

URBAN GOVERNANCE AND MISMANAGEMENT: AN ENVIRONMENTAL CRISIS IN ZIMBABWE.

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ABSTRACT

Waste disposal and water supply are key services, which urban councils and municipalities provide. However, from 2005 to early 2009, the Zimbabwe National Water Authority (ZINWA) took over these functions. This weakened the financial base of opposition-led urban councils and municipalities and made them irrelevant in some matters of urban governance even though they had won democratic elections. The ruling Zimbabwe African National African Union-Patriotic Front (ZANU-P.F) government, which had lost popularity in most urban centres, did not feel at home with local authorities largely composed of officials from the opposition Movement for Democratic Change (MDC), which it viewed as an enemy. Consequently, it withdrew some of the traditional roles of urban councils (namely: water supply and waste disposal) and handed them over to ZINWA. After its takeover, ZINWA dismally failed in service delivery thereby endangering the health of millions of urban residents. A cholera outbreak claimed some 4000 lives throughout the country. More recently, the mismanagement of funds by urban council officials throughout the country has also compromised the health of urban residents. This paper critically discusses these issues and suggests several solutions, which are aimed at promoting the achievement of sustainable development. These include: depoliticizing some municipal issues, restoring professionalism in the delivery of key services (such as water supply and waste disposal) and educating the public on environmental sustainability.

Keywords: Urban Governance, Environmental Crisis

INTRODUCTION

At global and national levels, public and political concern for water as a scarce resource is quite recent, dating back to a little over a decade. This is because scientists, legal experts, economists and administrators in charge of water have traditionally regarded the resource as a technical or economic issue that they could effectively manage on their own (Petrella, 2001). However, in recent years this conception has changed drastically due to several factors that, according to Soares (2001), include:

- a) The increasing pollution of water sources such as rivers, lakes and underground aquifers,
- b) Rapid population growth in major urban settlements,
- c) Soil erosion and dam siltation,
- d) Conflicts between farmers and city dwellers over increasingly strained water supply systems, and
- e) Competition for water between countries and regions.

According to Petrella (2001), at global level, some 1.4 billion people have no access to safe drinking water. Realising the importance of this resource to human health and other aspects of life, in 1996, the World Bank together with other U.N. agencies and states established two organizations namely: the World Water Council (WWC) and the Global Water

Partnership (GWP). While the WWC sought to develop a common vision for water-related issues, GWP's goal was policy oriented, striving to enable public and private organizations to develop a water-saving system or mechanism.

In line with these international events, Zimbabwe established a new water Act, namely the Zimbabwe Water Authority Act Chapter 20:25, which came into operation in January 2002 (ZINWA, 2002). At its formation, the new Act repealed the Regional Water Authority Act (Chapter 20: 16), which had been established during the colonial era. It also led to the formation of the Zimbabwe National Water Authority, a watchdog of the country's water resources. As part of its mandate, ZINWA's main goal was to ensure an equitable distribution of water among public and private consumers. It also guarded the resource against abuse through pollution. For this reason, it was expected to work closely with the Environmental Management Act (EMA) of 2002, a legal instrument that is geared towards environmental protection in the country (Gandiwa, 2004). From time to time, ZINWA would monitor the activities of local authorities in order to ensure that they kept the nation's water resources safe from potential polluters. This paper addresses three key issues that are summed up in the following questions:

- a) Which problems have Zimbabwean urban centres experienced in their delivery of key services such as water supply and waste disposal?
- b) How have they affected the environment and health of urban residents in the country?
- c) What solutions can be suggested for the future?

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study is based on a survey of recent events in Zimbabwe's urban centres. Various documents were perused including: the Environmental Management Act, the Urban Councils Act, the Zimbabwe National Water Authority Act, ZINWA's Operational Guidelines Hand book, journals, books and other relevant sources of information. Due to the topical nature of the problem at national level, media sources such as recent newspaper articles were also consulted. They were drawn from government-controlled papers such as The Herald (a daily paper), The Sunday Mail and The Manica Post (weekly publications) as well as private media sources such as News Day, The Standard and The Zimbabwean. While books and journals provided a general or global perspective of the problem, Zimbabwean Acts and media reports reflected the current developments in the country from 2005 to 2010.

