national housing plans and local housing development strategies.
- **Strengthening policy coordination and alignment with Harare's housing development needs:** There is need to enhance coordination and alignment among government agencies, local authorities, NGOs, and private sector entities engaged in

the housing sector in Harare. These actors should develop mechanisms for consistent communication and collaboration among themselves to prevent duplication of efforts and optimise the impact of housing initiatives throughout the city.

- **Establishing functional monitoring and evaluation mechanisms for Harare's housing projects:** Policymakers such as ward councillors and housing officers in the city must develop comprehensive monitoring and evaluation systems to keep track of the advancement of housing initiatives in Harare. This initiative entails regular evaluations of housing affordability, accessibility, and quality of life indicators to guarantee that the interventions effectively address the needs of the city's residents.

Recommendations for Urban Planners

- **Formulating and implementing an Integrated Urban Planning Framework:** There is need for urban planners to strive to implement a comprehensive urban planning framework in Harare, concentrating on initiatives such as land-use zoning, infrastructure development, and housing policy reforms to tackle the city's housing challenges.
- **Promoting community engagement in structuring and designing urban housing problems:** Urban planners in Harare should encourage collaboration with local communities to determine specific housing requirements and preferences in diverse neighbourhoods. This could entail carrying out community surveys, organising public consultations, and creating neighbourhood committees to promote communication and cooperation on the current and potential urban housing challenges.
- **Fostering regular capacity-building and knowledge-sharing among Harare urban planners:** There is need to engage in regular capacity-building initiatives and knowledge-sharing activities to boost their skills and expertise in urban planning and housing development to match Harare's context. This involves learning from successful case studies and best practices in other cities that have similar challenges.

Recommendations for Community Organisations

- **Empowering Harare community-based organisations in housing planning and implementation:** Community-based organisations in Harare should proactively engage in the planning and execution of housing projects. This can help in bolstering the development of community-driven initiatives, offering technical guidance to policymakers, and promoting access to housing development resources and financial support. The same initiative can improve capacity-building programmes and knowledge-sharing activities towards strengthening community organisations' capabilities to advocate for housing rights, gather resources, and interact efficiently with policymakers and stakeholders in Harare.

CONCLUSION

This article has demonstrated how the housing challenge in Harare, Zimbabwe constitutes a wicked policy problem as it is both ill-defined and resistant to the response measures formulated to ameliorate it. The number of urbanites in Harare who are living in conditions of severe shelter deprivations is increasing every day because the housing challenge has become difficult for governing authorities to manage. The study results show that the urban housing challenge in Harare is wicked. The city of Harare is typified by varying housing crises such as overcrowding in residential areas or the sprouting of squalid or dilapidated settlements unfit for human habitation, and these include the notorious Matapi flats in Mbare. There are conflicting interpretations of the definition of the urban housing challenge in Zimbabwe, and this has complicated efforts to design pragmatic solutions towards addressing this challenge. For example, stakeholders such as council housing officers, ward councillors as well as residents have varied definitions of the housing problem and this has heightened the problem's intractability. Owing to the diverse explanations of the same problem, diverse proposals on the solution to the urban housing challenge have been proposed. Thus, there has not been an objectively correct solution to be applied to the urban housing challenges in Zimbabwe because proposed solutions often reflect the ideological viewpoints of the different stakeholders in the urban housing sector.

The paper argues that notwithstanding their complexity, collaborative effort amongst all stakeholders can be a useful strategy for dealing with the wicked urban housing challenge in Zimbabwe. The contributions from different stakeholders enable policymakers to develop an exhaustive outline of all the conceivable resolutions to the problem at hand. The collaboration among these stakeholders can help in developing a more comprehensive definition of what the problem is, and the development of all-encompassing resolutions informed by the input from all affected parties and stakeholders. The current fragmented approach to addressing the urban housing challenge in Zimbabwe makes them wicked. Thus, public authorities should spearhead the collaborative process because they reserve the final mandate to legalise and enforce whatever strategy is suggested. Collaboration between state and non-state actors in tackling policy problems is not always a smooth process because of the innate conflicts among stakeholders, but it is necessary.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY AND AREAS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

The research on the urban housing issue in Harare, Zimbabwe, using the wicked problems framework, provides valuable insights. However, it also has some limitations that need to be acknowledged. The qualitative approach used in the study is informative, but it may restrict the ability to generalise the findings to other contexts. The use of purposefully selected participants and semi-structured interviews may introduce biases

and limitations, which could hinder a comprehensive understanding of the urban housing dynamics. To address this, future research could benefit from a mixed-methods approach that combines qualitative insights with quantitative data, thereby enhancing the scope and depth of the analysis.

Moreover, the main issue with this study lies in its inability to capture evolving trends in the urban housing challenge due to its limited temporal scope and the absence of a longitudinal analysis. Without considering temporal dynamics, the study may fail to recognise crucial shifts in policy effectiveness or socioeconomic conditions that affect housing dynamics. To overcome this limitation, future research could employ a longitudinal approach to systematically monitor changes in Harare's housing landscape over an extended period. This longitudinal perspective enables a more profound understanding of how housing challenges develop over time, allowing policymakers and stakeholders to create more responsive and adaptive interventions. Furthermore, such an approach offers insights into the long-term impact of the proposed solutions on urban housing dynamics in Harare, contributing to a better understanding of their durability and sustainability.

Future researchers can also explore the external factors and contextual dynamics that affect the urban housing challenge in Harare. Economic trends, political instability, and environmental considerations are examples of such factors that may interact with housing policies and practices in complex ways, influencing the overall landscape of the housing challenge. Future studies should conduct a more thorough analysis of these contextual factors to gain a deeper understanding of the underlying complexities involved. By acknowledging these limitations and conducting additional research in these areas, scholars can enhance their understanding of the urban housing challenge in Harare and contribute to the development of more effective and sustainable solutions for addressing this urgent challenge.

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