THE TRADITIONAL FUNCTIONS OF URBAN COUNCILS AND ZINWA

Urban councils are local government authorities that have been used in the administration of towns and cities in Zimbabwe and other parts of the world (Mosha, 1996). They are an arm of Central Government and are accountable to both government and the people they serve. They are made up of elected officials such as the mayor and several councillors who hold administrative posts. In Zimbabwe, their period of tenure is limited to every five years, after which they have to seek for re-election (Urban Councils Act Chapter 29:15, 1996). Most councillors are affiliated to political parties in the country. For example during the first decade of Zimbabwe's independence (1980-1990) most urban councillors belonged to the ruling Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU-PF). However, since 2000, most urban councillors have been drawn from the opposition Movement for Democratic Change (MDC). Whereas Central Government has been in the hands of ZANU-PF, local governance has become the domain of the MDC. This scenario has led to much friction since the two political parties are political rivals or enemies (Bond and Manyanya, 2003).

Among other things, the Urban Councils Act (Chapter 29:15) of 1996 empowers city councils to perform two main functions within their areas of jurisdiction, namely: waste disposal and water supply. This involves the construction of dams, weirs, bore holes, water and sewer reticulation infrastructure as well as solid waste dumps (Bagg, 1992). Since these services are provided at a cost, urban residents, industries, institutions and other clients pay monthly bills to urban councils for them. Consequently, local authorities derive substantial portions of their revenue from water and sewage disposal bills, which are revised regularly so as to match the rate of inflation (Mapira and Mungwini, 2005). They are also entitled to government grants in their operations. Traditionally, urban councils provided the above services under the watchful eyes of the Zimbabwe National Water Authority. In other words, while urban councils and municipalities were service providers, ZINWA was the watchdog that monitored the activities of local authorities. This division of labour was important as it ensured operational efficiency between the two organizations. ZINWA ensured that urban councils did a professional job for the benefit of its clients and protection of the environment. It was empowered to prosecute any municipalities that failed to fulfil their mandate. In monitoring the waste management and disposal activities of urban councils throughout the country, ZINWA (2002) was guided by six principles, which included:

- a) Granting or denying permits to agencies, authorities or private individuals wishing to discharge any effluent into any water body (whether surface water or ground water). This means that municipalities could not dispose of any waste (solid or liquid) without getting approval from ZINWA,
- b) Polluters were expected to pay to ZINWA for any pollution they caused. The scale of the charges was determined by the quality and quantity of the effluent. In this case, the poorer the quality of the effluent, the higher was the charge,
- c) Municipalities, industries, companies, institutions and individuals were expected to pay for ZINWA's policing efforts. Funds derived from permit fees were used in the monitoring activities that ZINWA regularly conducted,
- d) The permit holder was expected to shoulder the burden of monitoring activities. This meant that polluters had to keep records of the quantities and quality of the discharged effluent for inspection by ZINWA's pollution control unit,
- e) Penalties were expected to be clear and punitive. Failure of compliance by the polluter would result in the litigation of the culprits. The Administrative Court was a court of appeal while penalties for non-compliance were stipulated in the Water Act,
- f) The polluter was obliged to provide a remedy for any damage caused to the environment. This implies that he/she should either rectify the problem caused or pay for the damage.

The Water Act has been ZINWA's traditional legal instrument. Sections 3 to 7 of the Act's Operational Guidelines deal with water quality and environmental protection (ZINWA, 2002). They state that:

- a) Pollution is an offence and anyone found guilty of this offence shall be liable to either a fine or imprisonment for a period not exceeding one year or to both the fine and imprisonment. The fine has to be revised periodically so as to match the rate of inflation
- b) Any individual or organisation wishing to dispose of wastewater into a public stream or any other surface water or groundwater should apply for a permit to the Water Pollution Control Unit authorizing such disposal.
- c) ZINWA may require individuals or organisations to take certain steps to control or prevent pollution.

The Act works in conjunction with guidelines that specify the effluent standards for the discharge of liquid waste (ZINWA's Operational Guidelines Handbook, 2002). The handbook classifies permits into four categories, which range from safe or environmentally friendly (Blue) to low hazard (Green), medium hazard (Yellow) and high hazard (Red). This scale (Table 1) determines the penalties or fines that are meted out to offenders who are convicted. Since its inception in 2002, ZINWA has brought several urban councils to court for polluting the nation's rivers (Mapira and Mungwini, 2005). They include: Harare for polluting Lake Chivero, Mutare for dumping its effluent into the Sakubva River and Chitungwiza for polluting the Nyatsime and Manyame Rivers. However, over the years, ZINWA's efforts have been undermined by the failure of most urban councils to pay their fines in time since most of them have been experiencing financial problems (Mapira, 2007).

Table 1: Effluent Standards for Waste Disposal into Surface Water

| Classification | Risk | Reasons for Classification | Fees |
|----------------|---------------|---|---|
| Blue | Safe | Complies with Blue Standards | Monitoring fee Z\$7 500.00 |
| Green | Low Hazard | Waste meets Green Standard, or Blue Permit conditions not being met | Monitoring fee Z\$11 250.00 Environment fee Z\$30/ML |
| Yellow | Medium Hazard | Waste meets Yellow Standard, or Green Permit conditions not being met | Monitoring fee Z\$15 000.00 Environment fee Z\$67.50 |
| Red | High Hazard | Waste meets Red Standard, or Yellow Permit conditions not being met. | Monitoring fee Z\$22 500.00 Environment fee Z\$120.00 Penalty (+25%) |

Source: ZINWA: Operational Guidelines for the Control of water Pollution in Zimbabwe, 2002.

REASONS FOR ZINWA'S NEW MANDATE

During the first decade of independence (1980-1990), the Government of Zimbabwe enjoyed support from both the urban and rural electorate. This was shown by its repeated election victories at national and local government levels (Bond and Manyanya, 2003). However, during the 1990s the ruling ZANU-PF's popularity began to wane, undermined by the economic hardships that came in the wake of the Economic Structural Adjustment Programme (ESAP). While the rural electorate experienced land hunger problems, urban dwellers were subjected to numerous economic hardships, which made their lives unbearable (Kujinga and Makoni, 2000). In major urban centres such as Harare and Bulawayo, food riots, public protests and student activism became a common occurrence (Bond and Manyanya, 2003). In rural areas sporadic invasions of white-owned commercial farms reminded the government that the land question had not been resolved (Moyo, 2002).

According to Bond and Manyanya (2003), other factors that weakened the government's popularity included:

- a) Trade union activism under the banner of the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions (ZCTU),
- b) Revelations of political and civil service corruption such as rigged government tenders,
- c) Numerous cases of nepotism and bribery in government circles,
- d) Extravagant materialism by political elites for example the purchasing of luxury cars from Germany while the masses were starving,

- e) The formation of a strong political opposition party, the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) in 1999,
- f) The de-legitimisation of the state president who had fathered two children out of wedlock during the 1980s even though he claimed to be a devout Catholic.

The rejection of the government's constitutional referendum in 2000 reminded the ruling party (ZANU-PF) of its growing unpopularity (Logan and Tevera, 2001). Gone were the days when the electorate could be taken for granted. Hence it incited the invasion of white owned commercial farms in order to revive its lost nationalistic credibility among the peasants. In urban centres, the use of coercion, suppression of the judiciary and press freedom became a survival strategy for the regime (Bond and Manyanya, 2003). Some private newspapers such as The Daily News were banned while draconian laws such as the Public Order and Security Act (POSA) were passed in order to keep the masses in submission.

During the 2000 parliamentary elections, the MDC took all the urban seats and brought ZANU-PF's traditional grip on them to an end. It also swept mayoral and urban council seats (Mapira, 2006). These events did not only anger the ruling party, they also prompted it into new strategies of survival including dictatorship, coercion and the use of unconstitutional methods (Bond and Manyanya, 2003). The Harare, Chitungwiza and Mutare City councils were suspended and replaced by government-appointed commissions, whose tenures were renewed from time to time. Governors were introduced in order to complement the new structures that had been formed. Consequently, even though the opposition had won the elections, it could not govern the people who had brought it into power.

Although some MDC-dominated urban councils were suspended, ostensibly for their incompetence in service delivery, others such as those of Bulawayo and Masvingo survived. The ruling party did not take their impeccable performance in urban governance kindly. As a result, in 2005 ZINWA's mandate was broadened so that it could take over some of the key revenue generating activities of urban councils such as waste disposal and water supply (The Herald, June 7, 2005). The government claimed that ZINWA was in a better position to take over such functions than urban councils since it had the financial capacity to do so. However, it can be argued, on the basis of media evidence that the real motives of government's action were:

- a) The desire to weaken the financial base of the increasingly popular opposition-controlled urban councils so that they would become irrelevant in the eyes of the electorate since the ruling party would continue to dominate in matters of urban governance,
- b) Depriving the opposition-controlled urban councils of the opportunity to prove that they were more competent than the ruling party in service delivery, which would further increase their popularity among the electorate. The Harare City Council, under Elias Mudzuri (MDC) had already shown to the public its efficiency in service delivery,
- c) The fear that once the masses had tasted better quality urban governance, their appetite for a change of government at national level would be sharpened even further thereby creating a spirit of rebellion against the ruling party,
- d) Anger and jealousy against the opposition MDC whose popularity was increasing at the expense of that of ZANU-PF,

- e) The sheer desire of the ruling party to cling to power even though it had lost popularity among the masses. This explains the regime's decision to suspend some of the elected urban councils (such as those of Harare, Chitungwiza and Mutare) and replace them with government-appointed commissions whose terms of tenure were renewed from time to time.

By the end of 2007, most urban councils had been suspended and replaced by government-appointed commissions or were operating without financial or material support from government as was the case with the Bulawayo City Council (The Zimbabwean, 17 February, 2008). In Mutare, the dismissal of the mayor and his entire council occurred in December 2005 only two years after their coming into office. A government-appointed commission accused them of corruption in the form of "mismanagement and embezzlement of finances" (The Herald, 1 December, 2005 page 1). Since then onwards, government-appointed commissions managed the affairs of the city. The Urban Councils Act empowers the Minister of Local Government to suspend any local authorities that he/she deems to be incompetent in the delivery of services and replace them with commissions as mentioned previously (Urban Councils Act Chapter 29:15). When ZINWA assumed its new responsibility, the Environmental Management Agency (EMA) took over the pollution control unit from ZINWA so that it could monitor the operations of polluting organizations such as Urban Councils and ZINWA (Mapira, 2007).

HOW DID ZINWA PERFORM OVER THE YEARS?

Only a year after ZINWA's takeover, problems began to emerge. In 2006, the Minister of Water Resources and Infrastructural Development reshuffled the ZINWA Board, which had proved to be inefficient in the delivery of services (The Herald, October 26, 2006). This did not come as a surprise since most parastatal boards had been rocked by corruption and inefficiency (Mapira and Matikiti, 2010). Examples included: Air Zimbabwe (AZ), the National Railways of Zimbabwe (NRZ), the Zimbabwe Electricity Supply Authority (ZESA), the Agricultural and Rural Development Authority (ARDA) and the Zimbabwe Iron and Steel Corporation (ZISCO). Although the government achieved its objective of weakening the financial base of MDC-dominated urban councils, ZINWA's dismal performance in the delivery of services raised questions about the wisdom of government's decision. Over the years, water supply and waste management problems worsened as major cities such as Harare, Mutare and Masvingo ran short of drinking water (The Herald, October, 26, 2006). Some of these problems persisted for weeks or months without being attended to. The local media has been rife with reports of ZINWA's failure to deliver these services (Table 2).

Table 2: Problems encountered throughout the country

| Problems | City/Town | Media Source |
|---|--------------------------------------|--|
| Failure to rehabilitate water sewage disposal infrastructure. Poor billing and revenue collection. | Most urban centres in the country | The Herald, Thursday, 26 October 2006 page 1. |
| Failure to provide adequate water supplies to residents. A cholera outbreak kills over ten people. | Harare | The Herald Thursday, 26 October 2006 page 1 The Standard, 10 February, 2008, page 7 |
| Shortage of water in Dangamvura and Chikanga High density suburbabs Water shortages in Hobhouse and Chikanga 3 low-income residential areas | Mutare | The Manica Post 1-7 February, 2008, page1. |
| Lack of adequate water supplies for the whole city | Kadoma | The Standard, 10 February, 2008 page 13 |
| Burst sewer pipes and uncollected refuse, garbage and rubbish, a common sight Streams of sewage and mounds of rubbish, a nuisance in low- income residential areas. They expose people to disease out breaks such as cholera. | Harare and Chitungwiza | The Sunday Mail, July 25-31 2010 page D5 |
| Municipal and urban council officials overpay themselves at the expense of service delivery and provision. They consume up to 70% of city budgets instead of the stipulated 30%. | Most urban centres | The Sunday Mail, July 25-31 2010, page D14. |
| The country under threat of another cholera out break due to decaying infrastructure. | Most urban centres | News Day. Thursday, 22 July, 2010. |

The government's questionable intentions and ZINWA's dismal failure as a service provider generated suspicions among some urban councillors. The Bulawayo City Council is an example of local authorities, which defied government's plan to deprive them of some of their traditional roles. According to The Zimbabwean, 17 February, 2008 page 14:

"The shortage of potable water in Bulawayo is closely connected with a standoff between the city authorities and the Zimbabwe National Water Authority, ZINWA. ZINWA is a recently formed agency, which is supposed to be taking from municipal authorities as the supplier of water to all urban centres in Zimbabwe. However, its performance to date has been heavily criticised, and Bulawayo City Council-controlled by the opposition MDC-has resisted the takeover. The government in Harare has made it clear that as long as the takeover is resisted, the local authority will not get any assistance from (it)"

As a result of this conflict, the local authority begged for financial assistance from private companies so that it could buy water purification chemicals. Local authorities have a right to get government grants in order to execute some of their duties. It is ironical that government departments in Bulawayo were the major defaulters in the payment of water bills to

the city council. According to the same paper, they owed millions of US dollars in unpaid bills (The Zimbabwean, 17 February, 2008 page 14). There seems to be a conspiracy between central government in Harare and some of its departments in Bulawayo.

The national character of ZINWA's failure during its mandate is summarised in the following quotation:

"In other cities where ZINWA has taken over mains water and sewerage, it blames the shortage of electricity for its failure to maintain the water works. For its part, ZESA says it has its own problems including vandals damaging substations" (The Zimbabwean, 17 February, 2008, page 14).

THE CHOLERA OUT BREAK

In most cities where ZINWA took over, there were reports of garbage that had not been collected for weeks or months (The Zimbabwean, 17 February, 2008). The reason is that it had no transport to ferry it to the designated dumps since the government lacked enough fuel and vehicles for this purpose. When garbage goes for a long time without being disposed of, it poses serious health risks to residents who may end up contracting such diseases as cholera and malaria. Places of garbage are ideal breeding points for flies and mosquitoes, vectors of these diseases (Masocha and Tevera, 2003). On the other hand, Mapira (2007) shows that residents of Mutare City have been exposed to this problem for quite some time. Harare, once renowned as a sunshine city for its cleanliness (Moyo, 1997), has now deteriorated in status to a typical African urban settlement due to problems of waste management.

Obviously, ZINWA's failure in its new mandate rapidly turned the country's urban centres into unsafe environments for the residents (Chenje and Johnson, 1994 and Miller, 1998). However, as problems of water supply and waste management continued to dog Zimbabwean urban centres, it became obvious that the government lacked the will to reverse its decision on the issue. This is in spite of the fact that in Harare more than ten lives had been lost due to ZINWA's failure in its new mandate as mentioned previously (The Standard, 10 February, 2008, page 7). By the end of February, 2009, some 4000 lives had been lost in various parts of the country (News Day, Thursday, July 22, 2010).

IMPLICATIONS FOR SUSTANABLE DEVELOPMENT

From a sustainability point of view, several implications emerge from this study including that:

- a) Although ZINWA extended its mandate from that of a watchdog of the country's water resources to a provider of services such as water supply and waste disposal, it lacked the capacity to execute these duties effectively in all urban centres.
- b) Frequent water supply and sewage disposal problems were a threat to the health of millions of urban residents throughout the country.
- c) By ignoring the democratic rights of urban residents, the ruling ZANU-PF government was putting people's lives at risk through unsanitary urban environments. (The Zimbabwean, 21-27 February, 2008).
- d) The actions of government of depriving urban councils of their revenue (from water supply and waste disposal bills) were a ploy by a regime that had lost popularity and legitimacy among the masses, a tragedy in the history of urban governance in Zimbabwe. As a result of ZINWA's takeover, urban councils were weakened considerably so that they could no longer perform some of the key duties for which the people had elected them into office.

- e) ZINWA's takeover also reflected government's failure to respect its own constitution and the democratic rights of the urban electorate. However, this action was not new. It had been manifested previously through the introduction of Governors (or Resident Ministers) and government-appointed commissions, which took over the functions of elected mayors and urban councillors.
- f) After the formation of the coalition government in February 2009, urban councils regained their traditional roles. However, corruption and mismanagement of revenue have infiltrated them with negative consequences on the urban environment.
- g) In the current situation, there is need for environmental education among the public so that local authorities can be more sensitive to the plight of the environment and its impact on human life and health. Environmental watchdogs such as EMA, NGOs and the media can take a leading role in campaigns of this nature.

CONCLUSION

This paper has discussed some of the problems, which have confronted Zimbabwean towns and cities in recent years. They include: poor service delivery in the form of water supply and waste disposal as well as financial mismanagement by urban council officials. While some of these problems can be attributed to political interference, others reflect the greed of urban council officials and their lack of professionalism in their daily duties. Based on a survey of recent events, this study advocates for the restoration of professionalism through the launching of environmental awareness campaigns among the public. Urban residents, NGOs, the media and environmental watchdogs such as EMA can play a crucial role in such campaigns whose aim should be to restore professionalism in urban governance issues. The paper also recommends that in future Central Government should not interfere with urban council authorities for political motives as this can undermine professionalism in the provision of essential services. In the long run, such an approach undermines efficiency and is a threat to sustainable development in towns and cities.

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